

inspiring communication skills, far more patience and perseverance than we ever thought we had, gifts of healing and caring, practical skills, administrative skills, leadership qualities, everything we need- right down to a sense of humour to stop us becoming too boring. *Grasp these gifts*, says Paul, *work on them, develop them and encourage them in one another. And make sure that your lifestyle is so geared that these gifts can grow and not get smothered or neglected or destroyed.*

This is where his teaching on high standards of personal morality in work, home and relationships come in. It is not that Paul is a kill-joy or a stuffy old stick-in-the-mud. There will be ways of living which encourage the gifts of God in us and standards of ways of living which do not. It is as simple as that. The bestowing of God's Holy Spirit on a human life is not a one-off activity but something which needs continual replenishing and we need to allow that to happen. Grasp the Gifts.

And Number Three: Don't Despair. The vision is huge, the task is enormous and- while the world lasts- it is unending. There will be many times- says Paul- when you just want to give up altogether or when you slowly drift away from faith hardly noticing because there seems nothing useful you can do. Complacency may be a killer, but so is despair. Do not give up. This is God's work and God's ways are not our ways and God's time is not our time. If we keep our eyes fixed on God and our lives open to God, then our work for him and our faith in him will not be wasted. I have to say that, despite the huge number of sad stories that are told of struggling churches, I have also heard a fair few tales of congregations who appeared to have reached the end of their useful life only to discover through prayer, faith and lives open to the Holy Spirit, a whole new work waiting to be done and the gifts they needed to accomplish it. Don't Despair.

Good Advice: Keep Expanding your horizons. Keep fanning the flame of the Holy Spirit in you. Keep passion alive. This is God and God's work we are talking about and God does not do things by halves.
Amen.