

Gifts from the Spirit (Pt. 2)

Good morning everyone, it's great to be up here hanging out with you again. If I haven't had the chance to meet you yet, my name is Eric and I am a pastor in training here at City Church. I'm a big fan of this series we're going through about the Holy Spirit because I feel like it is a topic that sometimes doesn't get nearly enough attention and is something so integral to the lives of followers of Jesus so I'm loving this. Growing up, I feel like the Holy Spirit was a topic of regular teaching and discussion because, for those of you who don't know, I grew up in the small country of Nepal which is a place of hyper-spirituality. And like Kent talked about last week, discerning between spirits is something the Holy Spirit helps with and was a consistent discussion we had in our house growing up. Also, along the lines of spiritual gifts and the fruit of the spirit, my mom always had a little saying that made sure I could never forget them. Now I'm not super sure how closely related this is to our topic today, but I couldn't let the opportunity to talk about this on stage with my mom out here pass.

When I was growing up, any time I or my brother or sister would be in a bad mood or be upset about something or were complaining about something, my mom would cut us off and say, "I need you to stop, go out of the room, and come back in with one of the fruits of the spirit on your face. I don't care which one, just pick one." So I'd say I'm at least pretty familiar with the topic. Anyways, let's jump into it.

So like I said, we are currently in a series on the Holy Spirit, and we're in the middle of three weeks in a row where we're talking about the gifts from the Spirit, what a lot of people call spiritual gifts. So last week, Kent broke down what we call gifts from the Spirit into 3 main categories: prophetic gifts, practical gifts, and miraculous gifts. He went into detail about the prophetic gifts last week, and he'll be going over miraculous gifts next week, and I will be unpacking the practical gifts this week. I appreciate him setting it up the way he did because my sermon is bookended by his 2 that are much more challenging to communicate well so I feel pretty good about things.

Today, we're going to press pause on the gifts listed out in 1 Corinthians 12, and jump over to the book of Romans. So let's read Romans 12, starting in v. 3:

[3] For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. [4] For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, [5]

so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Now, I want to take a step back for just a second and explain that a little. These first few verses in the passage don't explicitly talk about the practical gifts we're discussing today, but are still completely relevant and necessary to talk about. Some of what Kent mentioned last week that is massively important is these gifts are all given to us for the purpose of loving and serving others. If you're not careful, thinking about spiritual gifts as an *individual* idea trains you to put the emphasis on your own gifting and your own personality, when the focus of the gifts in the Bible is about *how those gifts help and serve and build up those around you*. Does that make sense? Let's keep reading in verse 6:

*[6] Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if **prophecy**, in proportion to our faith; [7] if **service**, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his **teaching**; [8] the one who **exhorts**, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in **generosity**; the one who **leads**, with zeal; the one who does acts of **mercy**, with cheerfulness.*

You'll notice right off the bat as we read that these gifts are a bit more "practical," if you want to use that term. And by that, I don't mean that these gifts *aren't* supernatural or that God doesn't use them in supernatural ways—I just mean from our perspective, they're a little easier for us to get on board with because they're very practical, seemingly normal giftings. So today, we won't have to do quite as much addressing of our pushbacks and skepticism as we had to last week, but I still think there's some unlearning and relearning that needs to be done.

So I want us to get to unpacking each of these gifts in detail, but before we do, I feel like there is one big overarching idea to keep in mind as we move forward:

**A spiritual gift is an unusual effectiveness
in a responsibility given to all followers of Jesus.¹**

Here's what I mean by that: in saying that some believers are given the gift of *generosity*, Paul is not intending to communicate that they are the *only ones* called to be *generous*.

¹ This is taken almost directly from a section in J.D. Greear's fantastic book on the Holy Spirit, titled *Jesus, Continued...*

None of us get to go “welp, I don’t have the spiritual gift of generosity, so I’m gonna keep all my money for myself!” That’s not what it means. He’s not intending to say that because *some* believers are given the gift of service, everybody *e/else* is off the hook as far as serving other people goes. Nope again. **Every single item in this list is something *all followers of Jesus* are called to do.** We are all called to serve others. We are all called to teach other people about Jesus and from the Scriptures. We are all called to exhort, or encourage each other. And the list goes on. These are *responsibilities* given to every single one of us.

But at the same time, there is probably one thing or even several things that each of us are *unusually effective* in. And a lot of time, that points to the Spirit having gifted us specifically in one of these areas. So let’s talk a little bit about what that might look like for each item on the list, and then we’ll talk at the end about how to discern if *you* might be gifted in one of these ways. First, Paul mentions *prophecy*. But simply because we covered that last week, we’re gonna pick it up on the next one: *servicing*.

Serving

Paul mentions *servicing*. Some people are unusually gifted in the ability to serve.

I’ve been extremely fortunate in my life to have encountered quite a few people whom the Holy Spirit has worked through tangibly in the way of serving. One couple that worked closely with my parents when we were overseas comes to mind. Like I said earlier, I grew up in Nepal. To make a long story short, we had a tradition growing up where if it was your birthday, you got to pick whatever activity you wanted to do together, and the family would do it together. It was my mom’s birthday and she was torn between a family bike ride, and a family board game. She picked the bike ride. So here we were, 5 white people riding bikes through a village in Nepal, and my mom gets hit by a motorcycle, which is an entirely ordinary sentence. But it ended up badly cutting and injuring her foot. Should’ve gone with board games. So it’d been a little while after she left the hospital, and due to the lack of cleanliness and general hygiene in the country and hospital, she ended up getting a nasty post-op infection.

We didn’t know the extent of everything at the time, but when we did find out how bad it was, my dad was in India visiting the couple I mentioned, and I tagged along with one of my good friends. So my dad gets a call while we are in India that my mom is being medically evacuated from Nepal to Thailand because they might have to amputate due to the infection. Obviously he needs to go. So now he’s trying to think through the

logistics of how does he get to Thailand to be with her and what does he do with 2 middle school boys who just happened to be tagging along on this trip. Immediately, the couple we were with said they were already in the process of buying themselves flights to Nepal so my dad could leave and my friend and I could have someone to take us back home, and they had cancelled any plans for the next week so they could stay with me while my parents figured things out in Thailand. It was the only logical option in their minds because one of their main focuses in life was sacrificially serving others. And every interaction I had with them was like that. I never once heard either one of them say they wanted something or others to do things for them. It was always “what can I do to help” in every situation. Also, for the record they ended up not having to amputate, she’s still got two feet.

So I think we can all agree this in an unusual effectiveness and willingness to serve, right? I mean, hopefully all of us are loving people and looking for opportunities to serve people regularly in our lives, but I don’t know that many of us are in the process of buying plane tickets to Nepal and taking a week off work to serve someone without being asked. That is a **gift** of serving.

Teaching

Others are unusually gifted in the ability to teach. In other words, while any follower of Jesus might be able to teach us things from the Scriptures that are helpful, some people have the ability to teach in a way that is uncommonly helpful. In a way that when you hear them explain something from the Scriptures, it opens your eyes to something you’ve never understood before. Or, it helps you see things in a new light where something that has always been confusing for you just “clicks” all of a sudden.

If you’ve done much digging into different Bible resources or studies, you might have run across some stuff from a woman named Jen Wilkin. Jen is one of those people that is unusually gifted in teaching. A lot of Christian women gravitate towards her resources, but not just women—some of her studies have been incredibly helpful for me as well as many other people here because she has this uncanny ability to communicate truth from scripture and connect things in a way that very few people naturally would. She is able to unpack ideas and help people apply them in incredibly helpful ways. If you’re interested in some helpful studies, definitely look into some of her resources.

A little closer to home though, I really feel like my wife Sara is gifted in this area. I’m always amazed by the way she connects and unpacks scripture to apply directly to real

world situations I or people in our LifeGroup are dealing with. She has the uncanny ability to use the stories in the Bible and insert what's happening in day to day life to show how truth from scripture applies directly and tangibly to what people are experiencing or questioning. She does it so naturally in ways that I never would have thought to do and it's amazing to see the Holy Spirit work through her in interpreting scripture.

I think it's pretty obvious that a lot of people who are unusually gifted in teaching tend to teach in front of hundreds or thousands of people; they're up on stage, they're in settings tailor made for them to teach and people to listen. That being said, some of the most gifted people in teaching never set foot on a stage. They are just quietly and faithfully discipling person after person, teaching them about the scriptures. So it could be that you are gifted in teaching even if you are not in a prominent teaching role.

Exhortation & Encouragement

Next, Paul uses the word *exhortation*. That's probably not a word most of us use in our everyday life. In the bible, this carries the connotation of speaking to someone for their strengthening or encouragement. So obviously, this one is going to have some overlap with some of the *prophetic* gifts we discussed last week. Paul says in 1 Corinthians that when we prophesy, that means we're speaking to others for their strengthening, encouragement, and comfort.² So the prophetic giftings and this one obviously share some common characteristics.

But what we're talking about here is an uncommon ability to speak strength and encouragement and comfort into someone else (or into a group of people). So if you've ever found yourself in a place where you just felt super discouraged and beat up, and had another follower of Jesus come along and have a conversation with you where they built you up in a really specific, empowering and strengthening type of way, chances are you've encountered someone gifted with the gift of exhortation and encouragement.

So Jeff, one of our pastors, told me a story from his life that really exemplifies this. Jeff comes from a long line of men who have been verbally and physically abusive to women. His grandmother divorced his grandfather because of years of abuse. His mom had to have metal pins put in her spine from the physical abuse she sustained over the years of her marriage. When he was growing up, he said waking up in the middle of the

² 1 Corinthians 14:3

night to men in his family fighting with a physically threatening the women in their lives was a normal thing.

So during his sophomore year in college he told me he remembered leaving class one afternoon, and the weight of all the generational sin just felt crushing. He said he called guardian Anita, just weeping because of the depth of despair. He felt like it was impossible to escape the shadow cast by these men. Then she said something to him that he will never forget. She said, "Jeff, you are different from you grandfather, your dad, and your brother. You are different not because you are better than them, or because you somehow can control yourself better. You are different because Jesus has rescued you from your sin, and his Spirit is now in you. That is not something minor or some small change, it's completely transformative and alters the entire trajectory of your life. His Spirit is alive in you and working, and that's hope you can hold onto, a hope that's outside of yourself."

Now, at this point in Jeff's life, he had a cognitive knowledge of that truth. But in his moment of despair and feeling the weight of multiple levels of devastating generational sin, Anita was able to communicate the truth to Jeff in a way that explicitly fought against the weight he was feeling and saturated him with the encouraging truth. In that moment, it was evidenced that Anita had an ***unusual effectiveness*** in offering exhortation and encouragement.

Generosity

Like we've said several times already, it is pretty clear in scripture that *all* followers of Jesus are called to participate in *all* of these areas, and I think one area a lot of tend to gloss over this idea is when it comes to generosity. Knowing that believers are equipped through the Spirit with these gifts, it can be easy to sometimes think "not my gift, not my problem," but that's not what we're called to.

When I think specifically about the gift of generosity, there's one person that really stands out in my mind. I knew this guy back in Columbia who was a mentor to a lot of people and an all around fantastic person. He had what I would call one of the most tangible and obvious connections with the Holy Spirit. He fully embraced the gift of generosity and it was incredible. I could stand up here for hours and tell you stories about his Spirit-driven generosity, but for the sake of time, I'll just give a couple. There was a period for me in college when I would financially describe myself as...how do they say it...extremely broke. There was one month in particular I was trying to figure out what I

was going to do when the first of the month rolled around and I wasn't going to be able to pay rent. It just so happened I was on a weekend trip with a few guys and he happened to be there. Now, I had not told him anything at all about my financial situation or given any indication about what was going on. On the last day of the trip, he pulled me aside and handed me an envelope and he said, "I feel like I'm supposed to give this to you" and said nothing else about it. When I got back to the hotel, I opened it and it was cash that exactly covered the rest of my bills that month.

And the longer time went on, I realized he did this type of things for way more people than just me. We found out this was a regular thing that he did, and it was always so incredibly specific to the need at hand.

One of the coolest things about him was that he never wanted recognition. He wanted to come in, do what he felt the Spirit prompting him to do, and leave. He actually described himself sometimes as a postman and it was his responsibility to deliver whatever it was the Spirit wanted to send. I could literally go on and on with stories about this man, and when I was thinking of examples of the spiritual gift of generosity, he came into my mind as the absolute archetype.

It's easy to see examples of this happening and conclude that the generosity is always financial, and I want to caution against that. For sure, it can be financial a lot of the time, but generosity also shows up in other physical ways. Generosity and sacrifice with your time for others, generosity with your efforts, and other ways. So even if you look at your particular situation and think you don't have the means to financially generous right now, the Spirit could still be pushing you to be sacrificially generous with what you do have.

Leadership

So while we are all called to lead in some way, shape or fashion, there are certain people that are naturally gifted at leadership. When they speak, people tend to listen. When they head in a particular direction, people tend to follow them. A lot of the time these are the people who see a crisis or a need for someone to give direction for a group of people when others don't seem able and they step in. These are often the people who step forward to carry the weight that no one else wants to or is able to carry.

As a lot of people know, our church family went through a pretty dense period of suffering and hurt. In the midst of that, the effects were extremely widespread and felt by almost everyone. Thinking about this gift made me think of one of our pastors, Jeff, who

led people and cared for people and walked alongside people in the midst of all the pain, not because he wasn't hurting, but because people needed him to do it and he was called to it.

Now, this one I think comes with a heightened responsibility to ensure that you're leading people in helpful directions, not in selfish or demeaning ways. If you have the gift of leadership through the Spirit and people see that and follow, it is critical to be relying on the Spirit and his voice through community like we talked about and God's words through the truth of scripture. You should be looking to the perfect example of Jesus who led with humility and love. As someone gifted with leadership from the Spirit, you want to be leading people according to the Spirit.

Mercy

This word "mercy" carries the connotation of the ability and gravitational pull to have compassion and empathy for the down-and-out. These are people that have an unusual giftedness to care for the oppressed, the vulnerable, the hurting, and the downtrodden, the outsider. These are the people you see who tend to be drawn to things like foster care, orphan ministry, caring for refugees and the marginalized, being a social worker. Now, hopefully all followers of Jesus care about these things and help fight back darkness in our world in these areas. I also know there are people who are involved in and drawn to these things who might not have the gift of mercy, but people with the gift of mercy are just more strongly drawn to them.

Now, one more thing on *all* of these before we move on to how to discern your own gifting. One thing I love about these gifts, and *all* giftings in the bible, is that no formal position of leadership is required to express them. So if you have the gift of mercy, you don't have to wait for Kent or Jeff or Marcus to stand up and go "this is so-and-so, and we'd like to formally acknowledge that they have the spiritual gift of mercy, and so they are now officially our mercy ministry coordinator!" If you have the gift of *teaching*, you don't have to wait for Kent or Jeff or Marcus to stand up and go "this is so-and-so, and we'd like to officially declare that they have the gift of teaching, and so you now should feel free to learn from them about the Scriptures!" None of that is required. You can—and even *should*—just feel the freedom to start operating within your gifting.

One thing I love to see happen is little bible studies forming on their own throughout our church. And when those people started those bible studies, none of our pastors went "now hold on a second—we haven't officially verified that you have the gift of teaching.

Maybe you should hold off on starting that bible study until we can verify that.” No—we said “awesome! People who feel gifted and qualified to teach and explain the Scriptures are operating in that gifting.”

Now, as you operate within your gifting, there are going to come times where our pastors notice that and there’s a need within our body and we go, “hey, would you be interested in using that gifting of yours to serve in a formal capacity?” And those opportunities may present themselves. But I want you to see that you don’t need to wait on that to happen to let the Spirit use your gifting to build up the church. Does that make sense?

Discerning Your Gift(s)

Okay, with that being said, some of you may already be gravitating towards one or two of these as something the Spirit has especially gifted you in. Some of you may not be. Either way, that’s fine. What I’d love to do next is give you some guidance along the way. I think there are three really helpful questions we can ask when it comes to these gifts:

What do I have the *ability* to do?

So sometimes, gifts are things that we already have a natural *ability* to do, and then God comes along and breathes on it or simply *uses* it for his purposes. So there are people I know, who, before they were ever followers of Jesus, were just naturally wired as leaders. They just had the instinctive ability to take charge and people naturally followed them. And then, once they became followers of Jesus, they began using that natural wiring more and more for the purposes of the kingdom of God. I’ve seen the same thing with people who have the gift of encouragement: people who, well before they cared anything about Jesus and his kingdom, were naturally encouraging, life-giving people to be around. And then they became followers of Jesus and God began to use that natural wiring for his purposes. So **sometimes, gifts are things that we already have the ability to do, and God simply empowers us further *in that*, and uses it for his purposes.**

So one question worth asking, if you’re trying to identify how the Spirit wants to use you specifically, is *what do I have the ability to do?* Are there any natural skillsets or gift sets I’ve always had, and how might God want to use those in some way?

Now, I will *add* on this: God is not *limited* by your current ability. So I don’t mean to say at all that God can only gift you in ways that you are already talented in. Not at all. In fact,

just last week, Kent mentioned that when God spoke through somebody else to call him to pursue teaching and preaching, he did not feel *at all* like he was gifted in that arena. And yet God still gifted him to do it. So God is not *limited* to what you already have the ability to do, but he does sometimes *use* those things.

What am I *passionate* about?

Another question worth asking is *what am I passionate about?* Often, God will use things that we feel strongly about to equip us and gift us. So maybe for you, you've always been passionate about caring for the hurting, about practically helping the marginalized in your life in our society—as far as you can remember, that's just been an area you feel strongly about. If so, that might be something God wants to gift you and equip you to do. Or, maybe you are especially passionate about people learning how to understand the Scriptures and knowing the things that it teaches. God might want to use that to equip you with the gift of teaching.

With this one, I do think it's important to say that **being *passionate* about something doesn't mean you like doing it 100% of the time.** A person can be *passionate* about social work, and absolutely dread going into work as a social worker a lot of days. A person can be *passionate* about encouraging people and still some days find it very *taxing* to encourage people well. So when I say "what are you passionate about?", I don't necessarily mean what do you *enjoy doing 100% time?* I simply mean, what are the things that you feel led to continue doing, even when it's incredibly difficult, because you believe in it? Do you see the difference there?

What are the subjects that *energize* you, the things that you feel very strongly about? That may be another good identifier of how the Spirit wants to empower you. Lastly...

What have others *affirmed* in me?

Lastly, don't discount things that others have identified in you. Ask, *is there anything that multiple people have said, "you have a knack for this?" Or, when you do this thing, it's incredibly helpful to me and others? Or simply, you're really good at this type of thing?* Often God uses the wisdom and prompting of others to point us towards and draw out a gifting in us.

For example, as part of the pastor-in-training process, they wanted me to get involved in teaching our City Church class. After being a part of it and them hearing me teach, they said they wanted me to start teaching some on Sundays. I never went to them and said,

“hey you should have me teach on Sundays,” but others affirmed it in me and asked me to start doing it in a more formal way.

So don't discount the things that other followers of Jesus identify in you and encourage you in. Maybe you would say, “well I don't feel like other people have affirmed things in me like that.” Then as we mentioned last week, you may want to invite others to do that. So this week, when you're spending time with your LifeGroup, ask one or two or several of them, “is there anything you see the Spirit gifting me and empowering me to do, on a regular basis? What is it?” And they might have an answer or they might not. But even if they don't immediately, you're inviting them to watch for and name those things in the future when they *do* see them.

Lastly, to close things out this morning, I'd love to just bring us around full circle to the first couple verses of our passage. I'd love to read Romans 12:3-5 one more time for us:

*[3] For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you **not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.** [4] For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, [5] so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*

I think one of the greatest misunderstandings we could have about the gifts is that the gifts are something that *we* accomplish. That they're entirely due to our skill set or our spiritual maturity or our awesomeness in some way. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the gifts are just that: they're *gifts*. As in, “things we did nothing to earn or deserve.” The Greek word Paul uses is the word *charismata*—it's the same word translated elsewhere in the bible as “grace.” The gifts are acts of grace from a loving God, towards us. Even if God uses a skill or a wiring that you had well *before* you became a follower of Jesus, who do you think wired you that way?

You and I had nothing to do with earning God's love and affection towards us. That was accomplished *for us, on our behalf*, independently *of us*, by what Jesus did on the cross. We have nothing to do with earning *that*, and we have nothing to do with earning the gifts. They are God's *grace* to us, quite literally. When we see the gifts that way, it creates this mentality Paul is talking about: where no one “thinks more highly of himself than he ought,” but thinks with “sober judgement.”

And it creates an environment where we are just as excited about the Spirit's work in and through others, as we are his work in and through us. Here's what I mean practically: the reality is that you may be *passionate* about something, that you don't have the ability to do. And *that's fine*. Because you know what? I bet someone else in our church family has the *ability* to do it. And God designed it to work in such a way that you might need their ability, and *they* might need *your* passion. You might *have* the ability to do something, but be *doubting* that you do. And God designed it to work in such a way that you need someone else to *affirm* that you *do* have that ability. This is why it matters so much, to repeat something Kent said last week, that we don't view the gifts as a talent I have that deserves to be expressed, but rather a gift of grace from God to build up and serve the "common good" of those around me. The truth is we *need* each other. Or, in Paul's words from v. 5, we are "*members of one another.*" That's how this whole thing was supposed to work. And that requires us all seeing any and all of our gifts as grace from God himself meant to work their way *through* us and *towards* others, for their good.

That's what we're after. Let's pray.