

Topic	Spiritual Gifts in Community
Reference	1-Cor 12:1-11, 28-31
Date	14 July 2019
Speaker	Dr Peter Ng

So we are going into the Book of Corinthians. We are coming to the exciting part. We start off in Chapter 7, concerning matters about which you wrote... So Corinthians is a letter written to the Corinthian church to answer several questions and the questions were;

- relationship between sexes
- food given to idols
- woman praying and prophesying in public
- Lord's Supper abuse
- And we are now going into Chapter 12,

1 Corinthians 12:1 (ESV) Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.

So now we are starting a new section where it is talking about spiritual gifts and after that the resurrection. Now about spiritual gifts, we are going to go into series of five sermons on the spiritual gifts and charismatic controversies. This is the number one controversy that basically tends to trouble the church for the last 40 years in this country. I am going to be dealing with spiritual gifts in the community. Pastor Leon, members in the community. Samuel Khew will be taking the helm at love at the center of the community. Then I will be speaking on tongues in worship. Then we will have a break where Brother Arnold will be speaking on a different topic on its own and lastly I will end off with prophesy in worship (chapter 14). So if you have got people who are asking questions about this very controversial area, bring them along, so that we may together look at this.

Now this is a word which I want us to... we have mentioned this before but I need you to recall, **over-realized eschatology**. Basically eschatology is the study of last things. What happens is that we live in a finally balanced world. We have the final consummation of the kingdom coming and then we've got our previous life, which is marked by sin, death and defeat and we are living in the in-between. We are not living in sin and death and condemnation where there is no hope, we are actually liberated by the cross of Jesus Christ, but you are not fully liberated in terms of the final consummation of the kingdom. We live in the in-between. So this in-between is a very fine balance and tension, you can under realize this by just refocusing on the fact that you are powerless and there is a lot of sin in your life and you can't move ahead or you could over-realize it and thinking that, you know, the kingdom of God has finally come. So therefore there is a tension. What happens with the Corinthian church is that, they were focusing on this part, is as if we had the final victory... the final consummation of the kingdom has already come and that's why they say in chapter 4:8

1 Corinthians 4:8 (ESV) Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!

They were so confident, they have the believer's authority, everything is really achieved. So this was there tendency. Now if you look at the issue at hand,

1 Corinthians 12:1 (ESV) Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.

The word ‘spiritual gift’ in Greek is actually called ‘pneumatikon’, which doesn’t necessarily mean spiritual gift. It can be translated ‘spiritual people’ or ‘spiritual gifts’ interchangeably. So he is talking about spirituality. So there are two groups of people not unlike our modern-day situation.

- One group speaks in tongues, prophesize, they have healing and miracles, they believe anything is possible.
- The other group doesn’t speak in tongues, they only speak in Mandarin, no miracles, no healing and they are very suspicious of the guys who speak in tongues, as if, you know, they don’t know whether that’s from God.

So therefore two classes as if these class was more spiritual, the other class is not quite so spiritual and in fact in modern days we call this ‘baptized in the spirit’ and those who are ‘not baptized in the spirit’. This is modern day controversy. So this is what is tearing the church apart and when Paul was writing to them, he is writing to them about the role of spiritual gifts in this whole question of spirituality. Are we having more spiritual people because they can speak in tongues and the non-spiritual person because they cannot speak in tongues. So three things that the passage will seek to answer.

- A. What is the purpose of spiritual gifts?
- B. What is the nature of Spiritual gifts?
- C. How do we use the spiritual gifts?

A. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

1 Corinthians 12:1-5 (ESV) Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. 2 You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. 3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit. 4. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord;

Now traditionally if you read this, you start to think, oh! He is talking about spiritual gifts and then He picks up this idea of spiritual gifts again in verse 4. In between, he is talking about something else. He says,

2 You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. 3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.

So perhaps he was thinking about some pagan ceremonies like the priestess of Delphi, Cassandra or Sybil of Cumae where in the middle of a religious ceremony they will break out in ecstatic speech and they will be saying stuff which you don’t really understand and you need to have it translated and Paul is perhaps saying, well if some of these people say things, if they say Jesus is Lord, they are Christian. If they say, Jesus is cursed they are not Christian. That’s how to distinguish between the various spirits, after all they were speaking in tongues. That’s possible but I think if you look at the particular passage it doesn’t line in with the context. If you look at this

1 Corinthians 12:1 (ESV) Now concerning spiritual gifts,...

The whole passage is about spiritual gifts. He doesn't wander off and talk about some ecstatic spirit speaking some foreign tongue, which can be interpreted as Jesus is cursed or Jesus is Lord. It's all about spirituality and spiritual gifts and he is actually talking about three different groups of people. The first was what the Corinthians were before. They were pagans who are led astray by mute idols however they were lead, so they usually go in procession, there will be an idol and they will follow that procession along the way and this group were pagans, worshipping lifeless useless idols, that's what they were before. The second one is a group of people

3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!"

Very funny, you don't get people in church... Tell me who in this church will come and say in public, 'Jesus is cursed'. They would be stupid isn't it? It is absolutely stupid to have people to do that. That never happened and the only people who actually say Jesus is accursed were the Jews. They say it regularly in their synagogues at that time because Jesus hung on the cross. When you hang on a cross you are cursed. So regularly in a Jewish synagogue you have people who would say Jesus is cursed and if they come into the church, they come from a background in which they were regularly saying that Jesus was cursed. So, they were the second group of people who considered Jesus as cursed. The third group of people were the ones who can say, Jesus is Lord. These are the people who were filled with the holy spirit. So basically, the ultimate criteria of the Spirit's activity in spiritual gifts is the exaltation of the Lord Jesus. That is the ultimate criteria of spirituality. Thomas R. Schreiner is a professor of New Testament interpretation at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He writes,

The lordship of Christ is the criterion by which gifts are assessed. In other words, our gifts aren't a manifestation of ourselves or of our own abilities but are intended to communicate the truth that Jesus is Lord...

So what we actually have, controversies swirling in the church about spiritual gift. The important thing to distinguish, do these gifts exalt Jesus Christ as Lord, that is the number one criteria. Take for example this famous preacher, Jesse Duplantis, in United States and he shared with his congregation one day that he had a dream and,

"It was one of the greatest statements the Lord ever told me. He said, 'Jesse do you want to come up where I'm at?'"

So he asked the Lord for an airplane. I think this is a misinterpretation, everybody got very upset with him, everybody reads about him even in Malaysia and he come up and say,

"The Lord said, 'I didn't ask you to pay for it, I asked you to believe for it.'"

But if Jesus is asking him to go up to where he is, you know where Jesus is,

Matthew 25:35-36 (ESV) For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.

So Jesus is at Sungai Buloh Prison, Jesus is not up there. If you really want to minister you should be at Sungai Buloh Prison or Chow Kit road wherever the hungry, the sick and the destitute are. And here is a situation where he is not putting Jesus as Lord. So here is a tension of balance when he is on this side.

"It was one of the greatest statements the Lord ever told me. He said, 'Jesse do you want to come up where I'm at?'"

The final consummation of the kingdom is overbalanced. This is wrong theology. Jesus told his disciples,

Matthew 16:24-26 (ESV) Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

So Jesse has got to ask for a bicycle, you just ride in a cycle to Sungai Buloh prison and you find Jesus Christ. You don't need an airplane. That was his third airplane actually by the way, not the first airplane.

1. Spiritual gifts Serve the Lordship of Christ:

If you look at the healing service advertisements, all you will see is the pastor's name and timing. Nothing on Jesus Christ, nothing on the gospel, again that is totally skewed. If you look at the Book of Acts, Philip was sent to Samaria and he was ministering there.

Acts 8:4-8 (ESV) Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. 5 Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. 6 And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. 7 For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. 8 So there was much joy in that city.

Their primary focus was always what was said by him. The signs were incidental and accompanying. So I think we get it the other way around. Not only that powers and signs are not reliable signs of the spirit's activity.

2 Thessalonians 2:9-11 (ESV) The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, 10 and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

Matthew 7:22-23 (ESV) On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' 23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

Signs and wonders and gifts are not reliable sign of the spirit's activity. It is a life of the people who use their gifts to exalt the fact that Jesus is Lord. Back in the Old Testament Pharaoh encountering Moses

Exodus 7:11-12 (ESV) Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts. 12 For each man cast down his staff, and they became serpents.

It's a pretty good trick, they could do it, the only difference is Aaron's staff swallowed up their staff. Jesus is still king. Now magical activity can occur, but it is the activity that builds up Jesus Christ as Lord.

2. Spiritual gifts also build up Christ body.

*1 Corinthians 12:7-11 (ESV) To each is given the **manifestation of the Spirit** for the **common good**.*

This should be the key verse that should basically undergird our entire sermon. Gifts are given and they are basically manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. You look at Ephesians

Ephesians 4:11-13 (ESV) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry,

Notice what he says about the work of ministry. The saints do the ministry and the teachers, preachers, evangelist, apostles do the equipping.

for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

The spiritual gifts build up Christ body. Now when you talk about spiritual gifts, we are thinking it is like receiving presents at Christmas. That's why whenever we have a spiritual gift seminar, we give out nice inventory and everybody is very excited, they will tick I can sing, I can dance, I can do this or that and they feel very proud. The reason why you feel very proud and very excited about spiritual gift inventory is that they are perceived like the more gifts that you have, the more spectacular you have, the rise in stature, self-esteem, pride, confidence, personal fulfillment, popularity, you are great. The more gifts that you have.

Now gifts aren't like that. Gifts are like discovering your spiritual gifts, like a carpenter's tools, a sword, a hammer. Reinhard Bonnke says, 'Spiritual gifts are not badges of honor but they are tools for the job.' So I don't know why the excitement for the spiritual gifts, because we think they are like Christmas present. I have not seen anybody come around and say, 'Oh Lord give me the gift of washing up dishes', I see people want gift of prophesy, gifts of this and that but nobody comes to say, 'Peter Ng, I want to pray for the gift of washing up dishes'. In fact, the one who has got a great gift is Clement who is outside. He is always washing up dishes, but if whatever the church needs, that is where you to fill, not the fact that you have got that particular gift that will raise your profile.

B. WHAT IS THE NATURE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Now there are variety of gifts. The word 'gifts' is 'charismata', plural. Now let's look at the word. The word 'charisma' comes from the Greek 'charizomai' which is basically a verb, 'to give graciously'. The focus is graciously. And it is a thing that is given generously without any merit. For example, if you were to enter Jaya Supermarket at the Empire and you are the 100th customer of the day, the bell will ring and suddenly you get a Proton car. Now did you deserve it, no. You were just there shopping, looking for your bag of beans and you just got it. The guy who runs Jaya Supermarket must be very stupid to give away a car, but you are the one there who won graciously. So the focus of the word, 'charizomai' is basically given undeserved, graciously given. That's the emphasis. And if you look at the words for gift in Greek, 'Charisma', 'Doma', 'Doron' and 'Dorea'. All of them are interchangeable but 'charisma' has a nuance of the undeserved nature at the giver's goodwill and favor. Now if you look at this particular word. Charisma does not mean spiritual gifts. I don't know why the church is divided into charismatic and non-charismatic. It is the worst abuse of the Greek word I ever seen. The word 'charisma' is free gift. This free gift is eternal life.

*Romans 5:15-16 (ESV) But the free gift (**charisma**) is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift (**dorea**) by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. 16 And the free gift (**dorema**) is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift (**charisma**) following many trespasses brought justification.*

Now here you have got dorea, dorema, and charisma, they all mean the same thing, eternal life but they got difference nuances and the nuance that Paul want up to bring up is that free gift is basically undeserved. So if you look at how he uses it

Romans 1:11-12 (ESV) For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift (charisma) to strengthen you— 12 that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

If you look at gift of celibacy

1 Corinthians 7:7 (ESV) I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.

Gift of celibacy is also a spiritual gift. Some of you here have the spiritual gift, so don't complain.

- Now there are **varieties** of gifts,
 - but the same Spirit; 5
- and there are **varieties** of service,
 - but the same Lord; 6
- and there are **varieties** of activities,
 - but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.

He describes the gifts in different words, Charisma, 'Diakonia' which is service, and 'energemata' which is basically power in action. So all these different words, 'charisma' cannot just mean supernatural manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Charisma is just gift; the emphasis is freely given. The charisma God gives you is a free gift that's what the Greek means. You've got a free gift of eternal life.

Second issue is that the spiritual gifts are designed to bring interdependence and unity. If you look at a whole bunch of people that all wear one mask. It is like going to a particular church and they think one gift is the most important gift, everybody in the church must like wear that one mask because sin is always inward looking, got gift projection. Just because I can speak in tongues, all of you must speak in tongues. Just because I can prophesize, all of you must prophesize. It is a matter of pride and sin as you look inward.

Spiritual gifts are designed to bring interdependence and unity. Look at what the verse says, varieties of gifts, varieties of service, varieties of activities. There are varieties because it promotes interdependence. I operate every week on Wednesday afternoons and Friday morning. The Friday morning is the worst time, I like to get up early, go to the OR and they actually get people ready and everybody is already, the surgeon is all suited up, the anesthetist all suited up, the patient is there, everything ready but cannot start, because the radiographer comes late, 8:30. So all of us are sitting, waiting for the radiographer to come, the most important person in the room is the radiographer. It is not the surgeon, it is not the anesthetist, not the patient, it is the radiographer. We cannot work without the radiographer, so he strolls in at 8:30 to 8:45 while the rest of us are waiting and we can't do without the radiographer. I have tried to do it once and twice but you miss the stone if you don't get the radiographer, you cannot see where the stone is.

So the fact that we work together, we have different gifts, compels us to be interdependent that's purposely put there. On the other hand, we have got the same spirit, the same Lord and the same God and this basically is the spirit, the Lord which is Jesus and the same God which is the Father. Basically it points to

unity, the triune God. So although we are different, we are still the same. The fact that we have got the same God points to the fact that we actually have unity. We have got interdependence and unity.

Recently the United States women's team won the World Cup for the first time. They worked very well. The team got different personalities and different roles to play and then the co-captain Megan Rapinoe said, I am not going to visit the fellow in the White House. Everybody else in the team also decided simultaneously not to go, why, because they were united. Even though they had different roles, they were united together, because being different doesn't mean that they are independent. When one gift is overemphasized you have got independence and disunity. That is the problem with the Corinthian church and is manifested when the charismatic movement came out the 100 over years ago. Initially this is the problem. When you have this idea, the baptism of the Holy Spirit which is supposed to be at the conversion experience, but they say it has to be a post conversion experience, that everybody who is baptized in the Holy Spirit must have the gift of tongues. I want to address this problem today.

When you overemphasize one gift over every other gift then you have got independence and disunity but if you look at scriptures, it is very clear

*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;
5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord;
6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.*

There are different gifts

1 Corinthians 12:29-31 (ESV) Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

Not everybody speaks in tongues. So you cannot bring tongues as the sign of being baptized in the Holy Spirit, but we are all baptized in the spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 (ESV) For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

So the picture which Paul paints is that we are baptized, it is in the passive. We are pushed under by Jesus, Jesus does it as initiating event, when you are under there you are drinking water and that water is basically the spirit. In fact Paul says,

Romans 8:9 (ESV) You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

The sign, the number one important thing is that, if you are a Christian, you have the spirit of God. The word 'baptism of Holy Spirit' is only mentioned five times in the New Testament. Five specific instances; Matthew, Mark and Luke, each of them described basically John the Baptist announcing the baptism of Holy Spirit.

- In Acts 1:5 it is about Jesus Christ announcing the baptism of Holy Spirit.

- In Acts 11:6 it talks about the reception of Holy Spirit by the gentiles when they were initially converted. It wasn't a post conversion experience; it was an initial converting experience. If you read down here

Acts 11:15-17 (ESV) As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. 16 And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' 17 If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"

So he is now testifying, as he was preaching, before he has finished even preaching the Holy Spirit fell and they believed and there was a conversion experience. It wasn't a post conversion experience but then Acts describes various ways. There are post conversion experience of the spirit, not using the same term but reception of the Holy Spirit, Samaritans

*Acts 8:14-17 (ESV) Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that **Samaria** had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, 15 who came down and prayed for them that they **might receive the Holy Spirit**, 16 for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.*

This doesn't describe it is a baptism of Holy Spirit, but it is about the same thing they received the Holy Spirit.

The other one is Acts 19 describing the 12 Ephesian disciples

Acts 19:5-6 (ESV) On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.

Now look very carefully. Samaritans were remnants of the Northern Kingdom, who were overtaken by the Assyrians. They were mixed. And they had their own religion. In fact, they only used the first five books of the Old Testament. All the rest, they threw it out because they didn't like the Jews. When Jesus was confronted by the Samaritan lady, the first question she asked him, where is the true worship, is it in Jerusalem or here. Because they use to worship at Mount Gerizim, which is a small mountain, but they call it the highest mountain in the world. But to them they were proud of this, this was their religion. Now imagine if the Holy Spirit came upon them and they believed in Jesus and they would basically continue in this separatist way as if Christianity of a different branch was in the Samaritan church versus the Judean church. So what happen was that the Lord arranged, so that Peter and John comes down and they didn't receive the Holy Spirit until the apostles had come down from Jerusalem and laid hand on them, the Holy Spirit fell on them, so that both churches would be united under one unifying experience. It only happened among the Samaritans.

The other group was the Ephesian 12, these were disciples of John. They were baptized in the baptism of John, which is not into Jesus Christ. They were baptized for the repentance of sin only but not in the name of Jesus. They were told that, I will baptize you with water for repentance, but someone is going to come and baptize you in the Holy Spirit. They didn't realize that they only had this baptism of repentance. So their faith was incomplete and when Paul came, they received the Holy Spirit and they began speaking in tongues. These are the only two instances where you actually have a post conversion experience of the spirit and that's for historical reasons.

So therefore if you look at the baptism of Holy Spirit, we believe baptism of Holy Spirit occurs at conversion and what happens is that the filling of the Holy Spirit which occurs second time or third time whatever is actually what the Pentecostal describe as the baptism of Holy Spirit as a post-conversion experience. Now if you look at the gifts of the Corinthian church, so many gifts and you can find some are miraculous, but they are also non-miraculous gifts; teachers, helping, administration, faith, etc. Different kinds of gift and if you look further on the whole New Testament, you will find the whole bunch of other gifts; like evangelist, leader, teaching, giving, mercy, service, celibacy, marriage, which means these gifts in each case are not exhaustive, which means there could be other gifts out there, not necessarily bound by this list which Paul has given.

So therefore it tells you that these are all the non-miraculous gifts, the list is not exhaustive, they are miraculous one and non-miraculous ones and spiritual gifts may not be extraordinary and each one the tongues are always placed last. Not all have this gift. The gift of tongue is not the only evidence of the baptism of Holy Spirit. If you look in ancient times, the Oracle of Delphi, Goddess of Juno they speak in tongues. Shamans of the African tribes in Haiti as well also speak in tongues. Shinto Buddhists priests also speak in tongues. It is the question of what they speak in tongues about. If they profess Jesus Christ as Lord or not.

Now let's look at the different gifts. **Charismata** emphasizing grace. Service (**diakonia**) which means serving, its mundane. You are talking about waiters. **Energemata**, which is energizing, the power in action. So basically you have got three areas which gives minister to;

- grace gifts, capabilities are given,
- service; areas in which abilities exercise
- the effects of the exercise of all these gifts

All these things come under the same God who empowers everyone. So what Paul is doing again and again, saying there are differences, you are interdependent but there is unity in one. So what he is trying to do is bringing the charismatic gifts people and ones with non-charismatic gifts and they are putting them together, flattening the difference and telling them the only thing that is important is who gave you this gift. Are you serving God, and is there effect? That's the only three things he is interested in.

3. THE SPIRITUALITY OF A PERSON IS NOT DISTINGUISHED BY THE TYPE OF SPIRITUAL GIFT

As if tongues and miracles put you in a higher plane.

1 Corinthians 12:7-10 (ESV) To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 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.

So each one is given by God, you actually don't earn it. They are no super gifts and always in the list of gifts tongues are always listed last. Now there are people who they play this up. I read this from Charisma News, Larry Sparks. He writes,

If you have the gift of tongues, you get supernatural understanding of God's mysteries and you have got access to other revelatory gifts of the Holy Spirit. It opens up the bible in a New and living ways as you read it. It empowers you to engage in spiritual warfare from the position of victory.

I remember having dinner at a restaurant somewhere in PJ and there was a Filipino waiter who was really earnest Christian and basically, he was telling us about ministry where he drove a van to bring people who are undocumented or migrants in this country to Bible study. One day, the police stopped him. He didn't know what to do, he started praying in tongues. As he started praying in tongues, the police got blind, couldn't see and they let him go. There is also a story of a man called Brother Andrew. Brother Andrew for years he took Bibles into East Germany, into Russia and he prayed the same prayer, "make seeing eyes blind" and he prayed it in English.

It doesn't matter what you pray, in what language it is, there is no super gift. In fact, if you look at this passage

1 Corinthians 14:13-14 (ESV) Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful.

Which means when you are praying in tongues, you won't know what you are speaking about. It is not a super gift. There is no evidence of that. In fact, each gift has a unique function, it is a uniqueness of the gift that must be emphasized. In fact, Paul writes

Romans 12:3-4 (ESV) 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

So you can't take one gift and play it against the other as if one is more important. We might have sober, humble estimation of each gift on its own. What about natural gifts? Are these spiritual gifts. Believer and non-believer both have talents. You and I have talents. Some of you can bake, some of you can dance, some of you can sing, some of you are very clever accountants. And then you have got spiritual gifts and the spiritual gifts are special abilities that are added to and beyond the natural ability. Now there is an overlap, God has appointed teachers, helpers and administrators. If you look at Paul, he has got rhetorical skills. Where did he learn to write like that in the Book of Romans with the great flourish of a lawyer? What about the theological background he has to Judaism to use the Old Testament, to argue the case for Jesus Christ? Where did he get that, was it a spiritual gift or a natural gift that is basically hijacked for spiritual purposes. You can't tell the difference.

1 Corinthians 12:7-10 (ESV) To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

That's what spiritual gifts are. They are manifestation of the spirit for the common good. So therefore what about a carpenter or an architect,

Exodus 31:1-6 (ESV) The Lord said to Moses, 2 "See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, 3 and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, 4 to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, 5 in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft. 6 And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Abisamach, of the tribe of Dan. And I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you

Manifestation of the spirit for the common good. So you could be an architect and that gift could be a spiritual gift as it were. So in the Old Testament, the spirit empowered people who are craftsman, judges, prophets, even civil administrators; look at Moses. God found that Moses was too overwhelmed and so he said,

Numbers 11:17 (ESV) And I will come down and talk with you there. And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone.

You can have clerks, civil administrators all filled with the manifestation of the spirit for the common good. All having the same spirit whether it is New Testament or Old Testament, so therefore the conclusion is that you have got miraculous spiritual gifts, non-miraculous spiritual gifts, natural talents and the natural talents all come from the triune God and the natural talents are actually non-miraculous spiritual gifts used by the Holy Spirit for the common purpose of serving the lordship of Jesus Christ. Charles Webb writes,

The gift of the person of the Spirit may illumine, quicken, and nurture these potentialities in an individual to the development of greater usefulness, whereas without the presence of the Spirit in the life of an individual such potentialities may remain dormant throughout life.

So if there is a talent which you have, which could be used, that means for example you are rocket scientist and you make intercontinental ballistic missiles to destroy people, that's not a very useful talent in the kingdom of God, but if you have got other talents, God can bring them up and use them for the kingdom of God, which is the same way. Ji Packer writes,

Sometimes a very mediocre talent/ability can somehow be adapted by God into a spiritual gift, while at other times, a great talent in a Christian never seems to be used as a spiritual gift or ministry

So depending on what God will use. So natural gifts are also used by God. Now we are going to look at some of the gifts here before we end.

1 Corinthians 12:7-10 (ESV) To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 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,

So we seem to think that the utterance of knowledge and utterance of wisdom could be worldly wisdom, but it is not worldly wisdom. In fact, if you look at Acts chapter 5, Peter says to Ananias

Acts 5:3 (ESV) But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?"

So here we have the couple, they have sold all their investment property and then they told the church, we give all to you, but actually they kept the half for themselves and actually the Holy Spirit revealed it to Peter. That's evidence of the utterance of wisdom and knowledge at that particular time. But there are times when this is false. If you read the book, 'Showing the Spirit' by DA Carson, he describes a time in the Chicago Theological Seminary where there was a lecturer who claim to the gift of healing and utterance of knowledge. Suddenly, in the middle of the lecture he will stand up and says, "anyone here with a back pain by the name of Bill stand up." He said again and again and again until many times this fellow stood up and

he says, “yeah, I got back pain, but my name is not Bill, it is Mike”, and the guy say, “it’s okay that’s close enough.”

That’s a lot of rubbish, you are either right or you are not right. A lot of people have hijacked these gifts with the authentic one is mixed with all the fake ones, so that’s the problem. Now the spiritual wisdom is about Christ crucified.

1 Corinthians 2:1-2 (ESV) And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified

It is how the crucifixion of Christ affects how you look at realities in your life. You could be suffering from depression or something else and then God says, it comes into your life and the person gives you an utterance of wisdom to tell you what God is doing in your life. So that’s how it is done. Then you have got other gifts, gift of faith. Now this is not normal faith, everybody has faith. The best example of this is George Muller in the 1900s. He was a pastor at that time, and he started of in his journey of faith. He first started saying that, I don’t want to take any salary. So he worked for free because he didn’t want to burden God’s people. Second of all in those days they use to rent out pews, you can come to church and the church pew will have your name. He said, “we will not rent out pews anymore because we are discriminating between rich and poor people and so therefore, we will go by faith.” Then there was a cholera epidemic and then all the young children were out on the streets and that started him to think about providing for them. He started the first home in his house and another one in Wilson Street later on and he started homes because he wanted to demonstrate the faithfulness of God in response to pray. He never had church news to tell you about the projects. He just got on his knees and he prayed and each time he prayed God poured money in. The first 1000 pounds were given, and he started this house.

In fact, throughout his life he actually looked after 10,000 orphans. He started a 117 school, educating in Christian education 120,000 Christian students. That’s what he did, just based on faith. There was a very interesting story told of him. One day he got on a streamliner, crossing Atlantic to go to Quebec and the streamliner was running late. And he went up to the captain and said, “look you are not going fast. I need to be in Quebec on Saturday, and this is Wednesday, you know”. And the Captain said, “hey brother look at the fog, it is everywhere, we will never get there on time”. Then Muller said to him, look I don’t believe you, come let’s pray. So he took the captain down to the chartroom and say, “lets pray together”. So he got down on his knees and he said a very simple prayer which the captain describe later on was like a Sunday School prayer. George Muller started of “Lord if it is in your will, please lift the fog. I believe it is in your will because I got to be in Quebec by Saturday”. And that was it, the prayer ended. Then the captain said, “okay man, my turn”. Then as he got down to pray, George put his hand on his arm and said, “you no need to pray, you know why, you don’t believe, number two the fog already lifted”. They went out and the fog was already lifted. And he said to him, in 57 years of prayer I have never been denied an audience with a king, which means the king is always listening, but it doesn’t mean the king will answer exactly the way you want.

For most of us what we pray we pray with a bit of faith at first, but that faith has got to be encouraged by an answer which we like and when it comes with an answer that we like then we continue to pray. If it comes with an answer which we don’t like then we lessen the prayer, our conviction becomes less and we kind of feel embarrass for God or disappointed Him, but you never tell. The gift of faith is the one that keeps on coming and believing I have an audience with the King. No matter what and it keeps on believing and that’s what George Muller had and he actually built up all this orphanages that shows one thing that God is

always faithful and when he died the whole town of Bristol was jammed up. He is an example of someone with the gift of faith.

The other one is **gifts of healings**. These are the gifts which are actually in plural. It is called gifts, plural, healings plural, workings plural, miracles plural, while the other ones are all single. Which tells you that is not one person who has this automatic switch on gift, it is healing as each as an individual element working on. Give you some examples. Peter must have crossed the temple many-many times.

Acts 3:2 (ESV) And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple.

Acts 3:6 (ESV) But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"

Peter must have crossed this guy hundreds of time, why is that on that particular day he decided to heal him. It is because on that particular day with the spirit's prompting that is the healing that had to occur and that was the healing that he gave. What about Acts 16, there was this demon possessed woman...

Acts 16:17-18 (ESV) She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." 18 And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her."

Why didn't Paul did it on the first day or second day, he waited on it until he was really upset, why, because it is the time when the spirit prompts him that he should do it. So it is not something like an ability which you turn on, it is like some singer, but the gift of healing you can't just turn it on. It is like some singer who can sing very well, anytime you ask he can sing. But with the gift of healing, you can't just turn it on, but miracles and healing are true. If you look at the best work that has been written, it is basically by Craig Keener, looking at the huge two volumes on all the miracles which he has documented as much as he could all over the world and he actually quotes the Pew Forum in October 2006, which actually looked at 10 different countries across the world and they found documented experiences of miracles in 200 million people who have experienced miraculous healings and 39% of them in non-Pentecostal or Charismatic Christians. God works through miracles, but it is not on tap. If you look at Acts 19

*Acts 19:11-13 (ESV) And God was doing **extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul**, 12 so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.*

Fantastic that everything he touches is healed. Yet if you look on the other hand

*Philippians 2:25-27 (ESV) **Epaphroditus** my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, 26 for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill.*

Next to Paul and he is ill.

*(ESV) and I left **Trophimus**, who was ill, at Miletus*

Why would you leave your friend ill? Because it is not turn on like a tap. It is by the sovereign grace of God. Each healing is an instance work of the spirit and people distort this. For example Isaiah 53

Isaiah 53:5 (ESV) But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

This is true. The crucifixion of Christ is the atonement, we actually have healing. The healing is not only spiritual, it is also physical, but people take it to the extreme. This is an example of over realized eschatology

We have no Scriptural warrant to end a healing prayer with the faith destroying phrase "if it be in thy will" God has made it perfectly clear in his word that it is his will to heal the sick ..period

John Wimber says,

"Today we see hundreds of people healed every month in the Vineyard Christian Fellowship services. Many more are healed as we pray for them in hospitals, on the streets and in homes. The blind see; the lame walk; the deaf hear. Cancer is disappearing"

It is just belief that healing is a right, healing has occurred and in fact if you are not healed means there is something wrong with you. There can't be something wrong with God, because they will quote Jesus is same yesterday, today and tomorrow. If you are not healed that means something wrong with you and the guilt falls on you. In fact, there was a true story of Larry Parker and his family which was made into a movie. He and his wife were members of Pentecostal Assemblies of God Church there and their son fell ill because of diabetes and when he needed the vital insulin, the parents took the insulin and threw it away. They refused to give the insulin to the boy because they believe he will be healed in the name of Jesus and all physical symptoms are actually counterfeit signs of Satan. They waited three days, the boy fell into coma, they didn't do anything. After the coma, led to death. They had no funeral. They had resurrection service. For one year, they did it, until at last he saw the light and in fact he writes later on,

"Wesley died needlessly, a victim of our imbalance and misuse of the Bible. . . . All healing comes from God--medicine, nature and prayer are methods by which He accomplishes it. . . . Ample evidence exists in the Bible for the cooperation between medicine and healing by faith."

He realized that he was wrong. So the whole problem is over-realized eschatology. I actually don't have a problem when you are promising people to get healed. If you are healed fantastic, my problem is that when you are not healed, and you come back and you either think God is useless or you are useless. That's the problem. That's a theological problem that has worked out and all that is because they believe that the final consummation has already come. But if you look in reality, if you look at faith healing Down syndrome slight improvement, 1 out of 200. Blindness percentage of healing is about 3-8% and in John Wimber's own conference in 1986, 42% were not improved, 32% high measure of healing and 26% fair improvement. We are not there yet; the final kingdom is not consummated. Healing is given to us as little evidences of the age to come, but the age to come is not finally here.

We see little eruptions of that in our own backyard, if you look in the Barrio community in Sarawak 1973 to 1984, four waves of revival that came in and each wave of revival was characterized by repentance of sin, people getting excited about the gospel, travelling miles and miles just to quote scripture to each other and in that time massive wind rushing in, people speaking in tongues and Holy Spirit. Yes, God can act but at particular time according to his particular will.

HOW DO WE USE THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

1 Corinthians 12:7 (ESV) To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Spiritual gifts are exercised as an expression of spiritual fruit. Some of the most dangerous people in church are those who attempt to operate in the gifts of spirit without first developing the fruit of the spirit. If you look at qualifications for elders, actually the bar is very low,

1 Timothy 3:2-3 (ESV) Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

The fruits are emphasized more so than the gift itself.

1 Corinthians 13:1-2 (ESV) If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

So second thing is that gifts are the unique expression of your calling.

1 Corinthians 12:11 (ESV) All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

If God gives you a saw, you are a carpenter. If God gives you a calculator you are an accountant. Your gifts define your calling. You can't get a calculator and say you are a surgeon. Each gift is a unique expression of your calling and many of you have gifts and the Lord gives you at least one gift because each of you are called and he use what is in your hand.

Exodus 4:1-2 (ESV) 1 Then Moses answered, "But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, 'The Lord did not appear to you.'" 2 The Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A staff."

Moses was a shepherd.

Exodus 4:10 (ESV) But Moses said to the Lord, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue."

Exodus 4:16-17 (ESV) He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him. 17 And take in your hand this staff, with which you shall do the signs."

What you need is one stick and one chatty brother. You see the greatest miracle come with the most ordinary gifts. Rick Warren says this most eloquently and I always love to quote him,

"God gave me a gift not for me but for you and God gave you a gift not for your but for me. If you don't use your gift you are depriving me and if I don't use my gift I 'm robbing you"

So each one is unique. In fact, your gift profile is a signature of who you are. Third of all gifts are cruciform in nature. Thomas Schreiner writes,

The gifts are cruciform, for as we exercise the gifts, we give ourselves for the sake of others, just as Christ did on the cross.

The exercise of the gift involves sacrifice. Whatever gift you have, you have to sacrifice your time, your expertise and your effort, it is all gifts are cruciform in nature, they do not sit within your belt to make you feel good and Jesus ultimate gift was the gift of life and all he needed is 12 ordinary men who are willing.

OUR CHALLENGE:

Paul is writing to his disciple, whom at the situation where he was in prison, where he probably will not see him again. It is very sad, but these are the words he says to him,

*2 Timothy 1:6-8 (ESV) For this reason I remind you to **fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you** through the laying on of my hands, 7 for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. 8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God,*

So the picture he gives us is this. I want you to go home with this picture. It is as if you have got a bunch of coals and there are some smoldering embers. Each of us are like that, we have the Holy Spirit inside us, is given us a gift but all we have to do is to fan into flame the gift of God which is in you, we all have this gift, we have to fan to flame, which means put some effort inside and three things, affinity, ability and opportunity.

Affinity means something that you kind of feel close to being something that you like to do as it were, ability is you are being able to do it and the last one is opportunity and then God has given us not a spirit of fear but of power of love. Many of us think that we don't have this gift or my gift is very small. The most important thing about affinity and ability is opportunity, just take the opportunity. In my life, I have done Sunday School teaching, I used to play the guitar, lead singing, but I suck at all those things. It took me 20 years to find out I can actually preach, but if you don't do all those things you are never going to find out. The Holy Spirit gives us a spirit of not fear but of power of love and self-control and you are the man of the moment.

When I was 25 years of age, I had the opportunity to go to California for a conference that was in Los Angeles and after visiting the farmer's market there I decided to go to one of their malls. I can't remember what mall it was, and they have escalators on the side that goes up five stories, very steep and in between there is escalator going up and escalator going down, in between like 5-6 feet apart. And I was going up and all of a sudden, I saw this young Caucasian girl hurtling down with parents screaming at the back and I was thinking, maybe I can go across, but I was never the athletic type. It is 6 feet across, how can I go and get there and do it. The second thing I thought, I don't have the power and I thought this is America there must be some Americans behind me who are big and strong, I am just a tiny Malaysian. I look behind me and nobody there, very upset. And here she was coming down and in a split second I had to just jump across, I just barely made it and just managed to grab her arm and held her for about hardly a split second and then the mother caught up and her life was saved.

You see that is what using your gift is, you are there at that particular moment and the Holy Spirit gives you the power to jump across and the love because you can't let that girl slide by and lose her life or be terribly injured and yet self-control, because after that I didn't join the circus as if I was so great with my skills of jumping. I continued and became a surgeon instead. Gifts need to have the power, love and self-control. These are the three things. The Holy Spirit gives you power, gives you love and gives you self-control. The fourth thing is

8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God,

All gifts are cruciform, you have to be willing to sacrifice. No point saying I have got the power, I got to love but I don't want to sacrifice because that doesn't work. The Holy Spirit gives you this. Being able to share the sacrifice is given by the power of God. So from beginning to the end the ability is all given by God. These 12 men, God didn't choose the best men, they were fisherman, ordinary people, some are terrible people, tax collectors. All they did was say 'yes', I have a gift and God used them.

There is a place in England called Epworth Rectory. One of the lecturers in Wheaton College in 1940 went and took a group of American seminary students to Epworth Rectory which is the home of John Wesley, famous Christian clergyman who prayed and brought about the Wesleyan Methodist Revival that saved England from the French Revolution kind of uproar. He prayed and the whole nation was changed with the revival under him. And as they were leaving the tour, going back to the bus. One of the students were missing and he went back to look for the student and he was at the bedroom of John Wesley and next to the bed was a carpet and there were two deep impressions in the carpet which were the impressions of John Wesley knees. John Wesley every morning got on his knees and he prayed for two solid hours that God would save England. God will revive England and God did and this young man put his knees onto the impressions of John Wesley into the shoes of John Wesley and he was praying, "Lord, Lord, do it again, do it again, do it again." The lecturer came up, put his hands on the boy's shoulder and said to him, "Billy, we've got to go." He was Billy Graham and God did it again. What did Billy want? What was top of Billy's mind that Jesus is Lord.

So we need to get on our knees, we step in the footsteps of people like George Muller, Billy Graham, we could get there and fit our knees and we could say to the Lord, Lord I want you to be my Lord, Lord of my life, Lord of my family, Lord of my nation, the world must know that Jesus Christ is Lord, so do it again. Only thing this time, use me.

PRAYER:

We all have a gift. Our gift is a unique DNA profile of who we are. There is not a man, woman or child in this room whom God has not called to go out into his family, his community and to this nation to tell them that Jesus Christ is Lord. It is only whether you want to do it, whether we are going to be like Billy Graham on our knees and say, "Lord, do it again but this time use me". I pray that this will be the cry of our hearts and all of us will stand up, whatever gift we have. It could be spectacular, miraculous or it could be ordinary, could be a teacher, helper, administrator, we could wash dishes, we could be single but we want you O Lord to just do it again. Do it again. Help me share the gospel, so that your name is the Lord. We ask this for Jesus sake...*Amen*