

Gifts from the Spirit (Pt. 1)

Alright. Well, good to see you guys this morning. If you have a bible nearby, go ahead and turn with me to 1 Corinthians 12. If you're new around our church, here on Sundays we've been walking through a series all about the Holy Spirit. And we realize that hearing that probably *excites* some of you and *terrifies* others of you. But for us as a church, we believe that the Spirit is one of the primary means God uses to make himself known to us. So we're spending a decent chunk of the summer parsing out what all that means practically.

So today specifically, we are going to transition into what I think is one of the *primary* things many people think of when they think about the Holy Spirit, and that's what is commonly called the *spiritual gifts*. **The bible makes it clear that when we have a relationship with the Holy Spirit, there some particular ways that he makes himself known through us.** And those things are what Christians down throughout the years have called spiritual gifts. **So today I want to talk about what those things are, some about what they *aren't*, and then finally how to know if we possess them.**

So with that, let's just jump straight into our passage. 1 Corinthians 12—we'll read v. 7 and then camp out there for a bit before reading the rest. Take a look with me:

[7] *To each* [everybody say "each"] *is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good* [everybody say "for the common good." Marcus did that a few weeks back and I thought it was cool, so figured I'd try it].

Okay, two ideas in v. 7 I want you to be aware of by way of set-up. The first idea comes from that word "each." Whatever these things from the Spirit are, they are given to *each* of us as followers of Jesus." In other words, **there's no such thing as being a follower of Jesus and *not* having the Spirit work through you.** And according to Paul in this passage, **being a *healthy* follower of Jesus means that the Spirit will at some point, make himself known and visible through certain specific ways,** like the ones listed in this passage. That's what this verse is referring to. So if you are here this morning, you're a follower of Jesus, and you were hoping to get out of here unscathed by any of these "manifestations of the Spirit," you are out of luck. Because they're given to *each* of us. Am I making sense so far?

And then the other part of this verse I want us to hone in on is the phrase “...for the common good.” It says that these gifts, or manifestations were given to each of us *for the common good*. For *what* reason? For the *common good*. So the way it should work is that our various gifts would *build up*, would *strengthen* the community of believers that we belong to. That’s the end goal of the gifts. Now here’s why I want to highlight that. I think **one of the unfortunate things that has happened to spiritual gifts is that we have dramatically *individualized* them.** In an awful lot of contexts, **we have made the emphasis of the gifts more about me individually expressing my gifts than about me *using* my gifts to *build up* the community around me.**

As an example, you can go online and Google “spiritual gifts” and it will pull up several dozen different websites where you can take a spiritual gift inventory test. You answer a bunch of questions, and it will spit out in return what it thinks your spiritual giftings are. Almost as if spiritual gifts are just the Christian version of the Myers Briggs or whatever other personality inventory. And honestly, for several decades that *is* what it was like, until the Enneagram hit it big and now Christians are obsessed with that one instead. But that’s the way that I think a lot of followers of Jesus think about spiritual gifts—like they are God’s version of personality types. Now I don’t know that that is *completely* wrong—there probably is some overlap between those two ideas. But here’s what I would caution you about when it comes to these spiritual gift inventories. The danger I think, is that **if you’re not careful, thinking about it that way trains you to put the emphasis on your own gifting and your own personality, when the focus of the gifts in the Bible is more on *how those gifts help and serve and build up those around you*.** I think if we’re not careful, it’s easy for us to get the focus of the gifts exactly backwards.

For example, I can’t tell you how many conversations I’ve had with people where they’re talking about why they left a particular church that they were a part of, and to describe it, they say something like, “well there just weren’t many places for me to express my gifting at that church, so I left.” I hear that a lot. But do you see how, **to think that way about the gifts, is actually to elevate *ourselves* and our *own* giftings over the good of the community we’re a part of? It makes *me* the point, instead of making *others* the point.** It turns the Church into little more than a convenient outlet into which I can express my individual giftings. But if we understand v. 7 that we just read, I think that changes our mindset a little, does it not? It changes our response in those scenarios from essentially, “where can express my gifts,” to “how can I be radically for the *good* of those around me, whatever form that might take?” Do you see the difference in those two postures? We’ll speak real practically what that looks like towards the end of today’s

teaching. For now, I just want to make sure you see that each gift is given “*for the common good.*” Make sense?

Okay, with that set-up out of the way, we’re ready for Paul to tell us what some of these gifts actually *are*. Pick it back up with me in v. 8 of our passage:

*[8] For to one is given through the Spirit the **utterance of wisdom**, and to another the **utterance of knowledge** according to the **same Spirit**, [9] to another **faith** by the same Spirit, to another **gifts of healing** by the one Spirit, [10] to another the **working of miracles**, to another **prophecy**, to another the **ability to distinguish between spirits**, to another **various kinds of tongues**, to another the **interpretation of tongues**. [11] All these are **empowered by one and the same Spirit**, who apports to each one **individually** as he wills.*

Now, before we go any further, you should probably also know that this isn’t the *only* place in the bible that talks about these types of gifts. There’s this passage about these gifts, and then there’s *another* list of almost entirely *different* gifts in Romans 12. There’s another list in 1 Peter, but it mainly lists gifts that are also in other passages. And there’s *another* list in Ephesians 4, but there’s some disagreement as to whether those are the same thing or not.¹ And I think one thing we can gather from the fact that there are multiple different passages about this that all look a little different is that probably, **these lists of gifts aren’t meant to be exhaustive**. Meaning, **there are likely gifts that exist outside of just the few lists we have at our disposal in these passages**. This is probably just a sampling of some of the more common ones. But just for *our purposes* the next three weeks, **we’re going to spend the bulk of our time in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, looking at the gifts from the Spirit we find in each of those places**. Since these are the ones we *have*, we’ll start here. Make sense?

Now to *help* with this, I’ve broken the gifts in those two passages down into three *categories*. These categories aren’t explicitly mentioned in the bible or anything, they just help my brain process it and digest it all—so the hope is that they might help you as well. So the way I’ve broken them down is into what we’ll call the *prophetic* gifts, the *practical* gifts, and the *miraculous* gifts. Here’s how I’ll divvy them up, and we’ll put this on a slide:

- **Prophetic:** prophecy (obvs.), utterance of wisdom, utterance of knowledge, distinguishing between spirits

¹ For those interested, many people say that either a) these are giftings that mainly apply to those in *leadership* within the church, or b) Paul is actually saying the *leaders themselves* are gifts—not that these are *giftings*.

- **Practical:** service, teaching, exhortation, generosity, leadership, acts of mercy
- **Miraculous:** faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, tongues, interpretation of tongues

So the plan is to cover that first category *today*, the second category *next week*, and the third category the *week after that*. Sound like a plan? That being said, let's dive into the *prophetic* gifts. Are y'all ready? All my Baptists and Presbyterians in the room are like "not even a little bit." All the Pentecostals are like "I was *born* ready." Either way, it's happening. First up, *prophecy*...

Prophecy

So we'll kick things off with describing the big category the bible calls *prophecy*. In its simplest terms, prophecy is simply speaking to someone else, on God's behalf. It's when God gives someone a word, a picture, a dream, some type of information or message, that is *intended for someone else* that that person comes into contact with. The belief is that God speaks to us through the Scriptures, that he speaks to us individually through prayer, but also that he speaks to us *through other* Spirit-filled followers of Jesus.

Now part of the reason I wanted to describe this one first is that I think prophecy can also kind of serve as the big category that all the other *prophetic gifts* fit inside of. In other words, I think *words of wisdom*, *words of knowledge*, and *distinguishing between spirits*, could actually be understood as all being various *types* of *prophecy*. Are you with me so far? So let's look at each type to figure out what they are.

Utterance of Wisdom

The simple fact of the matter is that we all need *wisdom*, right? Right. We all need wisdom to navigate life, to make decisions, to figure out who and what God has called us to be and do. And if you *don't* believe you need wisdom, there's a decent chance that you are currently *suffering* from the *lack* of said wisdom. Now, a lot of the time, the wisdom we need can be found right here in the Scriptures. This book is *chock full* of wisdom. So if the question is, "should I divorce my spouse because they're currently getting on my nerves?" No. No need to seek out a message of wisdom from somebody else on that—you already know. The answer is right here: *no*. "Should I love and pray for the coworker that gets on my nerves, or cuss them out?" No need to seek a word of prophecy for that answer. You have all the answer you need already. Some things are cut and dry and do not need a prophetic word of wisdom to help you figure out what to do.

But at the same time, there are *other* things that you won't find a cut-and-dry answer for in the bible. "Should I major in *finance* or *economics*?" "Should I stay at my current job, or take this new job that has been offered to me?" "Should my spouse and I have one kid or two kids or three kids or no kids?" There are all sorts of decisions that we won't find a chapter or a verse for in the bible. And in those situations, it may be helpful to seek out an utterance—or *message*, of wisdom from someone who follows Jesus. So in some sense, this is a lot of what we talked about two weeks ago in the teaching—the Spirit speaks through our community. But a *word of wisdom* is when God does that in a really specific, pointed, undeniably-from-God kind of way.

So not long after I became a follower of Jesus in college, I felt like the Spirit was prompting me to pursue vocational ministry—to be some sort of leader within the church. So one of the first questions I was asked by other people in ministry was "what type of leader do you feel called to be?" And my answer at the time—I kid you not—was, "pretty much anything except a teaching and preaching pastor." And the reason for that is that I *hated* public speaking. Actually, "hated" is probably too weak of a word for it. It was more like public speaking made me want to crawl into a hole and die multiple times.

But I still remember—to this day—telling that to one of the leaders of the church I was a part of, and his response to me was: "Kent, I know you don't feel ready or equipped to be a teaching pastor, but I believe that that is in your future, that the Spirit wants to empower and equip you to do exactly that. And it will take time, but I can see, in my mind's eye, you standing up in another city where you've started a church, and the people there are benefitting from you teaching the bible. And I think you should pursue that, because I think God wants to form you and shape you into that." And I'll be honest—my immediate response was, "uhh...will you check with God again on that? Because I don't see it happening." But here I am, years later, doing exactly what he said I would be doing. And I'll be honest, without the Spirit of God speaking all that into existence through that person, I in all likelihood would not be doing that today. So I believe that person in that moment had a gift of *wisdom*, and spoke it prophetically, on God's behalf, to me. And I think the Spirit desires to do that for others, through many of us here in the room. Does that make sense? That's a message or utterance of wisdom. Next up...

Utterance of Knowledge

An utterance of *knowledge* is when the Spirit causes us to *know* something about someone else that we wouldn't otherwise *know*. So we see this in Jesus' life in John 4, when he's talking to a woman at the well. He correctly discerns that she has been married and divorced five times, and that she is currently living with a man who isn't her husband. She doesn't *tell* him any of that, and he doesn't find it out from anybody else—he just knows it. And her response to him once she realizes he knows this is, appropriately, “sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.”² Because that's **what the prophetic *is*—it's the ability to speak about things that we wouldn't know unless the Spirit had revealed them to us.**³

So on this one, at a really basic level, we'll have people come up to us fairly often after the teaching at a Gathering and say “that sermon today was for me.” They'll use words like “it just felt like you were reading my mail” or “it just felt like you were inside my brain when you said that.” And an awful lot of the time, we don't know that person. Or even if we do know them, we certainly couldn't have had any idea about the specific things happening in their life that made what we said in the sermon relevant to them in such a pointed way. So in that situation, we didn't know their story, but the Spirit has enabled us, somehow, to speak incisively and directly and specifically into their lives from the Scriptures. That's *one* way this happens.

But it's not just limited to me or to a teaching from stage—not at all. So I'll give you a recent example of when I was on the *receiving* end of *this* gift. So there was a night a few months back when I was trying to get to the bottom of a conflict that had happened within our church family. Something had gone down, and there was a night that I was just trying to get to the bottom of it to help resolve it.

And in doing all that, I was just super overwhelmed and burdened by it all. And something you guys should know about me is that when there's conflict or disunity in our church family, I very much internalize it. Like, generally in life, I sleep really *soundly*, but when there's unresolved conflict in our church family, I absolutely cannot sleep at all. And beyond that, I am periodically very overwhelmed by the fact that as our church grows, I cannot keep tabs on every single conflict in our church. I cannot control what

² This story is found in John 4:1-30.

³ As Marcus mentioned a few weeks ago in his teaching, it's easy for us to read stories like that and think, “well of course Jesus knew that about her—because he was God.” But the more likely answer from the bible's perspective is that he knew it because the Spirit *revealed* it to him, for it to be spoken *prophetically* to her.

every person in our church does or doesn't do. And sometimes, in my love for control, I'm very tempted to despair over that reality.

Now, so the reason I tell you those two things about me is because in the middle of this particular situation—this conflict I was trying to resolve—I called a guy in my LifeGroup who was involved with the situation to help get to the bottom of everything. And early on in the conversation, here's what he said to me: **“Kent, I want you to know that regardless of what is happening in this situation, you don't need to lose a single hour of sleep tonight, and you don't need to despair over the fact that you can't control what everyone in our church does or doesn't do. You are handling this situation the best you can, and you should sleep soundly tonight because of that.”** Now, I had never told him either of those two things about me. He did not know that those were the two *precise*, almost down-to-the-very-word things I was battling internally in that moment. Now, you're welcome to believe that's just some sort of crazy coincidence. But *I* choose to believe the Spirit of God brought those two things to his mind, for me, to encourage me in that moment in precisely the way I needed it. That's a picture of what a word—or “utterance”—of knowledge is. And third, let's take a look at...

Distinguishing Between Spirits

Lastly, Paul mentions this ability through the Spirit to “distinguish between spirits.” Now, as weird as that language may sound to you and me, I actually find this one to be incredibly helpful. **According to the bible, there are actually not just one, but many spirits at work in the world.** I'll come across people often who say “I'm spiritual, but not religious.” Have you heard people say that? Yeah, it always makes me want to ask, “okay, what spirits are you into? Because there are *plenty* of them. And I don't want to alarm you, but some of them can get a little bit dicey.” There could be a variety of influences behind the various things people do and say on a regular basis. So it follows that there are going to be times when we as followers of Jesus are going to need *help* discerning whether something done or said, or something influencing *us* is from the *Holy Spirit*—from God—or whether it is *another* spirit at work. Another spirit that has something *other* than our best interests in mind.

Now, this becomes *especially* helpful when it comes to what we're discussing today: people speaking “on behalf of” God. So there are all sorts of people out there who will say “God told me to say something.” And *some* of those people really *are* inspired by the *Holy Spirit* to say that. And, at the same time, there are *other* people who will say “God

told me to tell you to give me money so I could buy a multi-million dollar private jet.”⁴ And those people are likely *not* being led by the Holy Spirit to say that. **So there are some people who claim to be led by the Spirit of God who actually are, and others who simply claim to be, and are actually being influenced by something else entirely.**

And if that’s true, we need people with the ability to “distinguish between spirits.” To discern whether a person speaking is speaking by the Spirit of God, or by another spirit. So on some level, Paul knows that this whole speaking-on-behalf-of-God thing *can* get goofy, so he builds into this whole framework the gift, through the Spirit, to discern whether what you’re seeing and hearing is legitimate or not.

And truthfully, we’re *all* called to do that to a certain degree, whether we have this particular gifting or not. Today, **when someone claims to speak to us “on behalf of God,” we are never told to just accept it at face value. We’re always encouraged to consider what is said in light of the Scriptures and what we already know to be true about God.** I think 1 Thessalonians 5 sums this up really well. Take a look on the screen:

*Do not **despise prophecies**, but **test everything**; **hold fast** what is good.*

So Paul actually nuances it out really well. He says on the one hand, don’t *despise* prophecies. Meaning, when someone says “God told me to say this,” don’t just immediately roll your eyes and write them off. But at the *same time*, don’t hear someone say “God told me...” and go “welp, they *said* this is from God so it must *actually be* from God—who am I to question it?” No, instead, keep an open mind, *and test* everything—and what is consistent with God’s character and the Scriptures, “hold fast” to it. Whatever is *not* consistent with God’s character and the Scriptures, let it fall by the wayside.

So we *all* need to learn the ability to do this to *some* degree, but Paul says that the Spirit will sometimes supernaturally enable *certain* people to do it. So people who are gifted in this way generally have a very high level of discernment, they’re usually really familiar and dialed into the truth of the Scriptures, and to the character and attributes of God. And into all that, God gifts them with the ability to distinguish between spirits. Make sense?

⁴ This, unfortunately, is all too real. One example can be found here: <https://youtu.be/GsQo2TrvYcA>

Okay, so that's a brief flyover of all the *prophetic* gifts from 1 Corinthians 12. So with that said, the question most of us are probably asking at this point (other than "what did I get myself into by coming to this church today?") is *okay, what are my next steps? Assuming that I believe in this stuff, that I believe that it happens and that it's legitimate, how do I know if the Holy Spirit has gifted me or wants to gift me in one of these ways?* Great question. I think there are a few practical ways to find out the answer to that. First:

Ask your community.

The first (and I would argue most straightforward) way to discover if the Spirit is using or has used you in these ways is to simply ask the people you are in relationship with, "has God ever used me to speak prophetically into your life?" (Might need to explain what that question means exactly if they're not here today) You could even get specific if you want: "*how* has God used me to speak prophetically into your life? Was it a word of *wisdom*, or a word of *knowledge*, or to *distinguish between spirits*?" As *easy* as it might be to go and take a spiritual gift inventory online, it might be more *helpful* and more *in line with the Scriptures* to ask this question to the people that are most frequently around you, and see what they say. That's one way.

Try it.

Another way is to simply attempt it and see how/if the Spirit uses it. So next time you are with other followers of Jesus, try praying and asking the Holy Spirit if he would have you speak on his behalf to anyone else there. Ask him if there is a word of wisdom, or a word of knowledge he has for somebody in the group and wants to deliver that to them through you.

Now, pro tip if you're gonna try it: *humility* is key. Don't lead into it with "WELL GOD TOLD ME TO TELL YOU..." That's *way* too strong. Because when you do it *that way*, you're forcing someone to choose between refusing to listen to *God himself*, or listening to him *precisely* the way you unpacked it all. Doing that leaves out any possibility that you may be hearing from God inaccurately, or even *partly* accurately. I would recommend instead saying something like "so I'm not 100% on this, but I feel like the Spirit may be telling me to say *this* to you. Does any of that resonate with you?" That way there's room for *dialogue*. There's room for conversation. There's room for the Spirit to clarify and confirm what he wants to say in the context of community. Make sense?

And the reason I feel comfortable saying something as brazen as “just try it,” is because whether we are gifted prophetically or not, **we are all called to speak into each other’s lives**. So wouldn’t it make sense for *all of us*—regardless of our perceived *giftedness*—show up to LifeGroup, to show up to the Gathering each week asking the question, “*Holy Spirit, what would you have me say, offer, or help other people with today?* Help me speak on your behalf. Help me to show up, not just asking the question ‘what’s in it for *me?*’ or ‘how can these people be helpful to *me?*’, but rather ‘how can I speak the hope, life, and truth of Jesus into their lives today?’ Can you *imagine* what the Spirit might do in our midst if we all spent even *five minutes* praying through that question before we showed up to LifeGroup each week? I think it would transform the very face of our community. So you may want to just try it. Because worst-case scenario—even if we all fail miserably at the prophetic gifts—we’ve all started thinking more regularly about how to speak into each others’ lives. If that’s the worst thing that could happen, we’re in good shape, right? Okay, third...

Ask the Spirit to gift you in one of these ways.

Finally, very practically speaking, maybe you try both of those things and you still don’t feel like you’re getting anywhere with it all. If that’s the case, it might be good to *ask* the Holy Spirit to speak through you in one of these ways. Now, one way to do that would be to just pick one that you think is *cool*. “God, I think it’d be really cool to distinguish between spirits. So will you give me that ability?” That’s one way to approach it. But I would argue that’s not the *best* way to approach it.

Going back to the beginning of our passage once again, the gifts are given to us for what reason? “For the...*common good*.” So if you’re going to ask the Holy Spirit to empower you in one of these ways, here’s how I would approach it. I would start by asking, “what are the *needs* of the people around me currently?” And then asking, “in light of those *needs*, would you empower me with the gift or gifts that would help *meet* those needs?”

So maybe for you, the people you spend the most time with are super young, super new to the whole adulting thing, and you have just noticed that those people are in dire need of *wisdom*. They need people in their lives to speak prophetically, with specific, biblical, helpful wisdom, so that they will make wiser day-to-day decisions in their life. Maybe that’s a consistent *need* in the community around you. Well then for you, it might be worth asking if the Holy Spirit would equip you—or *gift* you—with a word of *wisdom* for those people.

Or, maybe for you, you have noticed that a lot of people around you are wrestling with *doubt* right now—they're just not sure if God hears them or if God loves them or if God even exists in the first place. Maybe *that's* the need. If so, maybe *you* should pray that the Holy Spirit would gift you with a word of *knowledge* for them. That he would give you the prophetic ability to speak specific, detailed, encouraging and strengthening words into their *exact* situation. That he would give you the ability to say “hey, God hears you wrestling with *this*, he wants you to know that he loves you in these specific ways, and he wants you to know that he is real, and here's why.” Maybe it's a word of *knowledge* that would be helpful to those around you.

Or, maybe right now there are people in your life who are overwhelmed by all these different forces pulling them in all these different directions, and it's hard for them to hear clearly from God about what they should or shouldn't do. Maybe in that case, you'd want to pray for the Spirit to gift you with the ability to distinguish between Spirits, so you can help them discern which of those forces are from God and which aren't.

Do you see how this works? It might be worth asking “what are the needs around me?” And then in light of that, “God would you equip me and gift me to help meet those needs in this way?” That's a radically different way of thinking about the gifts than simply, “which one do I have or which one do I want?”, isn't it? It's a different way of thinking about it altogether—to think about them as ways to *love* and *serve* the people around us.

And truth be told, it's actually the way *we were intended* to think about the gifts. There's a reason that in 1 Corinthians 13, the very next chapter—right in the middle of talking about all the technical aspects of the spiritual gifts—Paul does a whole chapter on what *love* is and isn't. I feel like a lot of people think 1 Corinthians 13 is in the bible so that we all have a passage to read at weddings. It actually isn't about romantic love—it's about how we use our *gifts*. It's there as a reminder that **the entire point of spiritual gifts is to give us practical, effective, powerful ways to love one another.**

You see **the reason Paul writes any of this stuff about the gifts in 1 Corinthians in the first place is because the church at Corinth had *lost the plot line* when it came to the gifts.** They had begun to operate, essentially, as if the point of the gifts was themselves. So Paul calls a timeout and says to them, essentially, “guys—you know the purpose of the gifts is to love and serve one another, right?” The point of the gifts is to build up others, not simply to build up yourself.” He draws a line in the sand and says “I

don't care what gifts you have—if you're not using them to love other people, they're useless."⁵

And the way he does that is that he launches into this beautiful, provocative chapter 13 about what *love* is, and what love *does*. He says that love is patient, and love is kind. That it doesn't boast, it's not proud or arrogant. It doesn't insist on its own way. // And if you know the bible well at all, as you read this passage, you start to realize that Paul isn't just pulling this description of love out of thin air—he's modeling it after the life of *Jesus*. *Jesus* was patient, *Jesus* was kind. *Jesus* wasn't arrogant, but rather humble. He wasn't self-seeking but rather took on the very posture of a servant to everyone around him, always looking to love and serve.

As you read this description of what love is and what love should look like, I think Paul wants you to see *Jesus* in your mind's eye. He wants to call our attention to the only human being who ever perfectly embodied *love* for others. And ultimately, he wants us to remember that *Jesus*' love actually stopped at nothing. *Jesus* said it himself: "I came, not to be served, but to serve, and *give my life* as a ransom for many." *Jesus* giving up his life on the cross was the apex of his demonstration of love for humanity.

And one thing he was doing through that event—through the cross—is that he was forming for himself a community of people who embody that very same posture. Who, in every arena of their life—including how they express the gifts—are guided by this depiction of what love is: that it is radically and comprehensively for the good of others. For the good of those around us. That's who we are. And that's what *Jesus* has made possible for us.

So with that posture intact, I'd love if we could explore this week in our LifeGroups this week what needs are present in the people around us and how God might want to empower us through the Spirit to meet those needs. So we'll have some discussion questions in our LifeGroups over the next few weeks to help with all that.

But that being the case, I'd love to ask for the Spirit's help in all that. Let's pray.

⁵ See 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 specifically.