

## Shaped to Make a Difference: Spiritual Gifts

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Getting ready for this message made me think a bit about gifts in general. You know, gifts I've received as well as gifts I've given. It didn't take me long to come up with a list of gifts that were very memorable. There's my Duke golf bag and my Dewalt cordless drill and there's this framed print of Salvador Dali's Christ of St. John of the Cross. There are gifts of a sentimental nature, like my light saber or this cookie jar that used to be my grandmother's. Of course there are those gifts that are not things, but the most important people in my life. Friends who will tell me what I need to hear, not just what I want to hear. My beautiful wife, Jennifer and our 3 awesome children.

So then I just keep notching it up. What gifts could be better than that? Well, there's the forgiveness and new life that comes from being a friend of Jesus. Beyond that, there is this adventure of building his kingdom that we're invited to go on, and his promise to be with us through all things. And there are these special gifts God has given us to help us show other people who God is, what God is like. Those gifts are called spiritual gifts.

Invite to take out the outline and study guide. We are in our second week of the series about your shape. I don't mean anything physical about that. It's about the shape that God has molded you to do ministry for his kingdom. And today to get a handle on spiritual gifts, we're going to walk through the longest section in scripture about it. So I'd like to invite you to open up your Bibles and follow along in I Corinthians 12. Now I'm going to use the Message version today, which is a common sense re-writing of the Bible. It will read very differently than most Bibles, but you will still be able to follow along.

So Paul begins like this...**insert I Cor 12:1 from the Message.**

***What I want to talk about now is the various ways God's Spirit gets worked into our lives. This is complex and often mis-understood, but I want you to be informed and knowledgeable.***

Paul wants the church to be informed and knowledgeable. There is nothing secret or hidden about the spiritual gifts, but one issue is that they are misunderstood. At the church in Corinth, there apparently is confusion about what spiritual gifts are, where they come from, what they are for, etc. There may have been some people are trying to use something they are calling "spiritual gifts", but using them for their own gain or glory. So Paul wants the church to be clear about spiritual gifts and particularly what their purpose is.

So let's take a few minutes and talk about what Spiritual Gifts are. So what is a Spiritual Gift and how is that different than my natural abilities?

Scripture teaches us that God has a purpose for your life, and your spiritual gifts are the equipment He gives you to do what He asks you to do. It's given to you the moment you accept Christ. You don't get to choose your gift, and you don't earn your gift. It's a gift. It's a gift chosen by God (or several abilities) just for you. The important thing is it's not given for your benefit. Your spiritual gifts are not given for you. They're given to you to help other people. And other people in the church family are given their gifts to help you.

Spiritual gifts are different from natural abilities. They may appear the same, but they're different. When you were born, you were given certain natural abilities. For instance, how many of you can roll your tongue? About 53% can roll their tongue; the rest of you people are defective! Can anybody roll your tongue under? Cool! Can anybody wiggle your ears? Anybody double-jointed in their fingers? Anybody double-jointed in their toes? That is a real ability! Do any of you hear voices in your head? *Just kidding!*

We all have different natural abilities. Have you noticed when kids are born there are some things they are just naturally good at? Macie is not quite 2. 6 months ago, we noticed that she was singing the melody of the ABC song. Looks like she may have a natural ability in music. Some kids are born being performers. They're cute, they're showing off – they're fun to watch. Other kids are more shy, and they look the other way when you look at them. Who taught them that? It's inborn. It's a natural gift. Some of you are good at math. Some of you are good at mechanics. Some of you are good at art and music. Some of you are born coordinated. You're good at sports. You have a good sense of balance. Some of us can tell if a shirt matches the pants or not. A natural ability that I don't have. When you were born you got a set of natural abilities.

When you are born *again*, in other words, when you have a spiritual rebirth, when you are converted, when you come to Christ, when you experience salvation in your spiritual rebirth, you get a new set of spiritual abilities to do whole new things. They're given to you the moment you become a believer.

What's the difference? Spiritual gifts produce spiritual results. For instance, have you ever noticed the difference between a Bible teacher and a spiritually gifted Bible teacher? Big difference. The difference is the difference between information and transformation. A teacher can give you information. But when you're gifted at teaching the Bible, it transforms people's lives. It changes them on the inside. It has an additional power to it that just normal teaching doesn't have. The combination of spiritual gifts that you have to help you produce spiritual fruit...transform people's lives. And that is what Paul gets into in the next section we're going to read from I Cor 12.

### **1 Cor 12:4-7 The Message**

***God's various gifts are handed out everywhere; but they all originate in God's Spirit. God's various ministries are carried out everywhere; but they all originate in God's Spirit. God's various expressions of power are in action everywhere; but God himself is behind it all. Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits.***

Ok, so one obvious understanding Paul wants us to gain is that ***Spiritual Gifts Come from God.*** So the source for the wide variety of Spiritual Gifts for a vast array of unique people is the one true God. It is God's Spirit working in unique ways in each of us.

This should give us a clue about the value God places on each and every one of us. God not only loves and cares enough for you to offer forgiveness and eternal life through the cross, but God invites you on the grand journey of joining him in transforming the world, then God gives you special spiritual abilities in a formula that is unique to you (yet will work in harmony with others). We must have great value to God, or why else would God put so much effort into us?

So spiritual gifts come from God and they are ***Given for a purpose.*** We've already mentioned that Spiritual Gifts are different than your natural abilities. I do want to say that I believe that our natural abilities are also gifts from God...they are gifts that are wired into our DNA, your physical make up. And while it is possible to use your natural gifts for God's purpose and glory, they are different than spiritual gifts.

Paul says, "Each person is given something to do that shows who God is. Everyone gets in on it. Everyone benefits." Other versions read like this, "...to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."

The overall benefit of spiritual gifts is for the common good of the mission of building the kingdom of God. That's the ultimate purpose for spiritual gifts. "Everyone gets in on it...everyone benefits. They are spiritual abilities to show who God is – to make God's kingdom manifest.

A manifestation is to make the intangible tangible, the invisible visible. That's the purpose of spiritual gifts. The spiritual purpose for our gifts is to use them to make the invisible God visible...to make the intangible Kingdom

of God become a new reality for someone else. Spiritual gifts are the unique set of gifts you have been given to help people experience the grace and love of the God who created them and desires a relationship with them. It's something you can do to show who God is.

The two things I love most to do in ministry are to preach and teach.

I never had any desire to do either until I was 21 years old. I hated speaking in public. The thought of being any kind of teacher never entered my mind. Then I became a Christian and God placed some gifts in me that I didn't know before. I received opportunities to preach and teach and those experiences were rewarding, not just for me but for others as well. I had a hunger to do more and I could see that God was accomplishing something through my preaching and teaching. It was something I could do that showed who God is to others. That's the key...it's something you can do that helps someone see God. Not every gift is a high-profile gift like preaching. And higher profile gifts like preaching should never be considered to be greater gifts than other gifts, but I'll save a bit of this for later.

So even though God gives us gifts as individuals, uniquely designed for us, they are not meant to be used alone. Spiritual gifts are meant to be used in cooperation and coordination with others. None of us have every gift we need to be in ministry, to be about the greater mission of leading people to an active faith in Christ, to build God's Kingdom. We can't do all that by ourselves.

That's why Paul uses an illustration to explain how God has designed his church to do his ministry. So we're going to skip down to **verses 12-27 Message.** **You can easily enough see how this kind of thing works by looking no further than your own body. Your body has many parts—limbs, organs, cells—but no matter how many parts you can name, you're still one body. It's exactly the same with Christ. By means of his one Spirit, we all said good-bye to our partial and piecemeal lives. We each used to independently call our own shots, but then we entered into a large and integrated life in which he has the final say in everything. (This is what we proclaimed in word and action when we were baptized.) Each of us is now a part of his resurrection body, refreshed and sustained at one fountain—his Spirit—where we all come to drink. The old labels we once used to identify ourselves—labels like Jew or Greek, slave or free—are no longer useful. We need something larger, more comprehensive. I want you to think about how all this makes you more significant, not less.** (This is a big statement here. I think about Jesus saying that you must lose your life to find it and that's the kind of thing Paul is pointing to here. Even though you lose your independence you become more significant, not less, because the mission and purpose is so great). **A body isn't just a single part blown up into something huge. It's all the different-but-similar parts arranged and functioning together. If Foot said, "I'm not elegant like Hand, embellished with rings; I guess I don't belong to this body," would that make it so? If Ear said, "I'm not beautiful like Eye, limpid and expressive; I don't deserve a place on the head," would you want to remove it from the body? If the body was all eye, how could it hear? If all ear, how could it smell? As it is, we see that God has carefully placed each part of the body right where he wanted it.** **But I also want you to think about how this keeps your significance from getting blown up into self-importance. For no matter how significant you are, it is only because of what you are a part of. An enormous eye or a gigantic hand wouldn't be a body, but a monster. What we have is one body with many parts, each its proper size and in its proper place. No part is important on its own. Can you imagine Eye telling Hand, "Get lost; I don't need you"? Or, Head telling Foot, "You're fired; your job has been phased out"? As a matter of fact, in practice it works the other way—the "lower" the part, the more basic, and therefore necessary. You can live without an**

*eye, for instance, but not without a stomach. When it's a part of your own body you are concerned with, it makes no difference whether the part is visible or clothed, higher or lower. You give it dignity and honor just as it is, without comparisons. If anything, you have more concern for the lower parts than the higher. If you had to choose, wouldn't you prefer good digestion to full-bodied hair?*

*The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don't, the parts we see and the parts we don't. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance.<sup>27-31</sup> You are Christ's body—that's who you are! You must never forget this.*

This is God's design for ministry...that we will all use our gifts in cooperation and coordination under the leadership of Jesus to show the world who God is. We are one body, and our diverse gifts are unified under one mission.

If you take a few minutes to think about any ministry, it operates like a body. Lots of people bring their gifts into a ministry and when the gifts of those people are unified by God's mission, then it's beautiful to observe. The church is filled with imperfect people and it has its flaws, but it is a beautiful thing to watch ministry transform lives.

We are already starting to collect for our Holiday Food Baskets. This is our outreach to the needy in our community during Thanksgiving and Christmas. I want you to think about what that ministry really looks like. It looks like a body with many parts. Some parts say to themselves, "I can buy a gift or some food to help show someone in need that God cares" and so that's what they do. People by the hundreds are part of this body just by doing that. Other people say, "I can wrap gifts or sort the gifts to show someone that God cares about them", and they do that. Others think, "I can come up to church a few hours to help sort the food into boxes for delivery to show someone that God cares about them." Some people say, "I can organize teams and make calls and get volunteers here when we need them." Others say, "I can drive the food or gifts out to the people who cannot get here to pick them up to show someone that God cares about them." Others say, "I can call the Salvation Army and get a list of people who are in need." And so when I watch the food and the gifts come in, and the people come in to get volunteers organized, and teams come in and sort it all out and others come to drive it to families. Then the drivers come back and they will sometimes say something like, "This lady was so grateful that she was in tears when she tried to say "thank you". I see all that and I think, "Wow – isn't the church beautiful".

Every ministry is like that! It's lots of people putting both their natural and spiritual gifts together under God's leadership to accomplish God's purposes. That's what it means to be the Body of Christ. How do you start using the gifts God put inside of you? Four things.

1. You've got to **discover them.**

You've got to know what they are before you can use them. You've got to stop neglecting the fact that inside of you are some dormant gifts that you're not even using. The Bible says in 1 Timothy 4:14, "**Do not neglect the spiritual gift that is in you.**" You've got to figure out what God has put in you.

How do you discover your spiritual gifts? Three ways: you examine, evaluate and experiment. This is how you decide and discover what you're good at.

First, you examine. That means you study spiritual gifts. There are spiritual gift surveys out there you can use to help you examine. This is something that the small groups will be doing together as a part of this study. If you want to get into a small group, let us know today.

The second thing to do is evaluate what you're good at. Here's how you do that. You ask other people, "What do you think I'm good at?" Ask other people. Other people will recognize your giftedness before you do. There are certain things you do well that you don't even know you're good at because you think it's natural that everybody thinks that way, acts that way, feels that way. They don't. Other people will recognize your spiritual gifts before you do. It is in their affirmation that you learn your spiritual gifts.

Experiment. You just have to go out and try stuff. I don't think you're ever going to learn your spiritual gifts by taking a test. There are all kinds of tests you can go out and take. I took one when I was a teenager trying to discover what my giftedness was. The only thing the test came up with was I had the gift of martyrdom. Great! That's the gift you get to use one time in your life, and it's over.

Saint Paul's is a great place for you to experiment. In fact, I want to encourage you to do just that. If you get into a ministry that is not in your giftedness and is a real struggle, then let us know and we'll help you find someplace else to try. There are hundreds of ministries you can get involved in. Just try different things. Then you'll know where you're gifted.

Some of you are sitting here going, "I'm waiting for God to tell me what He wants me to do with my life." It isn't going to happen. You cannot steer a parked car. You've got to be moving. If you're moving God can steer you. So just get out there. Volunteer for something, anything. Just start using your life to help other people. That'll steer you in the right direction. Don't wait. It's not going to fall on you like that. So you discover them.

## 2. The second thing you do is you **dedicate them**.

You dedicate your gifts back to God. The Bible says this in Romans 6, "*Give yourselves completely to God since you've been given new life. [In other words, He gave you all these gifts.] Use your whole body as a tool to do what is right for the glory of God.*"

This is about acknowledging the source and the purpose of your gifts...you offer them back to God. Some of you, you already know what you're good at. It's no big surprise. You know what you're good at. You're just not using it for the Lord. You're using it for yourself. What you need to do is, once you know what you're good at, you need to dedicate it to God. "God, I'm good at this. I'm dedicating it to You. God, I'm good at that. I'm dedicating that to You." Push the excuses out of the way and say, "God, I dedicate what You gave to me back to You."

## 3. You **develop your gifts**.

You discover them, you dedicate them, and then you develop them. Gifts are like muscles, the more you use it, the stronger it gets. The more it develops. You can strengthen and develop and grow what God has given you. Any gift that God gives you can and should be developed. If you have a gift of teaching... No gift comes fully developed. It comes into your life in a certain way. The more you use it, like a muscle, the more it develops. You get better at it and better at it. How? By practice. By learning. By studying. By learning from other people who have the same gift. As you practice it, you get better and better.

Discover, dedicate, develop. The fourth thing you do is.

## 4. **You deploy**.

You deploy your spiritual gifts. You know what deploy is. It means you put them into service. You get out on the field, and you actually start doing something. Romans 12:6 says this, "*We are to use our different gifts in accordance with the grace that God has given us. If our gift is to speak God's message, we should do it according to the faith we have.*"

What's the best way to practice and develop and deploy and dedicate and discover your spiritual gifts? In a small group or a ministry group with others. Remember that we are ONE BODY. We need to allow God to place

our gifts alongside the gifts of others for the body to fulfill its mission of show people who God is. So do ministry with others who will encourage and inspire and strengthen you.

Do you see how brilliant this plan is... what God thought up? God's plan for the church is, "Here's what I'll do, I'll give every single person in the church different gifts". Then everybody has a place. Everybody has a role. Everybody gets involved. Everybody can contribute, and everybody gets rewarded.

Imagine what would happen if everybody in our church did this – we had no spectators – what if we had no spectators in our church? What if everybody said, "I know my gift, and I'm using my gift." What kind of power, what kind of impact would we have on this world? It would be unstoppable. If everybody discovered, dedicated, developed and deployed their gifts. That's a beautiful picture. That's ministry, the way God designed it to be.

God has put some gifts in your life, and He says, "I want you to unwrap each of these. When you accept My greatest gift – *God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son* – you get all these other gifts." There's no better time to receive them or decide to use them than right now.

Prayer:

Would you pray this prayer? Dear God, today I accept Your free gift of forgiveness. Thank You for forgetting everything I've ever done wrong. I'm putting my trust in Your grace. Dear God, today I accept Your free gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ because of what He did for me. I know I can't earn my way to heaven. Dear God, I accept this free gift of Your Spirit into my life. Live through me, and fill me with Your love and joy and peace and patience. God, I accept the gift of special abilities You put in my life. Help me to develop them, to discover them, to dedicate them, to use them to be the person You made me to be.

If you've never invited Christ into your life, say, "Jesus Christ, today I invite You into my life, and I accept Your gifts. In Your name I pray. Amen."