

## **Sermon for Sunday, May 18, 2025: “What’s Up With All the References to “Our Gifts?”**

I have been reading the “Upper Room” and noticed recently a similarity between the theme for the “Daily Devotion” for May 10<sup>th</sup> and a theme that has been repeated several times in the Apostle Paul’s Epistle lessons chosen by the UMC Discipleship Worship Ministries for Sundays in the past 3 - 6 months.

The Upper Room Devotion for Saturday, May 10, 2025 is entitled “Amazing Results” and begins with the verses from Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus that we read for today’s Epistle Lesson. I’ll read them again.....

### **“The Devotion” for Saturday, May 10, 2025 continues as follows:**

“Years ago, my husband and I spent a week at a Christian camp helping prepare for the upcoming summer. Each person could choose a work assignment. Since I’m not a great housekeeper or gardener, I was happy to fold T-shirts for the camp store. But our team must have been too efficient because by the second day I had to choose another job. I

struggled through several tasks, volunteering to help cook and clean up. I wanted to be useful, but by the end of the week I was beginning to feel like my little chores (cleaning windows, hanging curtains, slicing potatoes) were insignificant. Yet on the last day, when I looked at all the work we had done that week, I was amazed at the results. A staircase had been built, the dock repaired, planters filled, the swimming pool drained and refilled, and the whole camp cleaned up.

No matter what part we play, we are important to God's work. God does not ask us to do someone else's part — only our own."

"Prayer:

Creator God, we want to be a part of your mission to offer guidance and love to your children. Give us strength to accomplish the work you have for each of us. Amen.

Thought for the Day: Any work I do for God is significant."

**This Devotion for Saturday, May 10, 2025 is written by Darlene Lunsford in the state of Washington, USA.**

***The theme in both Paul's letter and the Upper Room Devotion seems intended to encourage us to value the gifts each of us has been given by God and to find ways to use them to grow His body of believers. This is "what's up" with all the recent references to our gifts!***

You might be asking yourself, "So where does Jerseyville, and where do I, fit into that?"

Well, actually Jerseyville has been fitting into **"that"** for many years.

The problem with **"that"** is due to the never ending cycle churches face in dealing with the fact that people move away, people die, and even our children don't stay in the neighborhood where they grew up. The cycle means that each of us needs to continue to using our individual gifts to not only re-grow the parts of His body of believers we've lost, but also to add to the body.

So let's talk about the gifts and opportunities that exist among us:

## Opportunity 1

Some of us live on a small street of only about 23 houses with big yards that separate us from our “next door” neighbors. The space is a blessing, where kids and dogs can play largely protected by backyard fences that keep both away from the few cars that travel up and down the road. However, that same large space doesn’t really lend itself to backyard visits over the fence in the same way it used to when I was growing up. We found **“welcome”** (Gift 1) and the sort of **“community feeling”** (Gift 2) that was missing in the large church we were attending, when we decided to visit a little church only 10 minutes from home. We can continue to use the same gifts of **“welcome”** and ability to create a **“community feeling”** employed by those who went before us and caused us to join Jerseyville. Maybe we need to **“be brave”** (Gift 3) and **“try again”** (Gift 4) to invite the new people (**6 families**) who have moved onto our street to try the little church, where we found the gifts of “welcome” and “community.”

## **Opportunity 2**

Some of us live in a senior community and **“get along well with our neighbors,”** (Gift 1) **“have given people rides”** (Gift 2) when they needed transportation, and **“phoned them to make sure they’re ok”** (Gift 3). We regularly visit the **“local Senior Center and have friends there”** (Gift 4). We shop locally and **“we know the best stores to hunt for the best bargains”** (Gift 5) Sometimes the bargains are on canned soup or school supplies or backpacks, shoes or sweatshirts, that **“we give to Jerseyville or Joshua House to fulfill their needs”** (Gift 6) at the moment. **“We’ve already brought one visitor to our church”** (Gift 7) who has become a regular on Sunday mornings and lunch-out adventures. Maybe there’s a neighbor in our community or at the senior center who might accept an invitation to church one Sunday and find the gifts of “welcome” and “community” that drew us.

### **Opportunity 3**

Some of us live in an area that used to be rural, but is now more suburban. We travel a distance to attend the church that we were introduced to by one of our family members. We continue to come because we've made friends there, put down roots, and invested the time, knowledge, and skill **to help maintain the church building** (Gift 1) - - along with a buddy. We like helping that buddy with home projects too, and getting the same kind of help when we need it. Although we've cut down on our handyman repairs business, we still have some **long-standing customers who call when they need help and we take care of them** (Gift 2). **We're active in our home community too** (Gift 3) like to attend the movies at the library and yoga classes. **We had a friend whom we introduced to Jerseyville** (Gift 4) and who became part of the Jerseyville community until her death. Maybe there's a family member or two, a friend, customer, a family in the new suburban part of where we live whom we see pretty regularly, that we could

invite to church one Sunday --- where they could find “**welcome**” and “**community.**”

#### **Opportunity 4**

Some of us live in an apartment building. We had a friend who attended the same program we do on weekdays and invited us to church one Sunday. Transportation to and from church was included, along with lunch-out after the worship service, so we decided to give it a try. We felt welcome, and visited again.... and again, and again, until it became a regular event even though our friend eventually passed away. Other church members have continued to provide transportation to and from church services, Bible Study, and social activities so that we continue to feel “welcome” and like part of the “community.” **We are active among the community in our apartment building** (Gift 1), **helping to plan and set up for holiday social events** (Gift 2). **We offer the gift of music because we love it so much** (Gift 3). Maybe there’s another person who attends the same program we do during the week,

or lives in our apartment building, that we could invite to church on Sundays to begin to feel “**welcomed**” and part of the “**community.**”

### **Opportunity 5**

Some of us live in a community of single family homes not too far away.

We were attending another church, but sometimes missed the earlier service being held and didn’t want to miss church entirely that week.

So, we came to the later service being held at Jerseyville. Strangely enough, we felt drawn into the informal atmosphere of the later service. At least one person greeted us, even though this was the first time we attended. A couple weeks later we missed the earlier service again and went to the later one. Someone said they missed us and were glad we came again. We continued to come on and off. Someone (not always the same person) would continue to let us know we were missed when we were not there, without pressuring us to come more often. Eventually, we started coming regularly because it felt comfortable and right to be there. Although retired, **we volunteer our skilled advocacy, care, and compassion to a local nursing home** (Gifts



1, 2, 3). Is there anyone we know in our neighborhood or staff where we volunteer, that we could invite to church on Sunday so they can feel the “**welcome**” and “**community**.”

### **Opportunity 6**

Some of us support at least two churches, Jerseyville and another one nearby. **We love to sing and so we attend choir rehearsals and sing in the choir at one church** (Gift 1), then leave to attend the church service at Jerseyville. **We help to nurture the Jerseyville congregation by planning “lunch-out” fellowship events** (Gift 2). **We got Jerseyville involved in the “Souper” Bowl canned soups collection events for Joshua House** (Gift 3). **We are involved in local historical societies and worked with a local Boy Scout Troop in making improvements to the Jerseyville Cemetery** (Gift 4). **We are a member of the DAR (Daughters of the American Revolution) and also represent the Jerseyville church and cemetery in the Wreaths Across America program for cemeteries where veterans are buried** (Gift 5). **We pretty regularly attend social events of the UMC churches in Howell and have some understanding**

**of the pulse of each of those congregations** (Gift 6). Might there be someone we know in one of the historical societies, or in the immediate neighborhood where we live that we could invite to church on Sunday to experience “**welcome**” and “**community .**” Or, might we know of a way that Jerseyville could again collaborate with the other UMC churches in Howell to make all of us more effective community servants in our neighborhoods.

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## **WHAT DO WE DO WITH OUR GIFTS AND OPPORTUNITIES ?????**

All of the examples above show some key ways that the people in our existing congregation, as well as those who have gone before us, have impacted Jerseyville and grown the body of believers by a ***process*** based on reaching out to them, and reading the cues from people:

- issuing an invitation to come to church one Sunday
- providing someone without a car a way to get to/from church

- welcoming people when they do come.... “I’m Sandy, glad to see you here” (Bulletin/hymnal), hymnal page if they look lost
- not saying a word if a new person sits in “your” favorite pew or spot
- getting to know new people at *their* pace
- sharing something of yourself so they will begin to know you
- letting people know that they are accepted the way they are, just as Jesus accepts us
- making sure a new people find a seat at the lunch/dinner table with you

We can pursue any of the immediate opportunities that we see around us right now, by using the gifts each of us has right now.