

THE GIFT OF FAITH

1 CORINTHIANS 12:7-10

I want to begin with a Top Ten list.

Here are the Top Ten spiritual gifts *not* found in the Bible - the spiritual gifts that the Apostle Paul left out...

10) untwisting cellophane-wrapped candy during the sermon without making noise... 9) teaching three-year-olds by yourself... 8) holding a sneeze for the duration of a sermon... 7) correct pronunciation of the biblical genealogies... 6) matchmaking singles... 5) unlocking a car door with a coat-hanger... (a must for every usher) 4) turning in your Bible to the Minor Prophets without using the table of contents... 3) passing communion trays one-handed... 2) clapping on beat... (a gift I wish more people in this church possessed) and 1) coming up with funny sermon illustrations...

Obviously, as handy as these abilities are, they're not the supernatural gifts spoken of in Scripture. But there are gifts that God does give to members of the Body of Christ - gifts that equip us and empower us!

For the real list of spiritual gifts, you need to read 1 Corinthians 12:7-10. It's not an exhaustive list, but it's helpful in understanding the capacities God deems necessary for the health and success of His church.

Paul writes in verse 7, **“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to**

another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.”

You and I, as citizens of heaven... as ambassadors for Christ... as soldiers in a spiritual battle... we face trials and temptations of a supernatural nature.

That means when we *serve the Lord*, we need to step out in the *power of the Lord*. If our struggle is with spiritual forces in spiritual realms, we need divine help!

And God comes to the rescue. He provides the Church with an arsenal of supernatural resources. We've been given gifts of **worship** - gifts of **wisdom** - even gifts of **wonder**: *the ability to pray away disease and participate in miracles*. I believe spiritual gifts are for today - and that means, they're for you and me!

Our text lists nine such gifts, but tonight I want to focus on just one. In 12:9, Paul tells the Corinthians, "*to another faith by the same Spirit*" - *the gift of faith!*

Almost everyone today is looking for an increase of some sort... Politicians want to increase taxes. **Athletes** want to increase their strength and speed. **Celebrities** want to increase their social media exposure. **Salesmen** are hoping for an increase in sales. **Students** are hoping for an increase in knowledge. And **everyone** wants an increase in salary!

Even the disciples were looking for an increase. In Luke 17:5 they approached Jesus with a request, "*And the apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith.'*"

Jesus had just warned them of coming storms. They were to brace themselves for offenses. And this was not what they were used to - during the previous year they'd been riding a wave of popularity with Jesus.

The disciples weren't thrilled with the news that the tide was about to turn - the road would get rougher!

Look into their faces at that moment, and you would've seen a few puzzled frowns, some perplexity.

What the disciples needed was *a faith lift!* They needed *a boost in belief, a rise in reliance.* The disciples were discerning enough to ask the Master for *a little turbo-trust...*

"Lord, Increase our faith!"

Let me ask you, *"What kind of an increase are you seeking?"* Perhaps you want to increase your circle of friends? Or your bank account? Of your expense account... That's fine, but you're selling yourself short if you don't think seriously about increasing your faith!

Faith is your most significant possession! **Hebrews 11:6,** **"Without faith it is impossible to please (God)."**

Every step we take in life should be underlined with a reliance on God. **Romans 14:23** warns us, **"whatever is not from faith is sin."** Every blessing God desires to give you, He sends to you through the vehicle of faith.

In Matthew 9, Jesus was approached by two blind men. They were bawling and wailing, **"Son of David, have mercy on us!"** Jesus turned to the *desperate duo* and answered them with a question, **"Do you believe that I am able to do this?"** They answered, **"Yes, Lord."**

Then we're told, "He touched their eyes, saying, 'According to your faith let it be to you.' And Matthew then wraps up the story, "Their eyes were opened."

And here's a question for us, "*could it be the reason our eyes remain closed and our needs go unmet is found in this phrase, "According to YOUR FAITH let it be to you."* Do you need an increase in faith?

I keep another list handy. It's a list of oxymorons. Here are a couple, "death benefit, half dead, plastic glasses, drag race, (Here's one for Pastor Matt) "Junior High Leader" - but my favorite oxymoron is in the Bible.

Psalm 78:41 tells us, "Yes, again and again (Israel) tempted God and limited the Holy One of Israel."

Talk about an oxymoron! *How do you limit an Almighty, Omnipotent, Unlimited God?* Yet Israel managed to do just that. They caused God to restrain Himself. Israel limited the work God wanted to do *for them and through them* because of their *unbelief!*

The same tragedy occurred during Jesus' visit to His hometown of Nazareth. Everywhere Jesus had been He had electrified the town with miracles and healings. *Why would it be any different in His native Nazareth?*

Yet Matthew 13 provides us the sad commentary on what happened, "Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief." Their lack of faith handcuffed the Son of God, and what He desired to do that day. And I'm afraid that's the problem in a lot of towns and churches today.

God wants to bless, and heal, and help - but He's hindered by our lack of faith.

This is why our *passionate prayer* and *preeminent priority* should be to ask, **"Lord, increase my faith!"**

But what is real faith? Hebrews 11:1 gives us a definition, **"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."** God blesses us all with a priceless cache' of spiritual blessings, but the problem with spiritual blessings is they are so spiritual.

I live in a physical world - surrounded by material stuff. How do I possibly get a grip on intangibles?

You know God loves you... you hear His power is at your disposal... you're told you have access to His throne to find help in time of need... You realize all this is true, but it's just a little too mystical, too airy - for a down-to-earth guy or gal like yourself. How do you grab hold of spiritual realities and bring them into practical, everyday experience? The answer is faith! **"Faith is the substance of things hoped for..."**

When I have a busy day, my go-to breakfast is oatmeal. I love bulky, chewy oatmeal, the kind of oatmeal that sticks to your ribs. *Not watery oatmeal.*

Whenever I slip up and make my oatmeal too watery, the solution is simple, I add more substance. I pour in another pack of the instant oatmeal. More oatmeal to the mix thickens it right up. *And faith is like oatmeal!*

Faith adds texture to spiritual realities. It's the handle whereby we can grasp God's love, and peace, and mercy,

and power. Whenever my Christian experience becomes too diluted, its time to increase the faith!

Hebrews 11:1 also tells us that faith is **"the evidence of things not seen."** Not only are spiritual realities and blessings *intangible*, but they're also *invisible*.

It reminds me of the pastor whose son was always getting dirty. His mom was constantly after him to wash his hands, **"Son, you know that germs live in that dirt."**

But the boy grew weary of the warning. He shouted, **"Germs and Jesus! Germs and Jesus! All I ever hear around this house is germs and Jesus, and I've never seen either one."**

Spiritual blessings are like germs and Jesus - they're invisible. They lie just below the surface, barely out of sight... *except to the eye of faith.*

When you trust God to fulfill a promise or reveal a blessing, it's evidence to the reality of the invisible.

It's interesting that **astronomers discovered the dwarf planet, Pluto, before they actually saw it in a telescope.**

They noted a strange gravitational pull on **its next-door neighbor, Neptune - and concluded, there must be an invisible body nearby supplying the influence.**

And likewise, people learn of the invisible God by observing His pull on our lives. Our faith is proof to the world we live in that God is - and that He is at work!

Understand, we all have a measure of faith.

In fact, you exercised faith when you drove to church tonight. You boarded a 1200 pound automobile and barreled

down the street at 50 mph, and you trusted a set of slender brake pads to stop you within a few feet of the bumper of the car in front of you. *That's faith!*

Think about your last doctor's visit... You saw a man whose name you can't pronounce and whose degrees you never verified. He gave you a prescription you can't read, and you took it to a pharmacist you'd never met. The pharmacist gave you a chemical that works in a way you don't understand... but you swallowed that pill expecting it to cure you. *All that takes great faith!*

We all have a degree of faith - *the question is are we using our faith?* Tightrope walker, Charles Blondin, walked across Niagara Falls on a wire. Afterward, he asked the crowd, "Do you believe I can carry a man across the Falls on my back?" Everyone agreed, "*Sure we believe, but not enough to volunteer for the job.*"

But real faith is the willingness to jump on Jesus' back and let Him carry you over the turbulence of life.

Realize, the three types of faith spoken of in Scripture... **First, is saving faith.** Ephesians 2:8 tells us, "**by grace you have been saved through faith.**"

Saving faith embraces Jesus as Savior and Lord. We cast our sin on His innocent shoulders and rely on His sacrifice to gain for us God's acceptance.

Second is a growing faith. This is the faith needed to overcome life's challenges and live victoriously.

This is the faith that senses God's presence, draws on His power, and holds onto His promises. Every time God proves Himself faithful - this faith grows stronger.

If you wonder how Blondin got his tightrope across Niagara Falls, I've read the way it was done was to tie a light thread to an arrow and shoot it over the gorge.

Then a smaller rope was tied to the thread and it was pulled across. Then a larger rope was tied to the smaller rope - and on and on - until a cable heavy enough for Blondin was pulled across the canyon.

And this is how a growing faith develops. It begins as a slender thread - but as it gets applied to trials and testings it grows stiffer and stronger - until finally, it becomes the very ground on which you walk on!

But there is a **third type of faith - it's the gift of faith!**

And this is the quickest way for God to increase our faith! It's an immediate *faith lift* - it's a spontaneous *trust-thrust*. It's a special dose of faith given for a special purpose, under special circumstances.

This is not the faith we already possess or the faith that grows over time. This faith can't be conjured up by us. It's supernatural faith, implanted by the Holy Spirit in our heart. Paul calls it a **"manifestation of the Spirit."**

This lift comes as a gift.

The gift of faith operates like other spiritual gifts.

A word of knowledge isn't an insight you read in a book, or hear from a friend, or discover through experience. It's a bit of

information you could never have known had it not been revealed to you by God.

It's a call from God on His own divine hotline.

My wife is a nurse, and she can dress a wound to help it heal. She's can assist the healing process, but that is a far cry from the spiritual gift of healing.

God heals through doctors and medicines, but when the gift of healing is exercised, the healing is effected solely by the miraculous hand of Almighty God.

And likewise, the gift of faith isn't a self-manufactured faith. It's an extraordinary allocation of faith that God plants in the person that needs it and asks to receive it.

Every Olympics there's always a sprinter or swimmer or weight-lifter who gets accused of taking steroids.

Someone says the athlete is popping performance-enhancing pills that enable him to exceed human normal limitations, and accomplish feats he could never obtain through mere training and natural ability...

I once saw a cartoon where a depressed Superman is confessing, "Yeah, I used to be faster than a speeding bullet - more powerful than a locomotive - able to leap tall buildings in a single bound... then they found out about the steroids."

Imagine, Superman on steroids!

You could think of the gift of faith - *as well as all the spiritual gifts - as spiritual steroids - holy hormones.*

Spiritual gifts are performance-enhancing. They enable us to exceed normal limitations and exhibit supernatural

endurance. Metabolic steroids are illegal in the Olympics, but spiritual steroids are absolutely essential in the spiritual race we are called on to run.

I've seen normal, run-of-the-mill believers, encounter extreme situations and rather than come unglued, they remain steadfast in their faith. Afterward, I wondered, "*Wow, I didn't think they had it in them!*" - and I was actually right - *they don't have it in them!* **Extreme faith for extreme situations is a special gift from God.**

Perhaps you've noticed there's a growing interest in Extreme Sports. **There's the X-Games - and Ironman Races - and Strongman Competitions. There's even an extreme sports channel that boasts millions of viewers.**

And as Christians, we also need to get excited about *extreme faith*. As the world gets worse - as life gets tough - as the stakes get higher **we need some X-faith.**

I've got another name for *the gift of faith*. I call it, **"bungee jumping faith."** If you've ever bungee-jumped, please raise your hand! We need to know what you're capable of in case you ever ask us to borrow our car.

There's no way I'm free-falling from hundreds of feet above the ground with nothing holding me but a long rubber band tied around my ankle - *no way, Jose!*

I'm too cautious of a person - too self-protective to be that reckless. Something supernatural would have to come upon me for me to bungee-jump... Well, that's exactly what happens when you receive a gift of faith.

Something supernatural does come over you!

Normally, you would be too cautious to pick up a hitchhiker - or invite a stranger into your home - or work in an impoverished neighborhood - or reach out to unsavory people... *you like to play it safe!*

On your own, you'd never start a Bible Study, or teach a Sunday School class, or go to Haiti on a mission trip, but suddenly, the Spirit of God provides you *extreme courage* for an *extreme challenge*.

Often, God blesses start-up ventures with a gift of faith. This Sunday we mark the 39th year of Calvary CSM, and I'll never forget when we started. Enough happened in the first three months to cause us to seriously consider if we had missed God's will....

I had no experience - no financial backing - no base of people (*in fact, the folks I expected to come; didn't*).

We were criticized - called a cult - we lost two members to a cult - we were even quarantined for a week when Kathy came down with mononucleosis...

And this was all in the first few weeks.

In looking back, if *Sandy now* had been counseling *Sandy then*, I probably would've told him to forget it.

Just pack it up and wait for better circumstances.

But I kid you not, at the time the thought of quitting never once crossed my mind! I remained unswayed.

I was more convinced God wanted me to start this church than I was of my own last name. I now realize it was not *my faith* at work - it was the gift of faith!

I once heard it said, "Some situations require a leap of faith. You can't cross a chasm in two steps."

That's the gift of faith! It is a bold leap of faith!

Here's a good definition for the gift of faith, extreme faith... "It's a trust undaunted by circumstances, oblivious to obstacles, unfazed by criticism, unmoved by suffering. It sees the invisible, believes the incredible, receives the impossible. It's dead to doubts, dumb to discouragements, blind to impossibilities."

Martin Luther defined this faith as, "a living, daring confidence in God's grace. It is so sure and certain that a man could stake his life on it a thousand times."

Luther's definition reminds me of Peter's trip to the Temple in Acts 3. Most of us know Peter. We're well aware of his humanity. This was ole foot-in-the-mouth Peter - *pugnacious, arrogant, impulsive, inconsistent*.

This was the guy who denied the Lord when Jesus needed him the most. That's why Peter's bold faith in Acts 3 grabs our attention – *it's so out of character!*

Remember the occasion Peter and John were entering the Temple to pray. In the gate was a lame man begging for money. What Peter said and did next was not premeditated. It seems totally spontaneous...

Acts 3:4 tells us, "And fixing his eyes on him... Peter said, "Look at us." So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name

of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." *What a daring action to take!*

This was incredible faith. To command a man to rise and walk was a bold move! But what happens next goes beyond my boundaries of good judgment. Peter takes himself and God's reputation way out on a limb...

It reminds me of the faith healer who asked everyone who wanted to be healed to come to the platform.

Up walked a healthy-looking fellow whose ailment wasn't apparent until he spoke up, "Mmmmyyy, naaame isss Tobbbby." The evangelist told the man to walk behind the curtain. He would pray for his healing.

The next fellow who came to the platform was Jimmy. His problem was obvious. He hobbled up on crutches. He was also sent behind the curtain.

Well, the evangelist prayed an arrogant prayer where he ignored God's will. He bound, and claimed, and demanded, and commanded God to do his bidding.

Then the evangelist shouted, "In the name of Jesus, Jimmy and Toby be healed!... Jimmy throw over your crutches." The crutches came flying over the curtain and the crowd went wild. Then the evangelist shouted, "Tobby speak." And from behind the curtain came the response, "Uh, uh, uh, Jimmmmyyyyyy fefefell."

And that joke is what comes to my mind when I read verse 7, "And (Peter) took him by the right hand and lifted him up..."

Peter physically lifted the lame man to his feet... *but hey Peter, what if Jimmy falls?*

Peter will be accused of cruelty to the physically impaired. He'll be arrested and sentenced to sensitivity training. The newly-formed church will start out with a black-eye and probably a million dollar lawsuit.

Peter stakes the beginnings of Christianity on this one spontaneous decision. But look what happens, verse 7, "and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them - walking, leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God. Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms... and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him."

We leave the first part of Chapter 3 impressed with Peter's faith until we get to verse 16 where Peter explains the source of the miracle... "And His name (Jesus), through faith in His name, has made this man strong... Yes, the faith which comes through Him (that is, Jesus) has given him this perfect soundness..."

According to Peter, the miracle in the Temple was performed by faith, *but not Peter's faith*. It was the faith that comes "through (Jesus)." The miracle occurred through the gift of faith! That's why Peter wasn't hesitant like you and I would've been. That's why he didn't have to go home and pray for several weeks about whether to lift the man to his feet or not.

When God gives you the faith, you don't agonize over the details - nor worry and fret and scrutinize the possible outcomes - *you're so sure, you just go for it!*

Smith Wigglesworth was a plumber who lived in Bradford, England in the late 1800s. Wigglesworth was a bizarre character who had some very weird ideas, but he was a Christian who took the Bible and spiritual gifts seriously - and at times exercised the gift of faith.

One day, Smith was at work when news arrived that his neighbor had died. He went to her house - *and let me allow Wigglesworth himself to finish the story...*

"I began to penetrate the heavens with my prayers with what faith I had, all the time my wife was shaking me, saying, 'Stop praying; she is already dead. It's too late.' But I just kept praying. Soon I came to the end of my faith, and when I did, I was conscious of a faith which took hold of me that could not be denied.

The next thing I knew, without intending to do it, I got hold of that woman and pulled her out of the bed. I stood her up against the wall and commanded her to walk in Jesus' name, and she started breathing and started walking and was raised up!" A miracle occurred when *Wigglesworth's faith* gave way to *the gift of faith*.

I'll never forget the Sunday afternoon funeral we had here at Calvary Chapel. The funeral home brought the body over early that morning. We kept it in the office.

I remember thinking, "Well Sandy, if you ever wanted an opportunity to test your faith, and ask God to raise the dead, this is it!" I walked in and grabbed the body, set it up in the casket, and commanded it in the name of Jesus to rise up and walk... *Well, not really!*

I didn't do anything that day but preach his funeral.

No way did I have faith enough to raise the dead because that kind of extreme faith for extreme situations... requires the gift of faith! It's *X-faith!*

I love how the Amplified Version renders verse 9, "To another wonder-working faith by the same Spirit." The gift of faith is just that, it's a wonder-working faith!

Remember when the father delivered his demon-possessed son to the disciples and asked them to exorcise the evil spirits. The disciples failed to free him, and Jesus had to bail them out. Later, they asked Jesus why their prayers had been so powerless.

In Matthew 17:20, Jesus told them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, 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." I've read that verse a thousand times, and I always thought, "A mustard seed is so tiny, yet if a seed that small is all that's needed to move a mountain - wow, my faith must be microscopic."

But I now believe I misunderstood that verse. The idiom, "*faith as a mustard seed*" doesn't refer to *the size of our faith*, as much as it does *the source of our faith*. A seed comes from outside the soil. It's planted to bear fruit. And what Jesus is telling us is that mountain-moving faith is not *our faith*, but *His faith*. It's faith that His Spirit plants in our heart to believe the impossible.

Tonight, you may be facing an extreme situation.

A few months ago, your life was a picnic in the park, but circumstances have dramatically changed in recent weeks. Now your life is filled with uncertainty, and worry, and fear. You feel like your about to *bungee-jump!*

Perhaps, it's cancer, or financial pressures, or a crumbling marriage, or a teenage daughter who's pregnant, or a son who's on drugs, or you lost your job.

You feel like you're being pushed off the platform, and you're not sure if the rubber band will catch you!

Maybe God has you in a place, or He's called you to a task that has you overwhelmed. God has moved you outside your comfort zone. You've been thrown into the deep end, and you're not sure if you can swim.

Your circumstances are a chasm that's too wide to step across. This situation will require a leap of faith.

If you need an extreme faith for an extreme situation, it's time to trust God and pray! I believe all the spiritual gifts offered the Corinthians are available to us today.

And that includes... *"wonder-working faith."*