

Good morning. If you're just joining us, this is the last of a series of talks on the Holy Spirit. We've been discussing everything from his identity and role in the trinity, our response (or lack of response) to the Holy Spirit and how he prompts us, and today we've arrived at the point where the "rubber meets the road" so-to-speak... for us. We've been learning a lot of "theology" or abstract things – and Pastor Bill and other speakers have done a fantastic job of making some of this abstract stuff practical for us – how we can take what we've learned and do something with it. But today we're getting elbow deep into everyone's favorite question: "What now?!?"

Now, unfortunately this is not necessarily an easy question to answer in a group setting like this. There are certainly some group commands that we need to obey and follow – like the Great Commission:

¹⁸ Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20

And the Great Commandments:

³⁷ Jesus replied, "'You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments." Matthew 22: 37-40

But... What does that mean for you!? Specifically. Like Bri! Like Morgan! Like (pick people in the crowd). So, let's take this and make it a little

more personal.. Let's look at our own lives and see if we can figure out what WE need to do – INDIVIDUALLY.. And as a group...

So, the first thing we need to understand well – which just happens to be one of my favorite quotes ever – is that **YOU are UNIQUE**... Just like everyone else! Now, funny oxymoron aside... it's true. You are unique. There is NO ONE on this planet that has ever lived or will ever live that is like you. Not only are you unique, but you were uniquely created – DESIGNED – by an omniscient loving God to be YOU. **Pslam 139:13-16** says:

For you created my inmost being;

you knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;

your works are wonderful,

I know that full well.

¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you

when I was made in the secret place,

when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body;

all the days ordained for me were written in your book

before one of them came to be.

So... the obvious question then is... why? Why did God design me to be this way? (And this can be a really tough question, and even filled with a lot of anger and bitterness when we feel like we didn't get a "fair shake" – Born with disabilities, whether they be physical or mental, Struggle with depression, anxiety, or a whole host of other psychological concerns) And when we ask this question – God, why did you design me to be this way? We need to remember a couple of things. First, God designed you to be a perfect, amazing IMAGE BEARER. Each of us was designed to not only reflect God-like qualities, but to bear (contain) the

Holy Spirit within us. We are living temples of God. We carry God with us everywhere we go – if we are believers and have accepted the Holy Spirit into our lives. The second thing we need to remember is that this is a fallen, broken world that has been corrupted by sin. God did not design you to have disabilities, or illnesses, or trauma, or even blemishes. But he DID design you KNOWING that sin would corrupt your body and affect you, and life would be messy and impact your personality in a variety of ways – so he created YOU just the way YOU are... Knowing all of that.. FOR A PURPOSE. It says right there in Pslam 139, verse 16 that “all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” He knew what was coming.. and he knows what is coming next. God has a plan for you. He designed you the way you are for a reason. **Jeremiah 29:11** says:

For I know the plans I have for you,” says the LORD. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

Ok, so, if I was sitting where you are listening to me talk, riiiiight about now I’d be thinking to myself... “Ok, Matt, I get it. I’m unique, I was specifically designed for a purpose, and that purpose or plan is for good... BUT WHAT IS IT? What’s the plan? What’s the purpose!”

Well, that’s the fun part. You get to figure it out and step into it using the obvious clues God gave you. And there are 2 types of “clues” we can look at: **Talents and Gifts.**

A Talent is a direct result of how God created you. What skills you have naturally. What skills you have developed through your experiences. What do you enjoy doing? What brings you joy and brings excitement to your life?

I’ll use myself as the example for this one first. There are things about me that have just “always been” and there are things about me that I

have developed over time naturally and easily. For example, I have always been a fast learner and good at explaining things to others. I have always been competitive and enjoy new challenges. I have learned (but feel like it has always been) to be very logical and structured with my thought. I have always gravitated toward working with people that have “less” than I have – whether that is knowledge, skills, relationships, or economically. I am a kid at heart – and love to play with kids, as if I were one – because I feel like I still am. I am talented at speaking, teaching, math, and strategy games. So... question for you guys... Who/What was I designed to be? Math Teacher, Game Player, Public Speaker, Youth Pastor. Any or all of these things. These are my potential mission fields.

Create your own list. Who are you? What skills do you have? What do you enjoy? What are your talents? Where is your mission field?

Now, A Gift – and I’m talking about Spiritual Gifts. Are something else. A Spiritual Gift is given supernaturally by God at the moment of, or after you become, a believer in Jesus and have the Holy Spirit dwell inside of you. This is something you did not necessarily have before, that you have now. Or, something that you had a little of that God made BIG. It’s a noticeable change that is used to serve God’s purposes. There are a limited number of options for spiritual gifts, but there is no limit to how God gives them out. Paul explains it this way:

⁴ There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. ⁶ God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us.

⁷ A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. ⁸ To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. ⁹ The same Spirit

gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. ¹⁰ He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. ¹¹ It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Looking through Scripture, there are a number of spiritual gifts mentioned in different passages. Peter talks about them, Paul talks about them, and there are examples of gifts being used throughout the Bible. The point is this: A gift is given by God, through the Holy Spirit, on an individual basis, so that we can help each other and serve God. These gifts are also not permanent, they can be “swapped out” throughout the course of your life to serve the purposes God has for that part of your life. A gift you didn’t used to have, you might suddenly have. A gift you used to have, might have developed into a talent or skill.... But is not necessarily a supernatural gift anymore.

Going back to myself as an example, if you look at “who I am” and what skills/talents I have been given by God... it makes perfect sense that I was a high school math teacher for a number of years, and then later a high school principal. It fits. And I loved every minute of it. I was fulfilled. I was in my sweet spot – being exactly who God created me to be doing exactly what I loved doing. Until I became a believer. I became a believer during my first year as a high school principal, was baptized, and then God began to ask me to leave what I was doing and “teach for Him” (that’s all I got in the message... is that I needed to teach for Him). But that was CRAZY. I am a logical, structured, strategy-minded guy...

who really LOVES what he is doing. Why would I quit a high paying job, doing something that I love... to do... THAT!?! Uh uh. Not happening. Until God blessed me with a gift I cannot explain and cannot claim. It has nothing to do with who I AM. It has everything to do with who HE IS. He gave me the spiritual gift of Faith. All of a sudden, it didn't matter that what he was asking me to do made no sense. It didn't matter that it would require a complete shift for not only me, but my whole family. I just KNEW it was going to be okay. And not just okay... but GOOD. So, we did it.

See, God has designed you to be a certain person, with certain talents and skills – for a purpose. But he has also gifted you supernaturally in ways that are unique to you so that you can GET IT DONE.

God had prepared me to be a teacher for him, a church planter for him, a leader for him... without me knowing it. And then he gave me the ability to do it – when I did NOT have that ability to do it on my own.

See, natural talents are great and can be used by God, if we let him, but it's always our choice. Those same natural talents can be used selfishly to accomplish worldly goals and “gains” apart from God. The work I was doing before my baptism could be described as noble or selfless... and some of it was. I LOVED helping kids. But I also loved being the best. Being in charge. Running a school. Having that prestige. Those things were not of God... God can use them, but there was something very important missing. **Fruit.**

The Spirit confers both fruits and gifts to those that reside in Christ. Fruit are qualities that transform us to be more Christ-like. But they are also **the evidence that we are moving in the direction and under the purpose that God desires.**

Let's look at what Paul has to say about Fruit to the Galatians in chapter 5:

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. Galatians 5:22-25

Spiritual Fruit is both an attitude and an outcome. It is the attitude and behavior in which you accomplish God's work and through this work it produces more of that fruit in others. Fruit of the Spirit change the environment around us. They impact others. You've heard me (and others) talk about Cultivate before – how when you walk into that place the atmosphere there is just 'different.' You can't put your finger on it, or even describe it... you just feel it. Others feel it too, and are drawn to it. It's what makes Cultivate special and different. What you are experiencing is the Holy Spirit at work. The Holy Spirit has filled that place and the volunteers that work there. He is using the talents, abilities and skills of the people God has created and gifted them to complete God's work – enabling them to do the work. This work is carried out automatically (through the Spirit) in a fruitful way – with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Which then generates these same attitudes and fruit in others. It is POWERFUL.

We can attempt to use our Talents and Gifts to accomplish God's work, but alone are not sufficient, the work requires the fruit of the Spirit. No thing (nothing) of God can be accomplished without the fruit of the

Spirit – which requires the Holy Spirit to empower and work through God’s people.

Because of this, these fruit of the Spirit also serve as a litmus test (or evidence of) whether or not we are doing God’s work – and not just serving our own desires. One of my favorite phrases that Pastor Bill uses often is “You can’t fight like the devil for the things of God” – and what he means by that is we cannot accomplish God’s work, goals, and plans when we are acting in a sinful way apart from the Spirit of God.

An easy example: An angry group of “Christians” screaming at women entering an abortion clinic. These people believe they are serving God’s purposes... I mean, let’s look at it logically.

1. God loves all of us, even the unborn. He created us and wants us to live and love him and do his work. Having an abortion ends that life, which God does not want. Ok, so, they know they are on the “right side” of things... right?
2. God designed these “Christians” to be passionate about this issue and to feel deeply about these unborn children. So, God designed them to be this way... right?
3. God may have even, through his Spirit, given some of these “Christians” spiritual gifts of exhortation, wisdom, evangelism, and discernment. All of which could easily be applied to the work of helping these unborn children. So, God has empowered them to do the work... right?
4. The fruit produced by these actions is.... Well... there is no fruit. There is no love for these mothers, there is no joy, no peace, no patience, no kindness, no goodness, no faithfulness, no gentleness, and no self-control. Quite the opposite actually.

These people have convinced themselves that they are serving God’s desires, but God doesn’t want to accomplish his goals in THOSE ways.

He is GOD. He is the God of love. And he calls us to follow him and be like him.

That same person who was uniquely designed to be passionate about this issue and that is gifted with those gifts could serve God's desire for these unborn children in a VARIETY of other ways which allow the fruit of the Spirit to be present. Mentorship, counseling, adoption, foster care, financial assistance, and the list goes on...

In our "Five to Thrive" memory verse this week (which is still up on the screen), Paul says there is no law against these things! There is no limit to how much we can use these fruit. You can never love too much, never be too peaceful, too gentle, too kind, and so on. And when we behave in these ways – or more accurately, surrender to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to direct us to be these ways – it is contagious. It changes the environment, it changes the culture.

How do you know if you're doing what God wants in the way God wants? It's simple... where is the fruit? The fruit of the Spirit should not only be evident in your own behavior but in those around you. That's how you know you're on the right track!

So, let's break down what we've been talking about today...

First, You have been uniquely designed by God and given experiences in life that have shaped you – given you natural talents and skills - specifically so that you can serve the purpose he planned for you long ago.

Second, If you are a believer and follower of Jesus, you have the Holy Spirit inside of you which has SUPERNATURALLY given you gifts to do the work of God.

And Lastly, when we are doing this work if we surrender to the Holy Spirit and allow him to work through us and produce His fruit, we can

not only be sure that we are serving God's purpose, but it will impact us and the people around us – all for the Glory of God.

So what now?

Walking in the Spirit (Steps of Obedience)

Well, I think we need to step into the purpose and plans God created for us and do it God's way. And the first step is knowing more about ourselves. Who we are, what our talents and skills are and how we are uniquely gifted to do the work God has for us. So step one is

1. Learn about yourself

Answer these questions: Who are you? What skills do you have? What do you enjoy? What are your talents? Where is your mission field?

And then, how have you been gifted by the Spirit in a supernatural way?

Well, you need to take a Spiritual Gift Assessment. Contact Tammy Naffie! E-mail her and she will e-mail you a link back for a spiritual gift assessment. Her e-mail address is tln@erchog.org. Now, I warn you, this assessment is great, and I certainly encourage you to take it on your own – but most of the time we need someone else to help us walk through our results and talk to us about how we are “wired” and how we are “gifted.” It is always easier for someone else to objectively look at our lists about us and say “Oh, that's obvious – you should do this!” or “You'd be great at this!” But not always so easy for us to do that for ourselves. So, that brings us to our next step.

2. Talk about it with other believers.

There are 2 easy options.

First, if you're in a Bridge Group, write your list up, take the assessment, and take it to your Bridge Group. Talk with people that know you about

who you are and how you are gifted. God speaks through his people. If you're not in a bridge group, contact my wife, Melissa Chesney, and she'll get you in one!

Second, and I HIGHLY recommend this second option – especially for our recent graduates – Tammy's role here at Eagle Ridge is "Director of Mobilization" – which means she is uniquely designed, spiritually gifted, and super excited to HELP YOU figure this stuff out. Allow her to use her gifts to serve you! Take the assessment that she sends you then, she'll want to meet with you for about an hour to an hour and a half to talk about your results. She'll help you discover who you are, how God designed you, how God equipped and empowered you, and how God wants to use you for his purpose. It's awesome! For you high school graduates – please do this before you begin your next adventure.

I feel like I need to put a disclaimer on all of this. Your world is about to be rocked. I am not saying that God will ask you to quit your job and do something completely different – that isn't the usual approach, that's just what he did with me. God has likely already strategically placed you EXACTLY where he wants you, he just wants you to use the gifts he gave you and the fruit of the Spirit to accomplish his goals. Your job is to know this, understand it, and do it.