

# YOU ARE GIFTED

---

Title: You Are Gifted

Theme: We each find our place of worth and value in the body of Christ by exercising our spiritual gifts God has graciously given to us.

Texts: I Corinthians 12:1-11

Introduction:

Let me begin with a question today, *is the church of Jesus Christ just another human institution?* After all, people form associations around many common interests and causes. If you are golfer you might join a golf club; if you are into the culinary arts a gourmet cooking group might be in your monthly routine; if you are concerned about racial inequities, then you might have a membership in an organization that redresses these wrongs. Just so the church could be viewed a group of people united with the common interest of keeping alive the legacy of the teachings of one of humanity's greatest moral or religious figures, Jesus Christ. Are we any different than the Red Cross, NAACP, or a Hospital Women's Auxiliary?

Absolutely. I can't capture the uniqueness of the church any better than this statement from the theologian Thomas Oden,

*"Christianity is distinctive as a religious faith in that it understands itself to be living as a continuing community through the living Christ...Its uniqueness lies in its particular relationship to its founder...It is the resurrected presence of the living Lord that continues to be the sole basis of the present reality of the church. Jesus is not merely the one who founded the community and left it, but rather the one who is present to the community now and in each historical period as the vital essence of the church."*

In other words, the church is of divine origin, sustained by its ongoing connection to the living Jesus, and is the extension of His life to the world. On the way out of worship last Sunday, one of our members reminded me of the statue of armless Jesus that can be found in the Kaiser Wilhelm Church in Berlin. In the midst of a new structure, the Germans have preserved the effects of the bombing during WWII on the old church. The arms of Jesus had been blown off the statue. But the saying goes, that Jesus continues to reach out to the world through the arms of the church. That is exactly what we discovered last Sunday in our study of I Corinthians 12:12-21.

Last week we reflected on the interdependent nature of our relationship in the church. By design God made sure we needed each other. None of us can

## YOU ARE GIFTED

---

claim to be complete, fully-formed, thoroughly well-rounded individuals. It is only together that we form the body of Christ. Or as my friend from a former church put, *"We don't have it all together, but together we have it all."*

Whereas last Sunday we focused on inter-reliance, our being incomplete without each other, this Sunday and next I want to focus on what we individually bring to the church to build up one another. It is this balance of corporateness and individuality that Paul captures in his summary verse in I Cor. 12:27, *"Now you are the body of Christ (together), and each of you is a part of it (individuality)."* It is to the "each of you" that we turn. Today we will focus on the subject of spiritual gifts as our spirit-empowered ministry to build up the body, whereas next week I want to look at the fact each of us has a God-given purpose or call that we can know and live out.

Our passage of Scripture today is I Corinthians 12:1-11. If you were here last Sunday you know that we looked at I Corinthians 12:12-21. You might say why is he covering this chapter backwards? He starts in the middle of the chapter and then goes back to the beginning. I have had an argument with the apostle Paul about the order of this chapter for some time. I believe He should have introduced the image of the church as the body first, each of us with our parts, then said, now if you want to know your part let's discuss the fact that each of us has been given gifts of the Spirit to define what that part would be. So I am just doing a little editing. He got all the right content, not just in the right order. Just having a little fun!

### **Read I Corinthians 12:1-11; Romans 12:3-5**

Paul introduces the topic of spiritual gifts in the normal fashion that he introduces new subjects throughout this letter. He begins, *"Now about...or now concerning...spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant."* (I Cor. 12:1) What is the ignorance that Paul is addressing? Two fold: First the Corinthians have a wrong-headed notion of spirituality, and second they have not understood the diversity of spiritual gifts or the multi-faceted ministry of the body.

First, they have a spirituality that they have brought with them from their pagan background. *"You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols."* (I Cor. 12:2) In other words, they viewed spirituality as losing control to some ecstatic experience, giving their bodies over to the invasion of some alien spiritual power. This is why they seemed to be enamored with the gift of speaking in tongues. Having their tongues taken over by an outside force seemed most like the spirituality of the pagan temples. They got fixated on the dramatic. They exalted what appeared to be the supernatural gifts like tongues, and healing. Paul says that spirituality, on

## YOU ARE GIFTED

---

the other hand, leads one to make a very focused and rational confession in full control of one's faculties. *"Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus be cursed,' and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord', except by the Holy Spirit." (1 Cor. 12:3)*

The second dimension of ignorance is their lack of understanding of spiritual gifts, especially the full panoply of expressions and forms in which these gifts are manifested through the multi-faceted body of Christ. We have often heard it said, what you don't know won't hurt you. Or ignorance is bliss. Not so when it comes to spiritual gifts. I believe that most of us have a buried treasure that lies within us, and we are ignorant of what God has given us.

Let me illustrate. In the early part of this century Mr. Yates plucked down his life savings on a ranch in West Texas. I believe in Texas they call that a spread. When the depression hit in the 1930's, what he owed on the property exceeded his ability to pay the bank. He could barely feed and clothe his family. He wife had to resort to making clothes for the kids from the window curtains. Foreclosure was immanent.

Just as life was to come apart, a seismographic crew asked for permission to drill a wild cat well on his property. With nothing to lose, Mr. Yates signed a contract that gave him the rights for a healthy portion of the royalties. At 1115 feet the drill punctured an enormous pool of oil that immediately began to gush forth 80,000 barrels/day. Thirty more wells were drilled and 30 strikes were hit, while the first well increased to 125,000 barrels/day.

And poor Mr. Yates owned it all. The day he purchased the land he received the oil and mineral rights. Yet, he had been living on relief, a multimillionaire living in poverty. The problem? He did not know the oil was there. He owned it, but he did not possess it. Many of us are Mr. Yates when it comes to spiritual gifts. We are millionaires living as if we are paupers. We have been given gifts of ministry by God and instead of opening them, they remained unwrapped or like buried treasure that we did not know existed.

One of the reasons I get so excited about this subject is that I have been the guide on many a treasure hunt for people as they have discovered and unwrapped their previously buried gifts. When people hit pay dirt and see what they have to offer, there are few things more fun for me.

There is a lot of misunderstanding when it comes to this subject of spiritual gifts. Some of you will think we have entered the spiritual Twilight zone, as if we are talking about some mystical encounter with God. Others immediately think of "gifted" as if we are speaking about an exceptional athlete like Michael Jordan, or a student that belongs in the gifted program. Still others use the term

## YOU ARE GIFTED

---

gift like we do in our common parlance. I hear people say, "He has the gift of fixing cars", or "they have the gift of gab".

Paul clears away these false notions or ignorance by giving us what I consider to be a series of synonyms or the nomenclature of spiritual gifts in I Corinthians 12:4-7 and Romans 12:4. This is where I want to concentrate my attention.

Note the parallel structure,

*"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.  
There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord  
There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them  
in all.  
Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common  
good." (1 Cor. 12:4-7)*

One of the first things we might notice is the repeated couplet "different kinds" or translated "varieties" in the RSV. Essentially Paul is saying to the Corinthians, don't get fixated on one gift, like speaking in a foreign or angelic tongues under the Spirit's power, there are a variety of gifts. Note the source of these gifts comes from a Trinitarian God. The origin of gifts is the Spirit, Lord Jesus, and God, the Father. Paul is saying that the diversity of gifts is a reflection of the diversity within God Himself. Just as the one God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so the church is to reflect the manifold expressions of a variety of ministry gifts. It is a diversity within unity that God has in mind.

I want us to examine each of these words for spiritual gifts in order to understand what we have been given for the benefit of the body of Christ. The words are gifts (v. 4), service (v. 5), working (v. 6), and manifestation (v. 7).

**1. Gifts:** *"There are different kinds of gifts". (v. 5)* The Greek word here is *charismata* from which we get charismatic. Stay with me here as we take this word apart. The root here is *charis* which means grace. Add the *ma* or *charisma* and the word means gift. *Charismata* is plural, so we have literally here *grace-gifts*. So what Paul is saying is that coming with the package of our salvation are gifts for service within the body of Christ. Salvation is not just about being declared right before God or being forgiven, but also receiving spiritual gifts of service to be used to strengthen the body of Christ.

I believe one of the deepest needs of our lives is to make a contribution, to leave a positive imprint, to make difference for the time we have spent on this planet. This is why I tie this word "gifts" in v. 4 to the word that Paul chooses for as synonym for gifts in v. 7, which is "manifestation". Manifestation means to

## YOU ARE GIFTED

---

"make clear, observable, visible". Spiritual gifts are our visible contribution to the body of Christ. They affirm our worth and value. They say, "I have something to offer. The church needs me." When I exercise my gift of teaching in such a way that you make helpful discoveries that assist your following Christ, then I know I have made a difference for the kingdom of God. My visible contribution and sense of worth comes through the avenue of my gifting.

2. **Service:** "There are different kinds of service..." (v. 5) Again the word here may have a familiar ring. It is *diakonia* from which we get the word deacon. The word in its earliest form meant "to be in haste." Therefore Paul is saying that spiritual gifts convey an "eager readiness to serve." It is our avenue of service within the body of Christ.

Spiritual gifts convey the **manner** in which our gifts are offered. Service captures the spirit of giving. We are given gifts to build up the community. In v. 7 Paul says that gifts are "for the common good" or as Barrett translates, "with a view to mutual profit." In other words, our gifts are really community property. Why is Paul stressing this to the Corinthians? The Corinthians were into the flashy gifts of "tongues" and "healing". None of the quiet stuff. For them the use of gifts was show and tell time. Look what I have. I confess when I first began preaching, I was quite self-focused. I had a secret desire to be a great orator. People would come from far and wide to hang on my every word as succulent droppings flowed from my tongue. I trust my motives have at least marginally improved. Perhaps my attitude improved because people didn't think my droppings were so succulent. But regardless, the motive here is not ego satisfaction, but the health of the whole body.

The following parable captures the proper spirit in which our gifts are to be used. The difference between heaven and hell can be pictured in this way. In both heaven and hell people are sitting at a banquet table overflowing with bounteous food. In both situations everyone seated at the table has splints on their arms, which makes it impossible to bend them at the elbow. Yet in hell everyone is starving. But in heaven the people are enjoying the feast that is before them. Why? Because they have learned that the only way to receive the bounty is to feed the person across the table from them. This is the spirit in which God's gifts are to be offered to one another.

I can't pass up the opportunity to make a point that is central to my heart passion, others might say it is my pet peeve. The word translated service here, can equally be translated *ministry*. There are "different kinds of ministries". In the contemporary church we have to our own detriment come to associate ministry with pastors or professional staff. We pay a certain group of folks to do ministry to us or for us. We buy our goods and services. Our language gives us away. People who receive a call to be a pastor talk about "a call to **the** ministry"

## YOU ARE GIFTED

---

or we might say, "he is in **the** ministry." We have come to equate ministry with a call to a holy life in the church. So we divide people into two categories—ministers and the ministered to or the clergy and the laity. I am here to say that the New Testament knows no such division or understanding of ministry. That is a man-made development that creates passivity in the body of Christ. It turns the vast array of people in the church into an audience on whom the professionals to do their stuff.

Someone has said the church is like a football game, *"50,000 people in the stands in desperate need of exercise and 22 people on the field in desperate need of rest."* The only ministry that the New Testament knows is the multi-faceted ministry of everyone in the body of Christ. As I like to say, *"If the professionals are called into **the** ministry, what is left for the ordinary person?"* Not much. Why should we have all the fun? We need to get back to the New Testament vision that all of us are to be engaged in ministry. I love the caption in our order of service that says, "Ministry in Song". That is as much a ministry as preaching the word, or delivering a meal to a shut-in. I am calling us out of stands and onto the playing field to use our gifts together in ministry.

So the word ministry conveys both the servant spirit of our offering and the fact all of us have service to perform which is ministry in the total body of Christ.

**3. Working:** *"There are different kinds of working..." (v. 6)* The root word here is energy, so a more literal translation would be "there are a different kinds of *energizings*". Other translations focus on "effects" or "variety of impacts." In other words, when we exercise our gifts they leave imprint, something positive happens in the lives of others. It brings concrete results. There is an effect. If I have the gift of teaching, then the effect is that people are learning. If I have the gift of evangelism, the good news of the gospel pours forth so that people come to Christ. If I have the gift of mercy, the sick and hurting are comforted. If you think you have the gift of mercy, but you get thrown out of hospital rooms, then you might reevaluate whether you have that gift.

It is interesting to me that one of the words for spiritual gifts is related to energy. One of the ways you know you are operating in your giftedness is that you are in the stream of an energy flow. I was complementing Caryn, our soloist last Sunday on the blessings of her ministry of music. She said, "I love it. That's just who I am." When we use our gifts it is like drinking from the well of refreshing waters. Somewhere along the line service got a bump rap. We were taught that to serve God had to be drudgery and sacrificial. Ray Stedman has written, *"Somewhere this idea found deep entrenchment in Christian circles that doing what God wants you to do is always unpleasant; that Christians must*

## YOU ARE GIFTED

---

*make choices between doing what they want to do and being happy, and doing what God wants them to do and being miserable."*

One of the ways that you get in touch with whether you have been give a gift is to note your energy level. Monitor the inner motivations. My whole inner climate changes when I shift from the task of certain kinds of administration to opening up the Scripture to prepare for teaching. There is an inner well spring from which to draw when I am operating out of my giftedness. There is a rush of inner joy that says, "Can you believe it? They actually pay me to do this."

The body of Christ as a living organism is an energy system. Can you imagine a whole body of believers who have discovered their gifts and are using them in the context where they best fit? Dr. Paul Brand describes a physical phenomenon that applies to the church as the body of Christ. He explains that although the human body has nerves specifically for pain, cold, heat and touch, the body has no pleasure nerves. However, when the organs work together, one of the by-products is an enzyme that bathes the nerves and cause what Brand call "the ecstasy of community." Any outsider would feel the buzz of electricity. What's with those folks?

So what do these synonyms for spiritual gifts tell us: 1. *charismata* are grace-gifts from the bounty of salvation that define our worth, value and contribution; 2. *diakonia*, which is service or ministry relates to manner of giving our life away for the good of the body; 3. *workings* refers to the fact that gifts have an impact and energize us. So a working definition of spiritual gifts could be *our ministry capacity or abilities given by the Spirit which expresses our unique motivation for building up the body of Christ.*

What is our responsibility? Unearth the treasure and use the gifts God has given to us. In I Peter 4:10 we read, "*Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others.*" There is a wonderful apocryphal story that I love about Michelangelo. One day he was seen pushing a huge block of stone down the street toward his sculpting studio. A curious neighbor sitting lazily on his porch called to him. "Hey, Mike. Why are you laboring so over an old piece of stone." Michelangelo was reported to have said, "Because there is an angel in that rock that wants to come out." There are gifts in each of us that want to come out.

So, what are some ways that the angel can break free from the rock that holds us?

1. **Experiment:** Finding your gifts will take risk. We discover our gifts by putting ourselves in positions of service that we think we might like in order to discover how God has wired us. One of the young men I met with when I was in

## YOU ARE GIFTED

---

California recently is a mechanical engineer in his early thirty's who designs air conditioning systems for a living. Yet he is quite sure that he doesn't want to do this the rest of his life. He has a yearning to do something with kids. So he has been putting himself in different situations to get exposure to youth of various age. He has worked with 4<sup>th</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> graders in a program called Confident Kids. He volunteered a half day a week in a public school kindergarten class. Last week he spent the week at a high school camp as a counselor because he has been volunteering in his church high school ministry. As the saying goes, God can't steer a parked car. Experiment.

2. **Study and Reflect:** Get a couple of good books on spiritual gifts, such as Peter Wagner's *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow*. Attend the next scheduled Design Seminar, though not specifically on spiritual gifts, but more broadly our unique motivational pattern, this can be a time spent thinking about how God has uniquely wired you. Write down Saturday, January 24. If I may be self-promotional my book, *Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God* contains the vision behind this mini-sermon series.

3. **Ask:** Ask the people who know you best and whom you trust to give you feedback on the ways you they see you impacting those around you. What do you appear to be good at and get joy in? What is it that they see you getting excited and passionate about? Gifts are primarily discerned and affirmed in relationship since they are gifts of the community.

The healthy church has a full employment plan. Each one is using the gifts that God has given to us. The apostle Paul could never have imagined the modern church where the 80/20 rule prevails. What is the 80/20 rule? Twenty percent of the people give 80% of the money and 20% serve in the ministries of the church and 80% are the consumers of their efforts. **"To each has been given the manifestation of the spirit for the common good" (v. 7)**. No one has been left out, none of us has been passed by if we have given our life to Christ. O, what energy will continue to be unleashed as we contribute our gifts to this body and beyond.

Is the church simply another human institution or are we a uniquely divine community through who the Lord is creating His new humanity? It is the difference between being an orchestra society or being an orchestra. An orchestra society exists to support the orchestra. Along with the support comes the privilege of attending the concerts. But the orchestra society doesn't perform, it simply relaxes and enjoys the concert. Unfortunately, the modern church seems more like the orchestra society than it does the orchestra. The church, in fact, should be the orchestra with all of us having an instrument to play under the direction of the conductor, the head of the body. Each of us,

## YOU ARE GIFTED

---

though very different, is necessary to create the harmony of the sound. Let's make fine music together.