

Sept. 18, 2011, 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Part 1 of 4-Part Series, "Discovering Your Spiritual Gifts and How to Use Them for God's Glory and to Serve Others"

### Gifts for God's Glory

When I was a girl, someone gave me a box of stationery. This was back in the dark ages, before e-mail and texting and Facebook, and I actually wrote letters to friends, to my grandma, and even to former teachers.

So stationery was a useful, practical gift. And I used some of that stationery. But I didn't write enough letters to use the whole box and it sat in my closet, waiting for me to get the urge to write a letter.

And time for my birthday came around again.

I have two younger brothers who loved to tease me and play tricks on me. They also never had any money in those days, so when it came time to give me a birthday present, they did what any resourceful, broke, naughty little brothers would do.

They snuck into my room and found that half-used box of stationery. They wrapped it up and they regifted it to me! The ultimate in regifting---- they were giving me what was mine in the first place!

Our scripture passages this morning speak to us about the spiritual gifts that God has given to us, gifts that we need to use, gifts that God gave us in the first place and that we need to give back to God.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he writes about those gifts, given to us through the Holy Spirit through the grace of God.

Paul tells us that with those gifts, some people are apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers. The purpose is to equip the saints for the work of ministry and for building up the body of Christ.

Paul wrote a lot about spiritual gifts. He felt that it was important that the churches understood them. He taught about them so many times that you might say that he considered them the framework of the church.

Now, I know that some of you may not realize that you have spiritual gifts. You might think that they're only for other people, that you're not gifted like other people are.

And you might be right. You're not gifted "like other people." You have your own unique gifts.

You do have spiritual gifts.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul begins the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter by saying that he doesn't want any of us to be uninformed about spiritual gifts.

And then he says, "No one says, 'Jesus Christ be cursed!' by the power of the Holy Spirit, and no one can say 'Jesus Christ is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit."

I don't really know if anyone in that church was really saying "Jesus Christ be cursed" or if Paul was just trying to make a point.

And that point would be that everyone who confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord is saying that, by the power of the Holy Spirit only.

The point is that everyone who is a Christian has the gift of the Holy Spirit, so we ALL have spiritual gifts!

Just to make this point perfectly clear, Paul says

“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

Not to some. Not to just a select few. Not just to certain talented and super-holy people.

But to each. Each one of us. We all have received the manifestation of the Spirit.

Why? So that we can just keep it all bottled up inside of us? To hold onto? To bury in the ground like a treasure, hoarded for some future rainy day?

No! We are given the manifestation of the Holy Spirit FOR THE COMMON GOOD! To be USED to serve others and build up the church!

If we don't use our gifts, we are hiding our light under a bushel, burying our talent in the ground.

If we don't use our spiritual gifts, they have landed on rocky soil and they won't produce any fruit at all.

So once Paul has established that, he goes on to name the spiritual gifts. This list is not the same as the one in Ephesians or anywhere else where Paul lists the gifts. These lists are not intended to name every single gift. They are examples.

If we put together a list of all the gifts Paul names, I don't think we still will have all of them, because I think that the Holy Spirit can manifest in many, many ways, and Paul was not trying to name them all.

In First Corinthians Paul names the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, speaking in tongues, and interpretation of tongues.

So when we add these to the ones named in the fourth chapter of Ephesians, we have a total of thirteen gifts. There are others, including kindness and administration, to name just two.

Now even in Paul's day, some gifts were more highly valued than others. In some churches today the gift of speaking in tongues is considered essential, while in other churches, it's considered strange or even fake.

Some of us might think we rarely see miracles or hear prophecy or healing in these modern times, so people who have those gifts hide them so people won't question their sanity or their truthfulness.

I believe that all gifts that were seen in Biblical times are still manifested in some way in some people, and that if we deny our spiritual gifts for fear of being looked down on, we as the church are weaker as a result.

To get this point across, Paul uses the metaphor of the church being like a human body, with each person being comparable to a part of the body. Like parts of the body, each person has a specific function, a part to play.

The eyes have the gift of vision, so maybe they are the prophets or the preachers or the apostles. The ears have the gift of listening, so maybe they are the pastors, the nurturers, or the healers.

The feet have the gift of supporting the rest of the body and taking it where it needs to go, so maybe they are the administrators, the encouragers, the helpers.

You get the idea. Just like a person's body can still function without one of its parts, the Body of Christ, the church, can function without all of the members being there and using their spiritual gifts.

But just like a person's body without all of its parts, the church does not and cannot do all that it was meant to do if some of the members are not using their spiritual gifts. Without one part, when one person is not using their spiritual gifts, the church is weaker, less effective.

So this is the reason for this series of sermons and for the in-home Bible Studies that will go with it. To focus on everyone using their spiritual gifts together as the church in Linda Vista---the body of Christ in this place.

This is part of the vision for the church---that everyone will know what spiritual gifts they have and how to use them for the glory of God in service to God and neighbor.

You might have just one spiritual gift or you might have several. You might have had a certain gift in the past and now you have a different one.

You might not have the gifts you think are the best, but you have the perfect gifts for you to use at this time and in this place.

Young and old, we all have our gifts. And we need to learn about them and use them.

I want you to look at the front of the bulletin for a minute.

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Have you ever gotten a gift that you had no idea how to use?

No idea what it was? Did you read the instruction manual? Or did you just leave the whole thing in the box, keeping it only because it was a gift from someone you loved?

The Bible is our instruction manual for our spiritual gifts. If you don't know what yours are, if you don't know how to use them, then it's time to learn.

God has given us a most precious gift through the presence of the Holy Spirit, and we need to use it for God's glory!

Let's not waste what God has given us by leaving it in the box and putting it away in the closet.

Instead, we need to remember my box of stationery and regift what God has given to us back to God!

We need to take our spiritual gifts out of the bottom of the closet, wrap them up in our actions and in our words, and give them back to God!

For the glory of God and in service to others, let us begin!

Amen.