

Essentials - Kirsten Anonby

Gifts - Pt. 1 | 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 | May 16, 2021

INTRODUCTION

How do you feel when you're given a gift?

I'm sure we've all had experiences of gifts gone wrong - clumsily or thoughtlessly chosen or given solely out of obligation. Hopefully, though, we have all had a genuine experience of being blessed by a gift - because the intention behind a gift is to bless a person's life - not because they deserve it, but simply because they are loved.

We are talking today about the gifts that God gives us through His Spirit. God is a gift-giver-- and what He gives us matters much more than the bathrobes or LEGO that we give one another.

Back in 2019 Living Waters raised funds to purchase around 45 water filtration systems for a community in Honduras, and then sent a small team to install them. This changed the lives of the people in that community because it meant that they had easy access to drinking water that was safe and wouldn't cause disease.

The gifts of the Spirit are more like that - gifts that change the way a community lives. Gifts that allow a community to experience the living water of God's Spirit.

We're going to have two weeks where we explore the gifts of the Spirit. Today will be a bit of an introduction and an exploration of the gifts in our faith communities and our lives. Next week Dave will share with us how they transform us, and how that transformation overflows to further the work of God in the world.

What are the Spiritual Gifts?

When we read about the early Christian communities in the book of Acts, we quickly realize that all of the miracles and excitement didn't just happen during the life of Jesus. Very quickly we discover that the Holy Spirit is at work supernaturally in and through the lives of believers. If you haven't read the book of Acts, you should pick it up - it's good reading. You get to hear

about people's bodies being healed - a sermon being preached and 3000 people becoming Christians in one day. You get to read about people having visions, having special discernment, or, maybe most miraculously - you get to read about people selling their possessions and sharing meals daily with glad and sincere hearts.

Clearly what we see is that the Holy Spirit was expressing Himself in and through the lives of believers in tangible ways. We call these the gifts of the Spirit.

The passage that Leigh read for us a few moments ago is part of a letter that Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth. It's a letter where Paul is correcting them about their use of spiritual gifts. To help them, Paul gives them a beautiful picture of both the nature and purpose of the gifts. We're looking at that picture today to clarify what spiritual gifts are all about.

1. The Gifts are an Expression of God's Goodness to Us

The word "gift" in this passage is almost the same as the word "grace." We talked earlier in our Essentials series about grace - about what it means that we are given favour and acceptance by God that we do not deserve. The word in Greek for grace is "charis". The word for "gift" here in 1 Corinthians is "charisma", which simply means "grace made concrete." - tangible-grace no longer as a concept, but as something physically experienced in the real world.

Grace = charis (abstract)

Gift = charisma (concrete)

This word "charisma" is used by Paul in other passages to describe the many tangible ways that God's grace shows up in the lives of His people. Here, however, it is paired with the word spiritual, to describe the particular ways we experience the tangible working of His Spirit.

I find this a helpful starting point because it reminds us that the gifts of the Spirit are an expression of God's good heart towards us - He wants us to experience the tangible goodness of His Kingdom in our lives. And He wants us to experience that through one another.

I have a very strong memory from when I was about 21 of having a person share a word that they felt they had heard from God for me. The word was about how much God loved me. At that point in my life, I had been really trying to believe that God's love was real for me-trying and failing. This word, however, was different. It got past all of my defenses and spoke to the core of who I was. I was on an outreach trip in Europe at the time, and I was overflowing with joy for days. I remember wanting to tell everyone I saw that Jesus loved them. God's

goodness had been made tangible & concrete for me through someone else using their spiritual gift. It was powerful, and it changed me.

When we talk about the gifts of the Spirit we have to begin with this starting point. Jesus wants to pour out blessing on His people and on the world. He wants to do this through us - through spiritual gifts.

2. The Gifts of the Spirit are Diverse, but United

Earlier in our Essentials series you might remember Luke sharing about God's people being the Body of Christ. He talked about how it's meant to be a place where there is both difference and oneness. Just like the human body there are many different parts, but all of those parts work together and make up one body, or community. The same themes are present here - primarily because our text today is a part of the same chapter.

If we look at verses 4-6 we discover that Paul is building a similar picture of difference and unity.

- ⁴ There are different kinds of spiritual gifts,
but the same Spirit is the source of them all.
- ⁵ There are different kinds of service,
but we serve the same Lord.
- ⁶ God works in different ways,
but it is the same God who does the work in all of us.

Paul repeats almost the same thing 3 different times. I love this because through that repetition he names all of the members of the Trinity - Spirit, Lord (Jesus), and God (Father). His purpose in that is to help us to see that we as God's people are meant to reflect the nature of God - who is 3 different persons, but who is also One. Just like God is 3 but also one, we as His people are diverse but One in Christ.

United

Paul clarifies in these verses a few different ways the gifts of the Spirit are the same:

Vs. 4 - Even though the spiritual gifts might be different from one another - the source of them all is the same Spirit - (and let's remember once again, as Dave made so clear a few weeks ago - that this is, indeed, the Spirit of Jesus). The source of all the gifts is the same.

Vs. 5 tells us that even though the spiritual gifts and the way we serve might be different – all of these gifts are in service TO Jesus. And this is so important. The gifts of the Spirit are serving the purposes of Jesus in the world. All of the parts of the Body of Christ are meant to obey the head – who is Jesus, We all serve the same Lord.

Vs. 6 And Even though God may work in our lives in different ways, it's God who is doing all of that work.

So gifts of the Spirit are united because they come from the same Spirit, they serve and glorify the same Lord, and they are the work of the same good Father.

I take great comfort in this. It reminds me of my smallness: that God has plans that my spiritual gift is only a part of. It reminds me that we fulfill God's purposes in the world not alone, but through our life together. And it reminds me that the gifts of the Spirit are never about self – they are always about glorifying and serving Jesus. We are His servants – His hands and feet.

And yet, we are still given the incredible honour of being those hands and feet. And the Lord gifts us to do that in many different ways.

Diverse

When we look at verses 8-10 we discover a list of spiritual gifts. This isn't meant to be a comprehensive list, but it's simply Paul's way of emphasizing that the Spirit gifts His people in many different ways – all of which are important in the life of a community.

Paul gives another list in chapter 12 of Romans includes different gifts. That list, like this one, is demonstrating the breadth of how the Spirit works.

But a glance through verses 8-10 gives us a sense for the many gifts that the Spirit gives:

- The ability to give wise advice (which in other translations is called a message of wisdom given through the Spirit).
- There's also a gift of special knowledge through the Spirit
- There's the gift of faith, a faith well beyond what we would have on our own.
- And closely related to that are the gifts of physical healing, and being given the power to perform miracles.
- There's the gift of prophecy, which is less about speaking about what is going to happen in the future, and more about simply hearing from God and speaking out what God wants to say to our community.

- And Paul ends the list with the gift of being able to speak in unknown languages (or tongues), and the gift of being able to interpret what is being said when someone speaks in tongues.

Paul ends with tongues and interpretation because these two gifts were the most highly prized by the Corinthians. His point, however, is that these gifts, as beautiful as they are, are only two of the many ways that the Spirit gifts His people.

As we look at these gifts it's easy to see why they are a tangible expression of God's goodness and grace to a community.

- I think one of our deepest longings as believers is to hear from Jesus. Notice how many of these gifts are about God communicating with His people: words of knowledge and wisdom, prophecy. And tongues fits here too, because once it is interpreted, a tongue functions as prophecy for the community.
- And notice how many of these gifts are about Jesus making things right, just as we long for Him to do - healings, miracles, and faith. We're living in this murky place where some of the goodness of the Kingdom happens in the here and now, and some of it is not yet - not until Jesus comes back. But when we read this list we do realize that Jesus meant for some of the kingdom to be experienced now, and we are meant to be a part of it. That is good news.
- I am reminded as I look at these gifts and think of the many different ways I have seen the Holy Spirit gift believers - of just how vital they are to our life as Christians. We need to hear from Jesus, we need to experience His goodness, and we need His empowering to live our lives for Him, both in our individual lives and our life together as a community.

3. The Gifts of the Spirit are Given to Each of us so we can Help Each Other

This is really the main thing that Paul is trying to correct in the Corinthian Christians. Some of the people in this community were getting too excited about what their spiritual gifts said about their own personal spirituality. The gifts of the Spirit, especially certain gifts - were a mark that they, as Christians, had really arrived - that they were better than others.

This deeply grieved Paul, and it's why he spends the whole next chapter describing what love really is in 1 Corinthians 13. He begins that chapter by explaining that without love, the gifts of the Spirit are completely worthless. Paul wants them to realize that the way to be spiritual is

not to revel in the greatness of their gifts, but to delight in the gifts of others, and to use their spiritual gifts in loving service.

But He still wants them to eagerly seek the gifts of the Spirit, because he knows how powerful and vital they are when used rightly. They are powerful – and when we allow them to be expressed through our lives, you could say that you yourself become a gift to the Body of Christ. And that is the way Jesus meant for it to be.

The beautiful thing, though, is that while we become a blessing to others, we ourselves are blessed. That's always how it works with Jesus. This is what I think are the great blessings for us when we operate in the gifts of the Spirit:

1. Operating in the gifts of the Spirit is kind of like having a front-row seat to seeing Jesus at work in the lives of people. It's one thing to rejoice at a healing that's happened in someone's life. It's another thing entirely to rejoice when you've been using a spiritual gift of prayer for months to life up that person's need for healing. It was an amazing experience for me when that woman, years ago, shared that word about how much God loved me. But it was also amazing for her – to see me change. Seeing Jesus work brings us tremendous joy. Once you've gotten a taste of it, you'll want more.
2. Operating in the gifts of the Spirit gives us a profound sense of purpose. All of us want to matter, and the good news is that we do. Jesus wants to gift each of us and give us a role among His people. And the good news is that these aren't talents or skills – they're gifts. All we need is an open heart, waiting and willing to receive.
3. Third, operating in the gifts of the Spirit is intimate – with Jesus. Most of us have had the experience of growing close to a person through sharing a common work. As we receive the gifts of the Spirit we are drawing closer to the Spirit—to Jesus, and that's an intimate thing. As we co-labour with the Spirit we learn more of Him, of his heart and His nature. Because Jesus' intention is never just to use us – it's to know us.

Final Thoughts:

This past month I got to listen in on some coaching sessions with the women who are graduating from our Zoe Leadership Course. Fiona Keen, who leads the course, was helping each woman synthesize what they had learned about their strengths, spiritual gifts, and role in

God's work. I had such a delight in who each of these women were, in the diversity of their gifts and passions. Each of these women is a unique and important gift to our community that we need.

And I know that's true of everyone in our community. When I think about what it really could look like to be a community where each person is operating in the gifts of the Spirit, I catch my breath a little. I want to live in that kind of community. I need to live in that kind of community.

My hope is that Jesus has stirred some longing in you for the gifts of the Spirit today. Because they are gifts, and they are vital to our life as believers.

If you find yourself longing to experience these gifts more fully in your life, feel free to reach out to talk to someone on our pastoral team, and we'd love to talk and pray with you.

I will say though, that in some ways receiving the gifts of the Spirit is quite simple. In essence Jesus simply wants our hands to be empty, and to be open:

- Empty of our self-sufficiency and self-reliance
- And open to receive something new from Him—open to discover something new about what He made us to do and be.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Does anyone have any stories to share about how their life was blessed by the gifts of the Spirit?
- What is your faith background, and how did you see the gifts of the Spirit expressed in earlier communities you've been a part of?
- How does it shape our use of the gifts when we remember that all of those gifts serve the same Lord (Jesus)?
- Look at the lists of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 and in Romans 12:6-8. Which of these gifts have you seen at work? Which are you longing to see more of? Are there any you have questions about?
- How do we become a gift to our community when we operate in the gifts of the Spirit?

- Why do we need to empty our hands of self-sufficiency and self-reliance to receive the gifts of the Spirit?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (if applicable)