

Spiritual Gifts

This morning, we are going to talk about spiritual gifts, or “special abilities the Spirit gives us.” These aren’t our natural abilities, but will often connect with something we are naturally good at. But in this case there is a problem in the church in Corinth.

With that in mind, let's jump into first **Corinthians, chapter 12**. As always, Paul has a lot to say, and he says it with a sense of **importance, even urgency**. What Paul is saying is **crucial to the survival and effectiveness of this church**.

Now, dear brothers and sisters, **regarding your question** (Response to a previous communication) about the special abilities the Spirit gives us. **I don’t want you to misunderstand this**.² You know that when you were still pagans, you were led astray and swept along in worshipping speechless idols. (There is a fear of being misled about spiritual gifts)³ So I want you to know that no one speaking by the Spirit of God will curse Jesus, and no one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit.

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

⁷A spiritual gift is given to each of us **so we can help each other**. ⁸To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. ⁹The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. ¹⁰He 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. ¹¹It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.

¹²The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. ¹³Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.

¹⁴Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. ¹⁵If the foot says, “I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand,” that does not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear says, “I am not part of the body because I am not an eye,” would that make it any less a part of the body? ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything?

¹⁸But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. ¹⁹How strange a body would be if it had only one part! ²⁰Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. ²¹The eye can never say to the hand, “I don’t need you.” The head can’t say to the feet, “I don’t need you.”

²²In fact, some parts of the body that **seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary**. ²³And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect those parts that should not be seen, ²⁴while the more honorable parts do

not require this special care. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. ²⁵This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. ²⁶If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.

²⁷All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it. ²⁸Here are some of the parts God has appointed for the church: first are apostles, second are prophets, third are teachers, then those who do miracles, those who have the gift of healing, those who can help others, those who have the gift of leadership, those who speak in unknown languages.

²⁹Are we all apostles? Are we all prophets? Are we all teachers? Do we all have the power to do miracles? ³⁰Do we all have the gift of healing? Do we all have the ability to speak in unknown languages? Do we all have the ability to interpret unknown languages? Of course not! ³¹So you should earnestly desire the most helpful gifts. But now let me show you a way of life that is best of all. 1 Corinthians 12:1-29

There's a lot going on there. There's **some sort of problem** with how people are **interpreting what their gifts** are and **how they are using them**. Then there's this stuff about ones that **seem weaker to more fragile** are the most important. Those that might be not **as flashy** as the others in the list. **Keep that in mind**. And then there's this often-used **image of the church being like a body**, it's different parts working together in harmony. **Sounds like that might not be harmony** at the moment, or why write this?

What we are not going to do this morning is break down and define what each of these gifts mean. This would be more of a **Bible study in many parts** and not really a sermon for a Sunday morning. **What we are going to look at is what spiritual gifts are supposed to accomplish within the body of Christ and within believers. What is that connection between a spiritual gift that I might have and those I interact with in the Church?**

Clearly there are **problems being created by a lack of understanding** about spiritual gifts.

This morning is about...Understanding an individual's spiritual gifts within a church family.

The problems that are surfacing are visible because of how individuals are responding to their spiritual gifts and abilities **within the church**. That's where problems begin to bubble to the surface. **It's not at home in their prayer closet or around the dinner table**. Now, dear brothers and sisters, **regarding your question** (Response to a previous communication) about the special abilities the Spirit gives us. **I don't want you to misunderstand this**. ²You know that when you were still pagans, you were led astray and swept along in worshiping speechless idols. (There is a fear of being misled about spiritual gifts) ³So I want you to know that no one speaking by the Spirit of God will curse Jesus, and no one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit.

How does anyone in the church figure out what their spiritual gifts are? This doesn't happen in **private**. We need a **context with others in community**. 1. Discover and experiment within the church.

If someone is wise that becomes clear because their dealings with other people **help them understand or see what God wants them to see.** People are **encouraged or challenged to change** by these words of truth. Courage is given.

We need people to reflect on our gifts when they see them displayed in the church for helping each other.

The gifts are all relational, they become visible only in relationship with others. They will **help others' relationship with God and relationship with one another** and with **the world.**

This is what **happens when people start serving and growing together** in the church. **We get to put to the test what we think God might want us to use to bless others.** Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. 1 John 4

Here's one way that we can test what we think the spirit might be saying about our gifts. **Here at Eagle Ridge step number one** is to take a spiritual gifts assessment. This is an online test that asks you **questions that can help to uncover** how the spirit is gifting you to serve others. That happens with **Tammy Naffie.** She is **trained in how to give and interpret** your test with you. You ask Tammy and she **gives you the test.** Then you meet with her to **talk over what the test is saying.**

Notice already the body of Christ is helping us discover our spiritual gifts. Yes, it's a test, but that is just one part of the process. **The test is not a be all and end all.** It is **one tool** that must be then **walked out within the community** of believers. **What the test suggests that your gifts might be, must be tested out within relationships.** Remember the gifts are all about relationships within the body of Christ and the world.

We call this mobilization. Why? "Isn't it about how God has uniquely gifted me?" Yes, but he has gifted you **not so that you could enjoy your gifts, but so that you could use them in service to others.** You are **mobilized to move into the arena of service** where Jesus lives and where he empowers our gifts. **Mobilized to find those "good works" that God has prepared you uniquely to do.** He gave you a gift like _____ because he was going to **put you into a situation where that very gift was needed.**

I use the word discover purposely because this is less science and more art. There is some **trial and error involved** after taking the gifts assessment. **Tammy will look at opportunities within the church and outside** of the church that could be a good match for your spiritual gifts. Then you go out and serve in that area. **Maybe your gifts are of encouragement, or evangelism.** You might be directed to go meet with Deb about serving at **Cultivate,** where you meet people and try to bring them to Jesus.

Tammy can also get you into the Bible to read about how your type of gift has been used by Jesus or by others. **You get to learn more** about what God is saying to you through His Word.

Learning and confirmation happen in the body, not individually. It isn't like you **take a gift assessment and then say, I think that's me** and there you have it. **Mystery solved.** Well, I don't

think they had **gift assessments back in Paul's day, but it does sound like people might be deciding on their own** what gifts they have or maybe just want and then they start trying to do those things. That is a problem.

That's a lot of Paul, how about Peter? ¹⁰ God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. **Use them well to serve one another.** ¹¹ Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen. 1 Peter 4:10-11

Peter splits the gifts into two categories, ones that are spoken and ones that are done. Both are for the body of Christ, both are to serve others.

You might be thinking, shouldn't **Peter and the other verses all say the same things**, listing the same gifts? **Well, they don't.** I believe this is because **these lists are not exhaustive. The Holy Spirit is far too creative to be confined to a list of words describing special abilities or gifts.**

Peter is telling us to use them well, "with all the strength and energy God supplies." There's effort involved.

If we are testing these gifts within the body of Christ, then what are we looking for? We...Look for evidence or fruit.

Is there evidence in my serving others that makes me see that this is coming from God using me? ⁷ A spiritual gift is given to each of us **so we can help each other.** 1 Corinthians 12:7

There will be something that your gift will produce that will bring nourishment to others within the body of Christ...and later outside the body of Christ in a lost world.

This evidence or fruit becomes visible and helpful to others. **The spiritual gift in the hands of the gifted disciple gets picked, so to speak, enjoyed, and the other is strengthened.** This is **one generation.** I like to think of it as **multigenerational.** The saying **I learned at Exponential** goes like this, **"I want my fruit to grow on someone else's tree."** This is more than a brother or sister being strengthened by your spiritual gift; it is them **being empowered in their service to others.** They **don't just eat it, but the seed of that fruit gets planted in them** and grows onto the tree of their life.

People that have the gift of encouragement have built me up which has made my gift of teaching more effective. **When I give my sermon outline to Tammy** she always says, **"this is good stuff, I'm excited."** What then happens is **I start telling her more** about it and in that way my mind gets even more directed by the spirit.

More specifically, we see evidence, or fruit, because what I am...Coming from an attitude of service.

You can serve out of other motivations than an attitude of service. **I have an amazing ability to turn anything, even serving others, into being about me.** We can serve out of **obligation, fear, guilt, pursuit of power and influence, building a reputation or brand...**

Here's what **Paul says to a church in the town of Philippi**. This verse ends with the challenge to have a Jesus like attitude. Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? ²Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, **loving one another**, and working together with one mind and purpose. ³**Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves.** ⁴**Don't look out only for your own interests**, but take an interest in others, too. ⁵**You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.** Philippians 2:1-5

Paul is saying to the church in Philippi, **don't buy me anything for Christmas**. If you want to make me happy then **love one another and be unified in the mission**. But where do I start? **Do I start by trying really hard to love someone?** No, that's not the starting point. **Verse 3 is the check yourself first part**. Don't make this about yourself, don't try to impress or manage someone's perception of you and be humble. You're not all that.

A good attitude reset is this, and this will be **familiar to anyone who is in a bridge group**. It's **two steps**: God, how can you be so good to me? That gets your focus off of yourself, taking you out of the center of the universe and putting God there. The second is also a question. God, how am I doing loving those you have put in my circle of influence? Or, "What does Jesus' style love look like today? Either of these questions get my focus off me and onto those I'm supposed to serve, neighbor.

Try this as a reset of your attitude because the same attitude as Jesus looks like this...For even the Son of Man came **not to be served** but to **serve** others and to give his life as a ransom for many." Mark 10:45

The problems in Corinth seem to be with the more flashing attention, getting gifts like **prophecy** and **speaking in unknown languages (tongues)**. Look again at **Verse 28**. Here **Paul adds simple things like acts of service**, putting them on par with the other more supernatural gifts. Paul says, "**those who can help others, those who have the gift of leadership...**" Helping others is service and **leadership is more accurately administration, governing, guidance** so that something can get done. Both are not attention getters like the other gifts. These are good for having the right attitude. The others are **where pride can be lurking** in the wings.

I say all the time that you need to keep your head screwed on straight if you are preaching to a room full of people once a week. It is very seductive to have a bunch and people listening to you. Pride can slide in.

But then we get back to the real owner of the gifts, the giver which is **God, The Holy Spirit**. And once our focus is back on the giver, then we can put it on those who will receive and be nourished by the gift. **Back to questions #1, "God how can you be so good?"**

Remember when **Peter says, "then everything you do will bring glory to God."** Some of the flashier, more noticeable gifts are **the ones most likely to stroke our egos**. This is what the **Bible calls pride** and it is the foundation of all sin. **It's about me. Look at me.**

But what about all that stuff about the body, parts working together, both the parts that receive a lot of credit and those that don't? What is that all about? **Don't miss the forest for the trees.** The evidence of my gift being really from God is that it produces fruit, there's an attitude of service, but also spiritual gifts properly used in the church is...Promoting unity. Within the church family.

¹⁸But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. 1 Corinthians 12:18

This list of gifts or special abilities relates to the idea of a body that must be unified in its diversity or it will not survive. Different gifts, that produce different kinds of nourishment for the building up of the church so that it can be on mission for God. But **those gifts don't exist in silos** that are side by side, but not really interconnected. **Diversity must create unity.** Unity in the church is evidence that people are using their varied gifts to serve others and honor God. **When discovering and testing a spiritual gift, if it doesn't create unity but instead creates division, then something is off. People aren't being nourished and the whole church is working better as a unit.**

If a person is convinced that they have gifts for **helping people worship through music** and that person **can't sing, play an instrument or write music**, then it's probably not that person's gift.

I'm going to quote our residence scientist on staff, Deb Yats. When we were working on this sermon she said, **"Every system in the body is dependent upon every other system...you wreck anyone one of these systems and it will affect the others."**

There's a problem in this church. It is believed by scholars that Paul is writing in response to being written to by someone in the church. **The problem comes from people calling it a spiritual gift by behaving like they did when they were worshipping some Greek or pagan god.** The easiest parallels to what they would have experience in pagan religion of this time would be **wisdom, prophecy, and speaking in unknown languages.** **"Hey, I did this religious thing before I came to Christ** so it's probably what I should do now. That really felt good when I smoked something and then went on a stream of consciousness rant. **People thought I was really deep."**

They aren't using these "gifts to serve others" but rather to elevate themselves. And all of this is causing disunity.

What does Paul say? **He talks about the weaker, more hidden gifts** are the most important.

"All of Paul's emphasis on unity within diversity calls into question the behavior of a growing numbers of Americans who claim to be religious, believe in God, and even Christ, and yet drop out of organized church life or at least fade to its periphery in a land still heavily influenced by a heritage of rugged individualism; believers need to work even harder to demonstrate that Christianity is not a merely personal religion, but fundamentally corporate. Even evangelical language for conversion betrays this bias: a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. That is the necessary starting point, but we dare not stop until that relationship leads to intimate interpersonal relationships with other Christians." NIV Application Commentary, 1 Corinthians pg. 254

The evidence or fruit that comes from gifts is that they...

- Come from an attitude of service.
- Promote Unity and finally.
- They look and sound like Jesus.

Jesus, the one whose attitude we are to emulate and the one who **came to serve, not be served**, is our ultimate testing of a spiritual gift within the church. **If it waddles, quacks and floats it's probably a duck. If I sound like Jesus and act like Jesus, then it's probably the gift God has given you to serve others.**

This is what Jesus is like. This is **what his life produced** and **what our lives will produce** in ever increasing measure as we grow as disciples. **It's Christ's life being lived through us as the Holy Spirit in us ignites the gifts he has given us.**

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! Galatians 5:22-23

The fruit is more important than the gift. It's the fruit that tells us if the gift is real. It is the **flavor or aroma of Jesus around my attempts to teach, heal, prophecy, lead, serve, do miracles, or speak in unknown languages.**

This is where the confusion came in that Paul is trying to straighten out. People are prophesying and speaking in unknown languages, but it isn't nourishing anyone and it doesn't look or sound like Jesus. It's something they are using to elevate themselves above their brothers and sisters.

- Some seemingly less important parts of the body receive greater honor.
- No gift elevates anyone to super spiritual status. Ill. Prayer warriors...

Here's what all of this adds up to. Confirmation comes from within the body of Christ.

Steps of Obedience

- Schedule a meeting with Tammy, Director of Mobilization...a spiritual gifts assessment (Picture and contact info in outline and on PP)

Start testing by serving.