

LESSONS IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR

HOLY SPIRIT: GOD SPEAKS

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-11

We're in the middle of a series of messages we've entitled "Lessons From the Rearview Mirror." I'm looking at some of the important lessons I've learned in my past that have shaped my relationship with God today. We've talked about grace - and now we're discussing the Holy Spirit. **God comes - God acts** - next week we'll discover that **God transforms** - but today, I want to discuss how **God speaks** through the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:1-3, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb (or voiceless) idols, however you were led. Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit."

Imagine growing up in a pagan culture where idols were commonplace. Every member of your family had his or her favorite idol. At family gatherings your parents and siblings argued over which gods were best... [SLIDE] Your sisters paid homage to the Bulldog Idol... Your brother and his wife worshipped the Gator god... Your cousin was into some whack-o religion called "Buzz worship"...

Whenever your mom cleaned house she would lift her own special idol off the mantle to dust under its base... On your way to school you passed the temple, where you peered through the window at one of your gods... There it was, standing in stone silence!... [SLIDE] **Idols were seen, not heard.**

But now you're a Christian. You've swapped inanimate idols for a living God... **Your** [SLIDE] **God comes...** You call Him the Holy Ghost because He comes quietly and whispers your name. In a tangible world, He comes spiritually. Rather than sit perched on your mantle, **your** [SLIDE] **God acts...** He imparts the supernatural. He supplies you an eternal dynamic for your everyday life. And finally, you now have a [SLIDE] **God speaks...** Idols were seen, not heard - but the real God is the opposite - **He's invisible, but He speaks.**

The Corinthians learned that the true God isn't a dumb, speechless, mute idol - He's a living Spirit who talks to His people in audible ways. **God speaks** to and through God's people - and this excited the Corinthians. Now when they spoke to God - God spoke back to them. Prayer had become a two-way street. Imagine, a live stream, in real time, between God and His people. This is what the Church in Corinth had come to expect whenever they got together to worship and praise the Lord.

If you lived next door to the Church at Corinth you might've called the cops to complained about the volume. This was a church that got loud. The Corinthian Church had become infatuated with spiritual gifts - and who can blame them! Escaping an idolatrous world where gods were stone-silent, how thrilling it was to experience divine instant messaging...

Worship went from the library-silence to the banter of a chat-room. In light of the exhilarating changes Christianity had brought to their lives, I think we can excuse the Corinthians for getting a little carried away.

The Holy Spirit is the God who speaks... He speaks in various ways... For one, He's spoken through the pages of Scripture. In 1 Peter 1:21, the Apostle Peter explains the origins of your Bible, [SLIDE] "**holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.**" The Spirit moved on the minds and methods of the apostles to record certain truths on paper. The Holy Ghost also speaks to us in [SLIDE] "**a still small voice.**" In contrast to the storm, and quake, and fire - God spoke to Elijah through an inner whisper. When we dial in spiritually, He speaks to us in the same manner. But God also speaks as He did in Corinth through spiritual gifts.

Read on in chapter 12 and you'll see how the Holy Spirit gives to the Church a diversity of [SLIDE] "gifts" or "activities." Our English word "gifts" is a translation of the Greek word [SLIDE] "charisma" – it's a compound word - [SLIDE] "charis" or "grace" - and [SLIDE] "mata" or "gift." Spiritual gifts are literally [SLIDE] "grace gifts." A charismata is not a reward for diligent service or extreme sacrifice. Spiritual gifts are doled out by grace. You don't earn them. You can only receive them. Faith not work is the key. Grace gifts come to believers.

Think of spiritual gifts as power tools. [SLIDE] If your dad has a birthday soon, and you don't know what to get him, try a power tool. Men are into power. Every guy likes a tool he can crank. And the gifts of the Holy Spirit are God's power tools. They're normal activities on steroids. Don't mistake spiritual gifts for learned skills or natural abilities – they're not the same. Charismata are supernatural proclivities that come from God. They enable us to know, or do, or speak in a way that we wouldn't be able to do otherwise. God supplies the power!

And the Corinthians were using these power tools. Earlier in the book, in 1:7, Paul complimented the Corinthians, [SLIDE] "you come short in no gift." Chapter 12 lists the various gifts – and several of them involved speech. There was [prophecy](#), [words of knowledge](#) and [wisdom](#), [speaking in tongues](#), [interpretation](#). This was all happening in the Church of Corinth! Let me run through this list and try to describe a few of these gifts...

First, there were [SLIDE] [words of knowledge and wisdom](#)... The Holy Spirit would speak to a person about specific details they had no way of knowing otherwise. The recipient had no prior knowledge – no frame of reference. As they waited on God, flashes of information came supernaturally. Suddenly, they knew something about a friend – that the friend might not even know himself – a medical condition, a hidden hurt, a buried secret... The Corinthians were sharing these insights with one another. They were shining God's light into each other's lives. It was exciting.

There were also gifts of [SLIDE] [prophecy](#)... Here's a gift that turns mechanics and housewives into God's mouthpiece. God targets a situation not specifically addressed in the Bible, and sends a communiqué through you. I like to refer to prophecy as [SLIDE] God's bullhorn. It's a way for Him to speak directly to His people. Often it's a warning, or calling, or comfort. Prophecy is always the right word at just the right time. It's a hotline to headquarters. Prophecy is never premeditated or preplanned. The Hebrew word translated [SLIDE] "prophecy" means "to bubble up or tumble out." Its a message from the Holy Spirit that flows to from my spirit – through my mind - out my mouth – and to God's people. It's a spontaneous, ecstatic form of speech. Amos 3:8 declares, [SLIDE] "A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken! Who can but prophesy?" The Holy Spirit often whispers in a still, small voice - but with the gift of prophecy He roars like a lion! For two years Kath and I struggled to have kids. Finally, at a pastor's conference she requested prayer. It was the last weekend in May, 1982.

During the prayer meeting one of the ladies prophesied over Kath. The Lord gave the lady the message, [SLIDE] "By this time next year you will have a child." Zack was born May 29, 1983 - fulfilling the prophecy to the very day. And what kind of effect did that have on us? It brought great joy and hope. The gift of prophecy brings the God of heaven into your living room. With words of knowledge and wisdom God places ideas in your mind... With prophecy He puts a word-for-word message in your mouth... But with [SLIDE] [the gift of tongues](#) God rescues you when your mind goes blank and tongue gets tied. This gift is a supernatural way to praise God.

Here's how it works... Of the 5,665 languages in the world today I know only one – and very little of that... There are [SLIDE] 800,000 words in English, and the working vocabulary of the average person is a mere [SLIDE] 7,000 words. This presents a problem. What happens when you really want to express yourself, but you kind find the words? It creates a real frustration!

[SLIDE] Humans are like this funnel. The narrow neck represents our intellect. The wide base is our spirit. In the spirit we're capable of experiencing deep sentiments and profound emotions - yet all we feel on the spiritual level has to be forced through a narrow intellect and a limited vocabulary. Our narrowness cuts down on our flow of feelings. It bottles up our reactions, and strangles our expressions. We're pent-up - and we shut-up. This isn't good. Our God longs for our praise and worship.

And this is the purpose of the gift of tongues. God bypasses our limited mind and deficient vocabulary by placing words in our mouth that perfectly articulate what we'd like to say. We may not be familiar with the words themselves, but we speak them trusting God that they're the exact expression of the feelings that are trapped and brewing in our hearts. [SLIDE] By giving voice to the words we release our pent-up praise!

Sadly, some Christians don't grasp why bottled-up feelings are a problem in the first place. [SLIDE] When your heart is dry, and your spirit is like dust – what do you care about praising God? It's when you're overflowing with the new wine of the Holy Spirit that expression becomes a top priority! Imagine, [SLIDE] getting lockjaw on your wedding day. You're madly in love, but can't tell your spouse... Or think of going to the big football game with a case of laryngitis. You want to cheer on your team, but can't get it out... The gift of tongues is the deliverer of imprisoned praise. The Spirit loosens our lips. Rather than fumbling with our words, the Spirit of God enables us to be fluent in our praise, and gratitude, and love for God.

In the Book of Acts the gift of tongues is referred to as [SLIDE] “an unknown tongue.” That's because the speaker doesn't know the language he uses. This is how Paul describes speaking in tongues in 1 Corinthians 14, he says, [SLIDE] “My spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful.” The worshipper brings feelings and voice. It's God who supplies the words and phrases. 1 Corinthians 13 tells us the gift of tongues can be the language of men or angels. Imagine, speaking in an angelic dialect... Tongues can be a current language or a dead language... The point is that God isn't limited. He asks us to have faith to speak whatever words He supplies.

I love Harold Horton's explanation, [SLIDE] “The gift of tongues sinks a well into the dumb profundities of the rejoicing spirit, liberating a jet of long-pent ecstasy that gladdens the heart of God and man... Have you never in the presence of Jesus felt inarticulate on the very verge of eloquence?” Think of the gift of tongues as what your kid might do to a can of Coke. What kid hasn't shaken up a Coke; then pulled the tab. [SLIDE] He releases a spray of sizzle and foam. Likewise, when God fills us with the Spirit and shakes us up – it's only fitting He pops the top, and relieves the pressure. He allows gratitude and praise to spray out. This is the gift of tongues.

When I speak in tongues in my private devotions the language doesn't need to be interpreted to be useful. I know what's in my heart, I just need a release. And tongues comes to my rescue. I don't need an interpretation. But when someone speaks in tongues with other people present, it does need to be interpreted. If not, no one else will hear the praise and chime in. This is why in the public assembly of the church God also supplies a [SLIDE] gift of interpretation. Someone present interprets the praise being uttered. The interpreter doesn't know the language being spoken any more than the person speaking it, but God puts the translation in their mind, and they speak it out... As a result, everyone in the room can join in the praise!

Apparently, in the Corinthian Church these kind of supernatural gifts were commonplace, but they weren't always coupled with common sense. Imagine how these kinds of gifts can be abused and misused. I wonder how often an unwelcomed intrusion into a person's life – or an attempt to manipulate someone - was passed off as a word of knowledge. People can make up prophecies. That's why you test them. Paul stresses in our earlier text, 1 Corinthians 12:3, that one of the ways you recognize the Holy Spirit is that He gets it right about Jesus. If the voice you hear denies Jesus, or doesn't exalt Him as Lord, it's not the Holy Spirit.

When it comes to tongues it seems the Corinthians forgot that they controlled the volume. They held the on-off switch. Apparently, there were occasions when the Corinthians got so caught up in the moment they forgot it was rude to interrupt someone else's worship, or speak out of turn. In chapter 14 Paul had to remind them, [SLIDE] “the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets.” Even though God supplied the words, the Corinthians still had a responsibility. The vocal gifts were intended to build up others, and glorify God - not give the mouthpiece a reason to boast.

As the Corinthians discovered... it's glorious and exciting that God speaks... the problem though lies in our reaction. When it comes to these gifts people tend to gravitate toward two extremes -[SLIDE] charis-mania or charis-phobia. And apparently, the Corinthians were the original charis-maniacs. Maybe you've been to a church that was a no-holds barred, anything-goes worship service where folks spoke over each other, danced at will, and clamored for attention. It was emotional alright, but you're not so sure it was spiritual. Often what's credited to the Holy Spirit isn't holy or spiritual. It's sad when church leaders fail to obey 1 Corinthians 14:40, [SLIDE] “Let all things be done decently and in order.” NT protocols need to be followed.

But when I glance back in the rearview mirror of my life what robbed me of God's blessing wasn't [charis-mania](#) as much as it was [SLIDE] [charis-phobia](#). Paul told Corinth, "[Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant...](#)" The church I grew up in wasn't just ignorant it was downright hostile toward spiritual gifts. It was dominated by [charis-phobia](#)! I was going to say my childhood church was suspicious of anything charismatic. But we weren't just suspicious. We were sure we knew the truth. Speaking in tongues wasn't healthy, or holy, or for today, or even from God. We didn't speak in tongues, and we didn't like people who did. We might not have said it that way, but that was certainly the attitude.

I remember being taught by people in my childhood church not to open myself up to the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts – for if you did an evil spirit, or a demon, might take advantage of your openness, and slip his way in. I look back on that theology now and I'm appalled! What kind of a God did they think we served? What kind of a God would allow a demon to take advantage of our openness to His Holy Spirit! Either a uncaring god or an impotent god – but certainly not the one, true God. Our Pastor taught what's called [SLIDE] "[The Cessasionist View](#)." It's the idea that the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit ceased in the first century. Spiritual gifts like tongues, healing, prophecy ended with the Apostles.

The pastor would read his proof text, 1 Corinthians 13:8-12, [SLIDE] "[Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away... For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.](#)"

Cessasionists interpret "[that which is perfect](#)" as the NT. They say when the NT was finished there was no longer any need for supernatural gifts. And with that magical wand our pastor made everything problematic, or uncomfortable, or mystical – like tongues and prophecy – just vanish away. Of course, how do you interpret "[that which is perfect](#)" as the NT? In the context of 1 Corinthians 13 "[that which is perfect](#)" is our glorified, eternal state. When will I see Jesus "[face to face](#)?" When will I know even as I'm known? Not when the NT was finished - only when I get to heaven. Until Jesus returns His Church needs all His supernatural gifts!

At Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was first poured out on the Church Peter explained what had happened by quoting the Prophet Joel. [SLIDE] "[It shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh...](#)" He understood that the Holy Spirit's power is for the last days. And if 2000 years ago was considered "[the last days](#)," how much more is today the last days! I believe all we read about in the Acts – miracles, and healings, and words of wisdom - are still normative for the Church. If we see something wonderful happen in the NT that's not occurring in our church... It's not God's fault.... It's a result of our own lack of faith.

I'll never forget the first time I was filled with the Holy Spirit, and spoke in tongues, I was frightened. I was spooked. I was a good Baptist boy. I'd been taught that tongues were dangerous... God started putting words in my mouth, but as soon as it happened, I shut it down. It was too strange... As I grew in my knowledge of God's Word, and saw the ignorance of what I'd been taught, my initial reluctance bothered me. I realized I'd missed out. I repented and asked God to give me again the gift of tongues. But it didn't happen immediately. God had a time and a place...

In 1980 I enrolled at the CCBC in California and had the opportunity to attend that year's pastors' conference. I'd just begun to learn there were CC pastors other than Pastor Chuck... And I'd heard of a guy named Lonnie Frisbee. He was supposed to be gifted in matters of the Holy Spirit. I went to him, and shared a little of my background. Then I asked him to pray for me. I wanted to be filled with the Holy Spirit and speak in tongues. I'll never forget what he told me. He said, "[Take off your shoes](#)." I said, "[What?](#)" He said, "[Take off your shoes](#)." Now it wouldn't have been that difficult... All I was wearing was flip flops... But I was adamant, "[I don't want gimmicks. I want God's power – not some Charismatic hocus pocus](#)." He told me, "[Man, your problem is pride - intellectual pride. If you can't figure it out you won't believe it...](#)" Then he recounted the story of Naaman.

Do you remember the story? Let me retell it before I continue... Naaman was a high-ranking, Syrian General. He'd distinguished himself on the battlefield. He'd been honored by the king. He only had one problem. There was a patch of leprosy growing on his skin. He was scared. But Naaman had a slave girl who knew of a prophet in Israel who could help him. She recommended that he visit Elisha. When Naaman arrives the man of God refuses to come out and meet him. He sends his servant instead. His servant tells him to go to the Jordan and dip himself 7 times. Naaman was furious. He expected

the prophet to at least come out and greet him. Elisha could wave a hand. Make a show of it - do something that would grab everyone's attention – create a headline in the paper. But dip in a river... there were rivers in Syria not nearly as muddy as the Jordan.

I love how Naaman's men call him on the carpet, [SLIDE]"My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it?" To wash in the Jordan seemed silly. If Naaman had been asked to climb a mountain, or wrestle a bear – something to stroke his ego, and build up his image – fine. But the worse thing for a proud man is to appear foolish. Naaman's pride liked being in control and calling the shots. He was always in charge of the battle plan. For Naaman $2 + 2 = 4$, or he doesn't budge. If he can't figure it all out in advance he's not willing to participate. Naaman was a leader, but now it's time for him to learn to follow... He reconsiders and heads to the muddy, murky Jordan River to dip himself seven times – and I'm sure he griped and cursed after every dip. [SLIDE] Until the seventh. For when he rose out of the water he notices his leprous patch had disappeared. He was healed... but first he was humbled.

That's what needed to happen to me. When Lonnie told me to remove my shoes I got angry. I refused. I couldn't figure out what taking off my shoes had to do with the Holy Spirit working in my life. Finally he told me, "Look you've asked me to pray for you... and God told me not to pray unless you take off your shoes..." I was so mad I stomped off in flip-flops. I walked upstairs. Sat down to gather myself... And that's when God spoke to me, "Sandy, he's exactly right! If you can't dissect it – and get your mind around it – if it doesn't make you look good - you won't believe." Here's what I didn't understand... If I wanted to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and move in the gifts of the Spirit, I had to let God take control.

My problem was my pride! I'll never forget taking off my flip-flops and waving them at Lonnie on the back stairwell. He shook my hand – then he responded, "God just told me not to pray for you. I've done my part..." And with that he walked off... I had no idea what had just occurred, but I felt a million pounds lighter. And a few days later it happened... I was spending time with God when the Holy Spirit came over me, and a former Southern Baptist starting speaking in an unknown tongue. It was a wonderful filling I'll never forget.

Since that day, I've come to realize how vital it is to take God at His word, even when I don't have it all figured out... Our God can be trusted. He sure doesn't have to pass everything by me before He works... I have to lay my image, and pride aside if I want to be part of God's plan... Here's what I've learned... [SLIDE] If you want to dance with God you have to let Him lead. And nowhere it that more important than with the Holy Spirit.

Don't be afraid to let God speak... If you're a little antsy about all this talk of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, ecstatic utterances, and supernatural praise... listen to the promise Jesus makes to His disciples in Luke 11... Jesus asks them, [SLIDE] "If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?"

Remember, in the early church the bread, and fish, and egg were symbols for Christianity. Jesus is the bread of life... His first disciples were fishermen. He made them fishers of men... The egg speaks of new life. On the other hand, the stone speaks of spiritual hardness - the serpent was a type of Satan – the sting of the scorpion was a symbol for death. So what is Jesus telling us? Don't ever think opening yourself up to the Holy Spirit will make you vulnerable to evil spirits. What kind of a Father would allow a child genuinely seeking Him to get hijacked by a demon? Jesus concludes Luke 11, [SLIDE] "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" And the Holy Spirit a very good gift!

This past May we took a group of Middle School kids to Laguna Beach. It was tons of fun. The afternoons were spent frolicking on the beach, while the mornings and evenings were spent studying the book of Acts. One morning Pastor Zach taught on the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and encouraged the kids to receive from God the power they needed. After some beach time, they met again for worship and Bible Study that night.

The next day, one of the kids, a 7th grader, reported a strange incident... He said he'd been terribly tired the night before. He wasn't sure he could stay awake through worship. He recalled the study Zach had done that morning and asked God to give him the power He needed to stay awake. I've known quite a few adults who could've prayed for that power! But that's when it got weird he said. During worship as he was singing to God strange words popped into his mind - like he was speaking in a foreign language. Later he asked a counselor to explain what happened. Understand, there'd been no mention that

day of speaking in tongues. This young man was unaware the gift existed. He needed an explanation. All he knew was that he'd prayed for help to stay awake and praise God.

I want to close with [SLIDE] a question, "Are you smarter than a 7th Grader?" Can it be that simple? You just ask God for what He's promised and He gives it to you? I don't know about you, but I want all of God's blessings! I'll bet you whatever God is offering it's something I probably need. I certainly don't want my ugly pride to stand in the way. Let's be humble and open. I desire everything God has for me. I hope you do too.

There's a present-day Christian denomination who's official policy toward spiritual gifts reads, "Seek not. Forbid not." But let me amend their statement to make it more biblical... [SLIDE] "Seek not. Forbid not. And get not." If you don't desire God's blessings chances are you won't receive them. [SLIDE] "The Father gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" Will you ask? Don't try to be smarter than a 7th Grader. Let me close with Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 14:1, [SLIDE] "Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts..."