

WHY THE HOLY SPIRIT'S GIFTS MATTER. (Part 1)**1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-11**

Sometimes you just know something's wrong, but you're not sure what or why. It's like the man who went to see his doctor about his constant headaches. The doctor asked him if he smoked. The man said yes. "Well, stop smoking," suggested the doctor. So the man stopped smoking, but his headaches persisted. When he went back to the doctor, he was asked if he drank alcohol. "Yes, I drink quite a bit," the man admitted. "Stop it," said his doctor. So he stopped drinking. The headaches still wouldn't go away. At his next visit, the doctor asked him, "At your job do you do anything that puts pressure on your back?" The man said, yes, that was true of his work. "Well, quit your job," the doctor advised. So the man quit his job and found another one. But he still got headaches. Every day the pain pulsed through his head. Finally, the cause was discovered. He was wearing shirts with a size 15 collar, but he had a size 16 neck. No wonder he was having headaches!

There are times when, as followers of Jesus, we know something is wrong about our relationship with Jesus, but we're not sure what or why. I'm convinced one reason some Christians feel dissatisfied, discontent, or disappointed in their attempts to follow Jesus is the simple fact they're ignorant of their spiritual gifts or they're refusing to use those gifts for God's glory. "Invasion From Above: Why The Holy Spirit Matters" is the name of our current message series about the Holy Spirit. Today I want us to think together about something the Bible calls the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The fact is God has a job for each of us to do in life. Discovering His assignments for us and doing them – living them out – are some of the greatest joys any follower of Jesus experiences in this life. When you discover your gifts and put them to use, your life gains a sense of purpose and you know you're making some kind of good and eternal impact. Your spiritual gifts are your spiritual job description. You just can't afford to be ignorant of them or refuse to use them for God's glory. They matter that much!

Now, today, I'm not going to deal with the specific gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned in the Bible. We'll do that in two weeks. Instead, I want to share with you six important truths about spiritual gifts as a whole. Here's important information about the spiritual job description the Holy Spirit has for your life. Let's read our Scripture passage first. So, off we go. First, spiritual gifts are given...

#1: BY THE HOLY SPIRIT.

The repeated references to the Holy Spirit in the passage we just read makes that abundantly clear. When does He give these gifts out to you and me? Apparently, right at conversion – the moment you put your trust in Jesus – even though you were likely oblivious to it. Most followers of Jesus don't discover how the Holy Spirit has gifted them until a bit later in their spiritual journey, but those gifts are there waiting to be developed from day one of your relationship with Jesus.

Don't confuse the fruit of the Holy Spirit with the gifts of the Spirit. They're related, yes, but different. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,

faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Here's some important differences. First, nobody receives the fruit of the Spirit automatically. They're about your inner character and they appear and develop in your life over time and as you allow the Holy Spirit to influence your life. By way of contrast, you were gifted by the Holy Spirit with certain spiritual abilities at conversion. Yes, you need to use and develop what the Spirit gave you, too, but you didn't put those gifts there. The Holy Spirit just gave them to you.

Second, the fruit of the Spirit has to do with your inner character – who you are as a follower of Jesus. The gifts of the Spirit have to do with how you serve the Lord – what you do as a follower of Jesus. Third, every follower of Jesus ought to possess all the fruit of the Spirit in his or her life. We can't say, "Well, I can be loving and gentle, but I just don't have the gift of patience or self-control." Patience and self-control aren't gifts; they're fruit. As a child of God, you're supposed to bear all the fruit of the Spirit. But, no Christian has all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Instead, God provides a wonderful, diverse variety of abilities that show up differently in the lives of His children.

Now, because the Holy Spirit is the One who gives you these abilities, there's never any place to be either jealous or boastful. You didn't choose your spiritual gifts; they were selected and given to you by the Holy Spirit. Scripture says, "It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have." (1 Cor. 12:11 NLT) It's ridiculous, then, to ever think, "Wow, God gave me a gift of leadership or teaching, I must be better and more important than other Christians!" You had precisely nothing to do with it. By the same token, it's just as foolish to think, "Why couldn't I be born with a great singing voice or the ability to organize some great ministry? I must not matter to God very much." How the Holy Spirit has gifted us has nothing to do with our value to Him. He loves each of us the same, but He's gifted us differently. The important thing is to find out how the Holy Spirit has gifted you and then begin to put those abilities into action. Second, spiritual gifts are given...

#2: THROUGH GRACE.

The word for "gift" in the Bible is based on the same word for "grace." *Charis*. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are called *charisma* (one gift) or *charismata* (two or more gifts). All of these Holy Spirit given abilities are products or results of God's grace to you and me. The English word "charisma" describes someone who has a dynamic, charming, magnetic kind of personality. That's not the meaning here. You're probably also aware that a segment of Christians around the world refer to themselves as "charismatics." They frequently put a great deal of emphasis on the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit – such things as divine healing, speaking in tongues, and words of prophecy, for example. But, the fact is every follower of Jesus is literally a "charismatic." How so? Every Christian has been given the gift of God's grace – His *charis*. Every follower of Jesus has also been given *charismata* – some set of spiritual gifts through the Holy Spirit. There are no haves and have nots in God's family. All are gifted by the Spirit.

Is there a difference between a spiritual gift and what you might call a natural talent? Yes, absolutely. Just because you have a natural talent to lead a business doesn't mean you automatically possess the spiritual gift of leadership in God's church. Just because you're a fine private or public school teacher doesn't necessarily mean God has gifted you to teach His Word to others. That being said, however, it's been my experience as a pastor that frequently most people are gifted spiritually in many of the same areas they are talented naturally. Not always, but frequently. For example, I've found people who possess the natural talent to be great medical nurses often possess the spiritual gift of mercy or compassion. People who have innate, natural musical talent usually end up using those abilities for the Lord. If you enjoy encouraging and motivating other people naturally, you will likely continue that on a deeper, spiritual level once you became a follower of Jesus. Third, spiritual gifts are given...

#3: TO EVERY BELIEVER.

It's impossible for a person who doesn't believe in Jesus to possess a spiritual gift because he or she is not indwelt by the Holy Spirit. That should be obvious enough. Natural talents, sure. Spiritual gifts, no. But the Bible makes it clear that every believer has received one or more spiritual gifts. In our passage we read, "A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other." (1 Cor. 12:7 NLT) It's still a very common mistake to create an artificial gap between two groups of Christians: what is sometimes called "the clergy" – folk who have titles like "Reverend, Pastor, Bishop" in front of their names – and "the laity" – just ordinary followers of Jesus. Some people even like to lump pastors into the same company as doctors or attorneys and refer to us as "professionals." While I certainly believe pastors ought to act professionally, I serve as a pastor primarily because that's a spiritual gift God gave me not because that's my profession. By the same token, you don't have to be on staff at this or some other church to possess important gifts that the Holy Spirit wants you to use to help build Jesus' Kingdom. Be careful about confusing an office or a role – pastor or any staff position in a church - with a gifting of the Holy Spirit. And don't ever buy into the myth that just a small, spiritual elite are the only ones gifted to carry out God's work in this church or in this world. No, God calls, gifts, equips, and uses every believer.

Dr. Richard Halverson, a pastor who also served as the chaplain of the United States Senate, shared this story. A man came to visit him who said, "I'm 45 years of age. I've been an engineer for 20 years. Now I want to go to seminary so I can serve the Lord." Halverson thought his observation was humorous if it weren't so tragic. Somehow he had missed the point that Jesus had called him to be an engineer. If he had understood correctly what the Bible teaches about spiritual gifts, he would know everything he did as an engineer was just as much serving the Lord as going to seminary and standing in a pulpit.

It's easy to assume pastors and other paid members of a church's staff are there to do most if not all the church's actual ministry. That's not what the Bible teaches. My role as your pastor, Aimee's role, Todd's role, Beth's role, Kari's role, Carole's role, Ashby's

role (when he joins us next month) is really to help you discover your spiritual gifts, equip you to use those gifts, and provide an opportunity – a time and a place – where you can put those gifts to work for the Lord here at KRBC. God has given spiritual gifts to every follower of Jesus here. Do you know what your gifts are? If you do, are you using them? If not, why not and how long are you going to wait to find out?

When you stand before Jesus one day to give an account to Him of how you invested and used the spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit gave to you, what will you say? Please don't start whining when that day comes, "Pastor Rick never told me what my spiritual gifts are. My church never asked me to do anything – at least not anything I liked or wanted to do." At the end of the day, it's your responsibility and yours alone to discover your spiritual gifts, develop them, and put them to use. If you're content to remain ignorant or fail to put them to use, that's on you - not on me and not on this church! Believe me, one of the great discoveries and adventures in life as a follower of Jesus is discovering the person God made you to be, discerning your spiritual job description, and having the impact God wants you to have for His Kingdom. Spiritual gifts are given, fourthly...

#4: WITH VARIETY.

The beautiful world we live in reveals how much God values variety. Consider the variety of flowers and animals God has made. Beyond that, God has created people with different skin colors and ethnic features. People have different personalities, interests, abilities on a purely natural level. God's love for variety is also revealed in how the Holy Spirit hands out spiritual gifts. The very same Holy Spirit lives in you who lives in me. Nevertheless, you don't have my gifts and I don't have your gifts. This was a point of great misunderstanding among the Christians in Corinth to whom Paul wrote the passage we read earlier. They began to believe everyone should have the same spiritual gifts and, also, that some spiritual gifts were more important than others. As a result, some followers of Jesus began to feel superior to other Christians. That can happen so easily even today. I grew up in a church that believed every Christian should have the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues and that if you spoke in tongues you were more spiritual than a Christian who didn't. They were wrong. But I've heard other Christians insist that speaking in tongues is no longer valid for Christians today and that those who do are somehow inferior Christians. They're just as wrong. Never forget the Holy Spirit gives His spiritual gifts to Jesus' followers with great variety.

One of the joys of discovering your spiritual gifts is understanding what some call your "gift mix." The fact is that each of us has a unique combination of spiritual gifts – at least one gift, but probably more -, personality type, and life experiences that makes us completely unique and one of a kind. God has made you like no one else and gifted you like no one else. Don't waste your time and energy complaining about what you may not have been given by the Holy Spirit. Instead, get busy discovering, developing, and using your unique "gift mix" for God's glory. God has specific areas of ministry He wants you to be involved in right here in this church. He doesn't ask anyone to do

everything; instead He calls and equips each of us do something – something that you are gifted and qualified to do. A fifth truth – spiritual gifts are given...

#5: FOR SERVING.

I really like how the Living Bible rendered this verse, “Why is it that He give us these abilities to do certain things best? It is that God’s people will be equipped to do better work for him, building up the church, the body of Christ, to a position of strength and maturity.” (Eph. 4:12 LB) The Holy Spirit didn’t put spiritual gifts into you to build your ego. His gifts aren’t hobbies to play with or personal possessions that you use if and when you so desire. Spiritual gifts are both tools with which to do God’s work and weapons to use in spiritual warfare.

The Corinthians had either forgotten that central truth or were ignorant of it. They made the Spirit’s gifts a matter of feeling superior to others and showing off. But the Holy Spirit always intended His gifts to be used to serve others. The end result is to build up the congregation as a whole. Christian, if you still think the sum total of your relationship with Jesus is dropping in here for a few hours on a Sunday, getting a spiritual “pick me up,” and making sure your spiritual needs get met first of all, you are missing out on so much! God wants to employ you – put you to work – in the work of His Kingdom through this congregation. In addition, God wants you to see your place of work, your neighborhood, your network of family and friends – some of them with no relationship with Jesus yet – as your mission field. Any and every place can become a place where you serve King Jesus and help to build His Kingdom in people’s lives through the use of your spiritual gifts. Serving others is the whole point behind Paul’s use of the human body analogy. The parts of your body are all different even though they’re part of one body. They do different things, but they all have one goal: to make your body as healthy and useful as possible. That’s exactly the same mindset each of us should have toward this church.

Here’s a different analogy that underlines the same truth as the human body. Once upon a time, a set of carpenter’s tools held a conference. Brother Hammer presided. Several were unhappy with his leadership and suggested he leave the meeting because he was just too noisy. Hammer replied, “If I have to leave this carpenter’s shop, Brother Screw over there needs to go, too. You have to turn him around again and again to get him to accomplish anything useful.” Brother Screw said, “Maybe. But Brother Plane has got to go if I go. All his work is just on the surface. His efforts have no depth whatsoever.” To this insult, Brother Plane responded, “Brother Rule’s going to have to go if I go. He’s always measuring people as though he were the only one who’s right.” Well, then Brother Rule complained about Brother Sandpaper, “You ought to leave too because you’re so rough. You’re always rubbing people the wrong way.” Into this increasingly heated discussion walked the Carpenter – Jesus Himself. He’d arrived to start His day’s work. Putting on His apron, Jesus began to make a pulpit from which His good news could be proclaimed. He used the hammer, the screw, the plane, the rule, the sandpaper, and all the other tools at His disposal to accomplish His task. After the

day's work was done and the pulpit finished, Brother Saw remarked to the other tools, "Brothers, I now see that all of us are workers together for the Lord." Here's a sixth and final truth today about spiritual gifts. They're given...

#6: TO BE USED IN LOVE AT ALL TIMES.

Right after the chapter we read from today – 1 Corinthians 12 – Paul wrote those great words about love found in chapter 13. Why? Because love is greater than all the spiritual gifts combined. He reminded the Corinthians – and us – that you might be able to speak in tongues endlessly, or preach the house down, or give billions of dollars to poor people, or even be killed for Jesus' sake as a martyr, but if love doesn't dominate your life, it's all a colossal waste of effort.

Love never elevates one gift and tears down the value of another. It never makes one follower of Jesus feel important at the expense of someone else. Love creates unity among followers of Jesus by appreciating the contributions of all. Love reconciles people and brings down the barriers that separate us. Love rejoices in the diversity of spiritual gifts God has given His people and is never threatened by variety. Love is always eager to serve – to keep on giving when you're not noticed, to keep on using those gifts without reservation, and to keep on serving even when it means personal sacrifice of some kind. That's how Jesus loves you and me. And when the Holy Spirit fills you with His love, you begin to love like Jesus loves.

The Anacostia neighborhood in Washington, D.C. sits on a cliff overlooking our capital city. It's a ghetto full of poverty, hunger, crime, drugs, and hopelessness. Anacostia doesn't get frequent visitors from among Washington's celebrities and power brokers. However, one balmy June morning several years ago, black limousines and TV camera trucks lined the curb in front of the old red brick Assumption Catholic Church in Anacostia. Soon a wisp of a woman dressed in a white sari moved up the steps of the church, waved at a cluster of children nearby, and brushed past reporters crowding the doorway. The celebrity was the late Mother Teresa – then a 70 year old nun originally from the country of Albania. As the world famous winner of the Nobel Prize in 1979, she could have commanded an airport welcome by a host of government bigwigs, addressed a joint session of Congress, and attracted thousands at one of the city's great cathedrals. Instead, she went as quietly as possible to a troubled, neglected corner of Washington, D.C. to establish a new outpost for nine members of her order - the Sisters of Charity.

Since Mother Teresa wouldn't come to them, the Washington power types came to her. The mayor and city officials trailed the press into the church halls with its chipped paint and cracked plaster walls. The press shoved microphones in Mother Teresa's direction. "What do you hope to accomplish here?" someone shouted at her. "The joy of loving and being loved," she smiled. "That takes a lot of money, doesn't it?" asked another reporter. Everything in Washington D.C. costs money. And the more it costs, the more important it is. Mother Teresa shook her head, "No, it takes a lot of sacrifice."

What do you need to do to serve Jesus through your spiritual gifts, to be useful to Him, to accomplish something for His Kingdom? Not intellectual brilliance. Not outstanding leadership abilities. Not political power. And not money. What you must have is Jesus' love and the willingness to express that love sacrificially.