

OUR GIFTS

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-11

Last Sunday was my birthday. And I had quite a few friends send me birthday wishes on Facebook. If you were one of them, I appreciate you taking the time to do so... *Here're a few of the greetings I received...*

One guy wrote, “Your *birth* gave the *earth* an upgrade.” Since I came to Jesus, I certainly hope so.

Another friend wrote, “You are now older than me.” That’s kind of a weird birthday cheer, *but okay...*

Here’s a better one, “Sounds like *your day* was heavenly.” It was heavenly - I got to preach the Bible - but I never really think of my birthday as “*my day.*”

That seems sort of ambitious - that with 7.4 billion people in the world, spread out over just 365 possible birthdays, that one of those days would be *my* day...

BTW, 7.4 billion divided by 365... means *my* day is also *the special day* for 20,273,972 other folks as well. *My* day is also *the day* for a lot of other people too.

Yet despite those details, a birthday is a special day. But there is a day more notable than your birthday!

I’ve heard it said, “There are two great moments in a person's life: the moment you were born *and* the moment you realize why you were born.” And it’s the knowing *why*, that makes *the day* so important.

For God has created each of us with *a role, a purpose, a ministry*. Your day is a special day because you are special. You were created to be used by God.

And two factors shape our usefulness in Christ...

First, is **our place**. In Chapter 12 Paul refers to the Church as a body. We'll discuss this in more detail next week, but as your body consists of many parts working together, so is the Body of Christ. You need me and I need you. A Christian is left frustrated and unfulfilled if he or she never finds their place in the Body of Christ.

And the second factor that shapes our usefulness are **our gifts**. Every believer has a spiritual gift. All Christians need to **find their place** and **use their gift**.

Next week, we'll talk about **finding our place**.

This morning, we'll talk about **using our gifts**.

1 Corinthians 12 begins, **“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant...”**

And yet despite Paul's desire, there is probably no area in the Christian life where there is more ignorance than with spiritual gifts. Paul wrote this verse, and this chapter, nearly 2000 years ago, and there is still a great ignorance in the Church over the Spirit's gifts.

Realize, even though the Corinthians had problems and their confusions God was very active among them.

Jesus was still moving in His Church. God was at work through the Spirit of Christ - *through the person of the Holy Spirit - the third person of the Godhead*.

The Holy Spirit is not a force, or vibe, or feeling... He is a person. Today, when a Christian relates spiritually to God we do so through the person of the Holy Spirit.

And God's Spirit was alive and at work in Corinth.

In this church spiritual gifts were *commonplace*, they just wasn't always coupled with *common sense*.

Like in many quarters of the church today, there was an ignorance over the proper *use* of spiritual gifts. And as a result the gifts were being *abused* and *misused*.

1 Corinthians 12 teaches us that God intends for spiritual gifts to unite the Church. Instead, the gifts have often led to its division and to various schisms.

In 12:4 the Greek word translated "*spiritual gifts*" is "*charisma*." "*Charis*" is Greek for "*grace*" - "*mata*" is "*gift*" - thus, spiritual gifts are **grace gifts**. They're an extension of the grace we've receive in Christ. Neither His salvation or His gifts can be earned or purchased by our goodness or good works. They're given freely.

And when it comes to these spiritual gifts, or *charismas*, Christians tend to gravitate toward two extremes - either **charismania** or **charisphobia**.

I grew up in a church dominated by **charisphobia**.

Our pastor wouldn't touch Acts 2 with a ten foot pole. The baptism of the Holy Spirit, and speaking in tongues were taboo. We were afraid of spiritual gifts.

Supernatural manifestations were explained away as having ended with the apostles. We were taught the compilation of

the NT books made spiritual gifts obsolete. *But that's not what the Bible teaches!*

Nowhere does the NT suggest that healings, and miracles, and tongues, *and the like*, have passed away. Instead in 14:1 Paul instructs us, “**desire spiritual gifts.**” We should want and be open to all God's gifts!

Some Christians are afraid of God's “*charismas.*” Whereas, other churches are dominated by them. They're caught up in what's been called, **charismania**.

It's possible for Christians to become so enamored with *the gifts* that they neglect *the Giver*.

This is what happened in Corinth. The Christians were thrilled with supernatural displays of God's power, but that power was never applied to godly living.

Some churches are preoccupied with *power over piety - dynamic over discipleship*. They ignore biblical precedent, and chase after the latest thrill, no matter how trivial or silly. They're *emotionally-charged* rather than *biblically-led*. Their services are like a circus.

The world is *dying in sin* and *deceived by man's wisdom* - while some churches laugh uncontrollably and pray for God to change amalgam fillings into gold.

Show me chapter and verse for that! Charismania cares more about being *sensational* than *biblical*.

Oh, stuff happens - the saints are entertained - but no one muscles up or grows in their faith. Supposedly, miracles are occurring, but the saints aren't maturing. And this was the situation in the church at Corinth.

This is why churches need a proper balance...

We desperately need the power of God's Spirit, but we also need the knowledge to use that power wisely.

Some churches are **a fireplace with no fire**. The heart of the church is empty and cold. They're all about orthodoxy, but there's no life, no passion, no fire...

Other churches are **a fire without a fireplace**. There's a spiritual emphasis, but it burns out of control...

We need **the fire in the fireplace**. We need *the fire of God's Spirit*, but within *the fireplace of God's Word*. We want to see people won and warmed - *not burned*.

I love the adage, **"The Word without the Spirit will cause a church to dry up. The Spirit without the Word will cause a church to blow up. But the Spirit working through the Word will cause the church to grow up."** And the latter is the kind of church we want to be...

I'm not **charisphobic!** Spiritual gifts are for today, and *I want them all!*... But I'm also not **charismanic!** If an experience is not taught in Scripture, *I don't want it!*

The Bible is the final authority for faith and practice. If it's not biblical, apparently God doesn't think I need it.

I'm against both **charisphobia and charismania**.

Give me the genuine **charisma!** The gifts of the Spirit, laid out in Scripture, were purchased by the blood of Jesus. They're the believer's birthright - our inheritance. And it pleases the Father to see us exercise the gifts His Spirit chooses to allocate to us!

Haven't there been times in your life when you wished you had some extra help - a boost from above?

Like an athlete on steroids, what if there was a spiritual supplement... something legal and healthy - a performance enhancer from God - that would get you over the top, and help you win victories for Him?

Well, there is! God gives His people spiritual gifts that make them more effective in their service for Him.

And God doesn't want us ignorant of these gifts!

Something remarkable happened in the Corinthian church. They went from *mute idols* to a *talkative God*.

Verse 2, "You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led."

We'll discover the Corinthians were particularly enamored with the vocal gifts - *prophecy, tongues*, and *the interpretation of tongues*. And here we learn why...

They were Gentiles who had lived their entire life serving muted gods. Their false *gods had no voice. They couldn't speak*. Now as Christians they had an audible God. His Spirit spoke *to* them and *through* them. *No wonder they'd gotten a little carried away!*

Yet Paul warns the Corinthians, "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." In other words, every time you hear a voice that says, "Thus saith the Lord," don't assume what comes next is really from the Lord.

It reminds me of the fisherman who cut a hole in the ice. He baited his hook, and was about to drop his bait, when he heard a voice, “No fish are under this ice.”

He moved a few feet away, and cut another hole. Again he was about to lower his hook, when he heard the voice again, “There are no fish under this ice.”

He looked up to heaven and shouted, “Lord, is that you?” The voice spoke, “No, it’s the ice rink manager.”

Not every voice you think is from God meets the criteria. We have to test the voice to identify its source.

And here’s how every voice should be judged... How does it harmonize with God’s Word - both *His written Word* and *His living Word*? God has already spoken to us in two places - *through the Bible* and *through Jesus*.

Since, He’s spoken through the Bible, then this book becomes the sounding board for identifying any other communication that God might want to send us.

Does what I’m hearing line up with what’s already been written? God will never contradict Himself...

And does what I’m hearing exalt the living Word, Jesus. God sent His Son to reveal His nature, thus any communication from God will honor the heart of Jesus.

This is why Paul says no one speaking by the Holy Spirit ever speaks ill of Jesus. The Spirit moves on a person’s heart to submit to His Lordship, and declare their allegiance - not curse Him, or deny His authority.

Whenever we study spiritual gifts, realize miracles can be counterfeited... Egypt's pagan priests were able to duplicate Moses' miracles - *up to a point...*

The end-times Antichrist will work "**lying wonders...**"

Even today, Mormons claim to speak in tongues...

The gifts of the Holy Spirit build up the Body of Christ! They're *good for us* and *bring God glory*. That's why Satan does his best to try and discredit them.

In verse 4 Paul lists what I believe are the three categories of spiritual gifts, "**There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.**"

Paul speaks of **gifts, ministries, and activities**. Or we can list it - **motivations, ministries, and manifestations**.

First, there're "**diversities of gifts...**" In Romans 12 Paul lists seven gifts - **prophecy, service, teaching, exhorting, giving, leading, and mercy** - these are basic **motivations**. These gifts are spiritual tendencies God plants within us that help shape and color our ministry.

The second type of spiritual gift mentioned in verse 4 are "**differences of ministries...**" Ephesians 4 lists four types of **ministries**, "apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor-teacher." These gifts are offices in the Church.

The third type of spiritual gift is labeled "**activities.**" In Greek it's "**energeo**" or "**energies.**" Think of a supernatural burst. These are **manifestations** of the spiritual power. And verses 8-10 list nine such gifts...

Thus, spiritual gifts come to us in great variety. In the form of [motivations](#), [ministries](#), and [manifestations](#)...

Verse 7 prefaces the gifts listed in the three following verses, by calling them “*manifestations of the Spirit.*”

Paul writes in verse 7, “**But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all...**”

And this is an important verse! The gifts of the Spirit Paul is about to mention are supernatural. They're spontaneous eruptions of Holy Spirit insight and power.

Understand, spiritual gifts are not *learned skills*, or *human traits*, or *natural talents*, or *physical abilities*.

You're not born with spiritual gifts. Nor are the gifts something you practice or cultivate. Spiritual gifts are *supernatural enablings* that wouldn't be present in your life if they weren't provided to you by the Holy Spirit.

And Paul makes it clear why we're given these gifts. Verse 7 tells us they're “*for the profit of all...*”

My gifts should profit you, and your gifts will profit me. Thus, we're most profitable when we're together.

Each Christian gets a gift, but everyone benefits.

Spiritual gifts are not a means to *show-off*, but to *build-up!* The benefit I derive from exercising a spiritual gift is often the joy of being a blessing to other people.

And this is why you shouldn't be proud of a spiritual gift. Recall, the word [charisma](#) means *grace-gift*.

You don't get *proud* over a gift - you become *grateful*. Spiritual gifts aren't merit badges, or spiritual medals you receive for a noble deed or achievement.

Spiritual gifts are an extension of God's grace.

This is why a brand new Christian - still dripping in baptismal water - just a few hours removed from sin and shame - can speak in tongues or receive a word of wisdom. It has nothing to do with the person's worthiness. It's all grace. All spiritual gifts are freebies.

Once, an old lumberjack was told by a friend that he should buy a chainsaw. The guy said, "You'll chop four times more wood with a chainsaw than with your ax."

But after several outings with his new chainsaw, the lumberjack was chopping *less* wood. In frustration he returned the saw to the hardware store. The clerk was surprised. He cranked it to troubleshoot the problem...

As soon as it roared to life, the lumberjack got a weird look on his face. He asked, "*what's that noise?*"

Spiritual gifts are like power tools! The Spirit comes upon us and revs up supernatural capacities in our lives that enable us to do *more* and do *better* for God.

Recently, I ran across a list - **The Top Ten Spiritual Gifts Not Listed In The Bible**. These were left out...

10) untwisting cellophane-wrapped candy during the sermon without making any noise... 9) teaching three year olds by yourself... 8) holding a sneeze for the duration of a sermon... 7) pronouncing the genealogies correctly... 6) unlocking a car door with a coat-hanger... 5) matchmaking singles... 4)

turning to OT books without using the table of contents... 3) passing communion trays one-handed... 2) clapping on beat...

1) coming up with funny announcement ideas...

Actually, these are not spiritual gifts - just aptitudes that come in handy at church... And we don't have to go outside the Scripture for a list. God has left nothing out. Verses 8-10 lists nine *manifestations* of the Spirit.

First are **gifts of wisdom**: the word of knowledge, the word of wisdom, and discerning of spirits...

Second, **gifts of wonder**: faith, healings, miracles.

And third, the **gifts of worship**: prophecy, different kinds of tongues, and interpretation of tongues.

Verse 8 lists the **gifts of wisdom**, "For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit..." Then a related gift, verse 10, "discerning of spirits."

Knowledge of course, is *information*. Wisdom is the *application* of that information. And we need both...

On his famous voyage to the new world it was said of Christopher Columbus, "As he was sailing he didn't know where he was going. When he got there he didn't know where he was. And when he got back he didn't know where he had been." Sometimes we're like Columbus. We need knowledge, wisdom, discernment.

A word of wisdom or word of knowledge is just that, it's a *word*, not a whole book - just a bit, or a fragment.

Bible teacher, Harold Horton, describes these two gifts as “divinely granted flashes of revelation.”

Suddenly, God turns on a light and we become privy to information we otherwise would’ve never known.

Remember, in Matthew 16 when Jesus asked His disciples, “who do you say that I am?” It was Peter who said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

That’s when Jesus told him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” Peter’s correct answer wasn’t the result of his own perceptive powers.

It wasn’t that he was brighter or smarter than the other disciples. He got a heavy-revvy. God revealed a truth to Peter he otherwise wouldn’t have known...

God flashed across the screen of his mind a special bit of knowledge. His revelation was a spiritual gift.

And this can happen to us. Suddenly, in a perplexing situation the Lord might give you a piece of the puzzle.

Maybe not all the info you’d like, but enough to make sense of your situation, and know what course to take.

It’s like a flash of genius. An idea or insight comes across *the monitor of your mind*. It’s information you couldn’t have possibly known apart from God’s Spirit.

I recall one Easter Sunday I was climbing out of the shower to head to church when a random thought struck me, “*tell the worship leader to change the strings on his guitar.*” Well,

when I arrived at church I got caught up in all the special activity, and I forgot...

Until the middle of the second service... when I saw one of the worship leader's guitar strings pop.

I'd received a word of knowledge, but didn't act on it, to the detriment of the Body... When an out-of-the-blue thought crosses your mind don't just dismiss it. God could be sending you a word of knowledge or wisdom.

In Luke 21 Jesus promises us words of wisdom. He told His disciples, "Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist."

Jesus was warning His disciples that they'd be put on the spot, and called on to stand up for their faith.

But in that moment of trial the Holy Spirit will come to their rescue. He'll give them "*a mouth and wisdom...*" He gives us the *words to say* and *wisdom to say it...*

One Sunday my wife, Kathy, met a girl who's friend had brought her to church. It was the only time Kathy and this lady had ever talked - *until three months later.*

Suddenly, mysteriously God spoke to my wife and told her this lady had suffered a severe tragedy.

Kathy got her phone number from her friend and called her. She discovered on that very day her family had held a memorial service for her deceased father.

Kathy's daddy died in a accident when she was ten years old, and she was able to wonderfully minister to this grieving

lady. *And how did Kathy know this lady had suffered a tragedy?* The word of knowledge!

Another gift of the Spirit is the “discerning of spirits.” A beautiful example of this gift is found in Acts 14.

Paul and Barnabas were preaching the Gospel in Lystra when they came across a lame man. Luke tells us, “Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, ‘Stand up straight on your feet! And he leaped and walked...’”

How did Paul know he had faith? He wasn’t wearing a sign. Faith doesn’t have symptoms like warts, or a fever, or the shakes. *How did he know?* Apparently, the Holy Spirit gave Paul discernment into the man’s heart.

I’m sure most of us are literate. We can read lines of words. But to survive in our crazy world it’s just as important that we’re able to read *between the lines*.

Not everyone is honest. Situations and people aren’t always as they seem. And the Holy Spirit is like Google... He *searches* the hearts and souls of men.

The Bible teaches that Satan appears as an angel of light - as a wolf in sheep’s clothing - thus, we need eyes to see behind the facade, and discern the spirits.

Realize, a Christian with this gift is not clairvoyant.

You don’t have to avoid the brother for fear of him accessing your thoughts or reading your mind. It’s not that he or she has supernatural powers to wield as they please. Insights come as a gift from God’s Spirit.

Jesus was given spiritual discernment in Luke 22. He sensed a spiritual battle raging over Simon Peter...

He cried out, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail..."

Jesus got a glimpse into the spiritual realm, and He used this gift of discernment to pray for Peter. This is often the reason for this gift, to help *us* pray effectively.

In addition to *gifts of wisdom*, there're also **gifts of wonder**... Paul says in verse 9, "to another faith by the same Spirit..." It's been said, "Nobody gets over a canyon in two steps. At times you need to take a leap of faith." And that leap is helped by the *gift of faith*.

This gift is a special allocation of faith given by the Holy Spirit that enables us to rise up under duress and be bold for God. This is lion's den faith - giant-slaying faith - water-walking faith - mountain-moving faith!

I have my own name for *the gift of faith*. I call it, "bungy-jumping faith." *Any of you ever been bunny-jumping?* Now I know who not to let borrow my car!

Who in their right mind would jump off a bridge with a large rubber-band tied to their ankle? But that's exactly what happens when a believer receives *the gift of faith*.

You throw caution to the wind and do stuff for God you wouldn't do normally... Rather than play it safe you pick up the hitchhiker... You give more than you can afford... You go

on a mission trip... You agree to teach Sunday School... You witness to your boss at work...

When we started CC we took major risks. Launching a church from scratch is a daring venture. In hindsight, some of the stuff we did then, today we might consider reckless. *Yet we were operating in the gift of faith.*

This is what Jesus spoke of in Matthew 17:20, “If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.” Everybody reads that and focuses on the tiny size of the mustard seed. They reason *just a little faith moves mountains.*

But rather than *the size of our faith*, what if Jesus points to the seed to call attention to *the source of our faith*. A seed comes from outside and gets planted in the soil. This is true of mountain-moving faith - it’s not from us. It’s a gift from God. The Holy Spirit implants the faith in our hearts, so we can do the impossible.

Then Paul writes, “To another gifts of healings by the same Spirit...” Ultimately, God will heal all our illnesses. When you arrive in heaven you’ll be in perfect health.

One of the first things I’ll do in heaven is cancel my health insurance. *The money I’ll save will be heavenly!*

Yet on earth there are times when God chooses not to heal. The last I checked, we’re all going to die. *Sorry, but none of us are going to get out of here alive!*

It reminds me of the evangelist who was in the midst of his colossal healing crusade. He called two men out of the crowd. Jimmy walked onto the platform with the help of his crutches. Toby had a stuttering problem.

The evangelist told both men to stand on the stage behind a curtain, while he prayed for their healing...

When he finished his prayer, the evangelist shouted, “**Jimmy throw away your crutches!**” Suddenly, a pair of crutches came flying over the curtain... Then he shouted, “**Toby speak!**” And you could hear Toby from behind the curtain, “**Preechcherer, Jiiiiimy feelll.**”

Not always, but God does heal, and in many ways...

Most often, God heals naturally. The human body is designed with amazing rejuvenating capabilities...

God also heals medically - by doctors. The marvels of modern medicine are no less a miracle from God.

But at times, God heals supernaturally.

There is such a thing as *gifts of healings*. God uses individuals within the church to lay hands on the sick and pray for their recovery. We've seen these miracles.

I recall a lady suffering from serious heart disease. She was facing major surgery. She asked if we would come by her house and pray. We did. The next day at a pre-op exam her doctor said the problem was gone.

He canceled the surgery, and we praised the Lord! *Is there a doctor in the house?* Yes! His name is Jesus!

And I believe there are times when He directs certain people to touch the sick and pray for their healing. Not only did Jesus

do this while on Earth, so did His disciples. And there's nothing in the Scripture that says He doesn't want His disciples today to do the same!

And notice the double plural - it's "gifts of healings."

Apparently, there're different types of "healings" God wants to perform - *physical, mental, emotional, spiritual*. This world is a cruel place. Folks can get hurt in multiple ways, and God touches us where we hurt.

There's also different "gifts" - or ways of mediating God's healing. Through prayer. Through physical touch like the laying on of hands, etc. It's "gifts of healings."

And then verse 10 mentions, "To another the working of miracles..." If you believe Genesis 1:1, "God created the heavens and the earth" then you'll have no problem with miracles. For if God created the laws of nature, He can suspend or override them when and if He chooses!

Miracles were common in Jesus' ministry. He walked on water, multiplied fish and bread, turned water to wine, calmed the storm... In Acts the apostles also worked miracles... It's been said, "Where the age of faith is not past, the age of miracles is not past."

I never validated the story, but I heard Pastor Chuck tell it as true. A girl didn't have gas to get to church, but she wanted to come, so she took her garden hose, filled up her tank with water, and asked God to turn the water into gasoline. When she finished praying, she drove her car to Calvary Chapel to worship God...

In John 14:12 Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.” Jesus promised that His Spirit would continue His supernatural work through us.

Perhaps the greatest miracles are still ahead.

Here’s a quote from Billy Graham, "As we approach the end of the age I believe we will see a dramatic recurrence of signs and wonders which will demonstrate the power of God to a skeptical world. Just as the powers of Satan are being unleashed with greater intensity, so I believe God will allow signs and wonders to be performed." Let’s be open to miracles!

And in verse 10 he mentions three more gifts - **gifts of worship** - and the first is “*prophecy.*” This is speaking out a spontaneous message from God.

God puts words in your mind to which you give a voice. You speak His words by faith. According to 14:3 prophecy brings “*edification, exhortation, and comfort.*”

It did for us! On the last weekend of May 1982 some pastor’s wives prayed for Kathy to have a child. One of the ladies prophesied, “**By this time next year you will have a son.**” On May 29, 1983 we were in the hospital giving birth to our firstborn, Zach - *exactly one year after the prophecy was given.* You can’t imagine the comfort that has brought to us *and him* over the years.

What a blessing! We’ll talk more about the gifts of worship - **prophecy, tongues,** and **interpretation** in Chapter 14, which deals specifically with all the above.

Verse 11 wraps up Paul's list of spiritual gifts, by reminding us, "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills." In other words, we don't get to pick our own gift.

You might say, "Oh, I want the gift of healing... How cool would it be to run around healing folks." That doesn't mean God will oblige. It doesn't work that way.

The Spirit decides which gifts to distribute to whom.

As I mentioned the Greek word translated "*spiritual gifts*" in most of the chapter is "*charisma*" - but not in verse 1. There it's "*pneumatikos*" which means "things belonging to the Spirit." Here's a fundamental point...

This is why I don't believe a spiritual gift is something you carry around in your back pocket, and *whip it out* whenever you want to *show it off*... You don't just conjure it up on your own, apart from the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual gifts are ours to use, but they remain God's gifts. He is the power behind them - not us. Thus, when we exercise spiritual gifts we always should rely on the Spirit's direction. He is sovereign over His gifts.

Last Sunday I had quite a few birthday greetings on Facebook, but few of the well-wishers sent me a gift.

That might also happen to you on your birthday.

Yet God not only celebrates *the day we were born*, He's goes a step further and wants us to know *the why we were born*. That's the reason He follows up His wishes with a gift -

spiritual gifts. And using these gifts are one of the ways we discover our purpose in life.

Another way is *finding our place...* next week.