**SPIRITUAL GIFTS**

1 Corinthians 12:1-31

Key Verse: 12:7

Welcome! Today is a very special day. Today marks the twentieth Birthday of our ministry here in Lincoln Park. Twenty years ago, where I’m standing now used to be my family’s living room—a dank and musty room with wall-to-wall red carpeting. I was a kid when my parents came here and started studying the Bible and sharing Jesus with DePaul students in this neighborhood, and I remember the small group was really a motley crew of people. And here we are today, twenty years later.

And today, on this Birthday celebration, we’re going to learning about the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit’s gifting in our lives. Now, this is a tough passage. So we’re going to be thinking about Spiritual Gifts, asking four simple questions **Who has spiritual gifts? What are the spiritual gifts? How do I discern my spiritual gifts? What is the purpose of spiritual gifts?**

**Who has spiritual gifts?**

The book of 1 Corinthians we’re looking at is Paul’s letter to the church there. Corinth was a really diverse place. As a trade city, it was known to be a place of intersection—different people from around the Roman world, different cultures and religions mingling together (8:5). It was a city of fusion. And from this diversity sprang exciting new ideas, new philosophies.

Paul came to the diverse place with the message of Jesus. Now, the Corinthians weren’t Jews, so everything about Jesus was new to them. But the message of Jesus was infectious, and many Corinthians began following Jesus. After several years, the church in Corinth was having some issues. There was a lot of sexual immorality going on (5:1-13;6:12-20) and all the different kinds of people had a hard time getting along with each other (1:10; 5:1;11:18). Things were kind of rough in Corinth. But, Paul’s letter to the church was more than a correctional letter, or trying to get a bunch of different kinds of people to get along. Paul wanted the group of Christians in Corinth to realize that they were more than just a group of people, but that they were “God’s temple” where “God’s Spirit dwells” (3:16).

How does that happen? How can a group of different people be God’s temple, a place where God’s very spirit dwells?

Looking at verses 1-2, many of the Corinthians used to follow “mute idols” or dead gods (2). And, Paul wanted to assure them that the leading of the Spirit is not the leading of something else, some other spirits. The way you can tell if someone has the Holy Spirit or not is very simple to Paul. Look at verse 3. If you are one who has accepted and can confess “Jesus is Lord,” then you have the gift of the Holy Spirit (3).

We may be at different places in following Jesus. Some of you might be seeking God, or just beginning to get to know Jesus, or some of you may have been following Jesus a couple of years, maybe even a couple of decades. But according to this passage, if we are at the point in our faith where we can confess, “Jesus is Lord,” then we have the full gift of the Holy Spirit. So, it’s pretty simple. If you’re a Christian, you have the gift of the Holy Spirit. Nobody has more or less of him. Each of us, as Christians, has the Holy Spirit.

**What are the spiritual gifts?**

So, Paul first explains who has the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then, he goes on to explain spiritual gifts. What are Spiritual gifts? Well, let’s look at verses 4-6. Paul says that they’re different kinds of gifts (4), services (5), and workings (5). All these things are action-related. Here we see that spiritual gifts aren’t mystical powers or supernatural X-men abilities. Broadly speaking, they’re the empowered **actions** of the indwelling Holy Spirit. (Repeat).

Let’s look again at verse 4-6. We see also that these words used to describe spiritual gifts are all very similar, yet different—“gifts,” “services,” “workings.” Paul explains, that spiritual gifts all come from God, but he uses three different ways of describing God—“the same Spirit,” “the same Lord,” “the same God.” The Holy Spirit gives us spiritual gifts in **diverse** ways. God loves diversity, and we see that this comes because he himself is very diverse. God is the same person, yet three persons. That’s how he works. And God works through different kinds of people through his Holy Spirit and gives spiritual gifts in different ways. Yet it’s all the same God, the same work of the Holy Spirit, all for the same purpose.

Sometimes we think of Christians as a “type.” We have to be a “type” of person to be a Christian. We’ve got to be a Bible teacher, a messenger, a prayer warrior, a missionary, a scholar, a pastor. If you can do all that, then go you. Or we think we have to give up what we like or our dreams or our personality to be somebody God can work with. But if we think that way, we’re so wrong. God so loves diversity and wants to work through diverse people, in diverse ways.

Paul goes on to list different kinds of gifts in verse 8 to 11. The spirit gives some the message of wisdom, the message of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, the ability to distinguish between spirits, various kinds of tongues, the interpretations of tongues. Later on, in verses 27-30, we see the different roles in the community of believers according to spiritual gifts—apostles, prophets, teachers, those who work miracles, healers, helpers, and guiders, those who speak in tongues. And Paul says not everyone can be one thing (29-30). All are needed and necessary in the community of believers. And there are more spiritual gifts than those listed here. Ephesians 4, Romans 12 list more. So spiritual gifts are really varied But, they are all the same empowered actions of God through the Holy Spirit.

And Paul says in verse 11—“All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.” The gifts of the Holy Spirit are vastly different, all doing different things, but all coming from the same Spirit. And, as Paul says, these gifts of the spirit aren’t something we seek after, or something we even necessarily are good at. God decides who is gifted with which gift.

Paul explains that the spiritual gifts working together like the human body. Look at verses 12-14. A body is one entity, it’s one person, but that one person is made up of many parts. Paul says to the Corinthians, who are all very different, and who each have different spiritual gifts, that they are all working as the same body. And verse 15-24 are kind of funny. The eye ball can’t stop being part of the body, and a body can’t just be a big eye ball. And the eye can’t say to the hand, “I don’t need you.” And no part of the body is more useful or more honorable than the other, but they all work in unison together. So Paul says in verse 25 that “there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.”

There’s this documentary I watched a couple of years ago, and it’s about an artist who went to Brazil named Vik Muniz. Muniz, for two years, went out into one of the world’s largest landfills outside of Rio de Janeriro in Brazil, and he collected garbage. He took all this garbage and he sorted in all out by color and shape. He then chose some of the pieces of garbage and decided where to put them in relation to each other. He then uses this garbage to create these huge mosaics. His artwork is now shown around the world, at the MET in New York and one piece sold in London for millions at auction. From worthless to priceless.

God works like that. He takes a bunch of diverse people. By ourselves, we’re kind of like garbage in a landfill. We’re kind of useless, and things can be kind of meaningless. But to each one of us, God the artist gives the gift of the Holy Spirit, and each one of us is gifted in very unique ways. From worthless to priceless. We’re all imperfect by ourselves, but together, in a community, we’re priceless art. And we can all be different. We don’t have to be a pastor or a missionary, we don’t have to be someone who can speak in tongues, we can be someone who helps others, encourages others, someone who understands people well, someone who helps others to relax, someone who is always praying and thinking about others. There is no gift greater than another. The human body needs both the pinkie toe as much as it needs the brain and heart. They are all part and complete the same body. So it is with us.

This mosaic, of different people with different gifts, like the church in Corinth, like the group of people here, speaks to the importance of community. It’s easy for me to think that following Jesus is about me and my faith and doubts and me figuring out my world. But really, we participate in the full presence of God and what he’s doing and wants to do when we’re a community of believers. Now, I’m not talking about community like PTA meetings or formal occasions. These days our concept of community is relationships at an arms length away. Then we retreat back into our personal lives of laptops and Facebook profiles. Yet we long for real connections with others. This vision of community God gives us here, a body made up of different parts, all needing each other, all communicating with each other and working together.

You know, you may have been seeking God, and may have felt like you’re missing something. You may feel like you can’t really experience God, that it’s something that’s not real to you. But, you can only experience the fullness of God’s presence when living in and participating in his community on earth, the body of Christ.

**How can I discern my spiritual gifts?**

So, what’s my spiritual gift?

School started this week. There’s a buzz of excitement on the campus. Walking through the campus, I was asked where the bookstore was, a couple of people were really studying the campus maps, and I saw one freshman running to class to get their on time, clutching her schedule. The excitement of school reminds me of Harry Potter. All the young wizards are excited to get to Hogwarts, to see their friends and imagine the adventures they’ll have, riding the Hogwarts Express. And the first day at school at Hogwarts, all First Years have to put on what’s called the Sorting Hat. When you wear the hat it investigates what kind of person you are, what you’re good at, and predicts what kind of person you’ll be. It’s this Hat that helps you find out what you’re gifted at, and how you should use your gifts as a wizard.

Wouldn’t that be nice, to have a Sorting Hat for our spiritual gifts? How do I find out what my spiritual gift is? Well, firstly, it’s not necessarily what I’m good at. Spiritual gifts aren’t talents, but it’s simply God’s workings through us, through the Holy Spirit. If we limit ourselves to just what we’re good at, then we may not be really using the spiritual gifts God wants me to use. Secondly, we shouldn’t pursue spiritual gifts that seem cooler than other gifts. Paul spends most of chapter 14 talking about the gifts of prophecy and speaking in tongues. Now it seems that speaking in tongues was thought to be by some as a higher spiritual gift, and so people would speak in tongues in public meetings, without anyone else being able to understand what they were saying. In essence, people were using the gift of tongues to show off.

There’s this one guy, named Bill Bright, who was the leader for Campus Crusaders. And many people who knew him, would say that he had this crazy ability to share the Gospel with others. He used to have to travel around to different college campuses around America, and after sitting with them, it something like 9 out of 10 times that person would become a Christian. This guy had sick spiritual gift. And you might be like, “Well, anything I do is not really as good as that.” And we can do this in small ways, some people maybe good at music, good at sharing the gospel, good at speaking, good at making friends. Or we might think that we have a certain spiritual gift, and we may think that everyone else should have that spiritual gift too.

**The thing is, if we start to use spiritual gifts to compare with one another, or if we begin to say, “Oh, I’m only good at this, or that” then we stifle the gifting of the Holy Spirit.**

Once, God appeared to Moses in the form of a burning bush (Ex3) And God told Moses to go to Egypt and go into Pharaoh’s palace and tell him to let God’s people go. And Moses was like, “Hey God, I’m no good at talking publicly.” And a lot of people think Moses had a speech impediment. So Moses was like, “Hey, can someone else do this job?” And then God says to him. “I am with you.” And God tells Moses to tell the Egyptians, “I am who I am is sending you.”

To discover our spiritual gift is to never try to peg ourselves as one kind of gifted person. It’s the almighty God who wants to work through us. He can work far beyond our abilities. Spiritual gifts isn’t about what we’re good or not good at, it’s about who God is and what he wants to do.

But Paul does give us a guide to help us discover in what ways God wants to gift us. In Chapter 12 verse 31a he says we should pursue the “greater gifts.” And in Chapter 14, verse 1, Paul says, “Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy.”

Why prophecy? Prophecy is one of the gifts that you read and are like, “What?” But prophecy isn’t like being a palm reader or predicting the future. The word for prophet means to relay what God is doing and will do. In essence, it’s sharing the things of God to others. It’s this gift of prophecy that Paul says we should most eagerly desire. It seems that it’s this gift of prophecy that is inlayed in all of the spiritual gifts.

Again, God doesn’t want us to get caught up in what gifts we have or don’t have, or what gifts others have or don’t have. If we’re pursuing spiritual gifts for our own egos and self-affirmation, we’re never going to find out how God wants to work with us. But, if we are pursuing being prophets, sharing the things of God with others, then God will begin to work through us through the Holy Spirit.

So to find out what my spiritual gift begins in pursing being a prophet. When you pursue sharing and revealing the things of God and what he’s doing, and will do, God will begin to reveal his gifting in your life.

**What’s the purpose of Spiritual gifts?**

So what’s the point of all? What is the point spiritual gifts? ? Let’s read verse 7. “Now to each one the manifestation of the spirit is given for the common good.” The purpose of spiritual gifts is for the common good. It’s says in Ephesians that spiritual gifts are meant so that the body of Christ might be “built up” (Eph4:12). But what does that mean, really? We’ve been looking at 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, but right in-between those two chapters is chapter 13. And Paul introduces this chapter by saying, “And yet I will show you the most excellent way. If I speak in tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

The Holy Spirit comes and dwells within us, empowering us with spiritual gifts, for this reason—to love on another. God comes and helps us to love one another because we’re not very good at it ourselves. We all want to be loved and maybe even want to love others, but we all fall short of it in many ways. We can only truly love one another, in a community, through the Holy Spirit. And our community of believers can only work to love others around us through the help of the Holy Spirit. We can be the moving body of Christ on earth. God can work in and through us to reveal who he is, and reveal his amazing love.

So, how does God want to work through you? How will the Holy Spirit work through his gifting to love others in your life?