

Gifted to Serve

Part 1

1 Corinthians 12

Dr. Kevin Maurice ---- May 28, 2023

In all seriousness, though, I am really proud of this class. They are resilient; they love to serve. They have a heart for the Gospel and for people and for the world. I'm excited to see what God does in and through them, wherever they go from here. It's going to be fun to watch.

Back in the nineties there was a band called Sixpence None the Richer. Do y'all remember them? They had a few hits ... [sings] *Kiss me, beneath the milky twilight* ... Right? Y'all remember that one? I promise you ... do not worry ... I will not sing another word today.

But did you know that the lead singer in that band, a woman named Leigh Nash, is a Christian. And when they first become famous, Sixpence None the Richer was invited to perform on *The Late Show* with David Letterman. After they sang their songs, Leigh Nash was interviewed by Letterman. And he asked her the obvious question: "What's with the name? Why Sixpence None the Richer?"

And she answered and said, "Well, it comes from one of my favorite books when I was a kid, a book by C. S. Lewis. In the book there's a story of a father who gives his son a sixpence, a small coin, to buy a gift for his dad." And she said, "When the father received the gift, he was certainly happy, but he was none the richer, because he was the one who gave the sixpence to his son in the first place. C. S. Lewis was comparing that to his belief that God has given us the gifts that we possess, and to serve Him the way we should, we should do it humbly, realizing how we got our gifts in the first place."

Letterman responded, "That's beautiful. It makes perfect sense. When you hear something explained like that it's so obvious, and yet we need to be reminded of it almost every day."

And you know what, Dave? I agree.

So, Grace, for the next two weeks we're going to explain and be reminded of this simple but profound truth of spiritual gifts. And it's my hope as a pastor, and it's our hope as a church, that as we explore spiritual gifts, it wouldn't just lead us to knowing more about this; but that as

we put a spotlight on spiritual gifts, it would lead us to becoming more and more like Christ in all of life in who we were made to be. And it's our hope and goal that this would lead us to a paradigm shift in the life and in the ministry and in the community here at Grace Covenant Church in Austin, Texas. We are really excited.

So, please turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 12. It's in the back half or back third of your Bible. And as you turn there, I want to encourage you to please read this passage for yourself sometime this week. This is a dense and rich passage and chapter of Scripture, and we can only explore so much this morning. So, please read it for yourself.

Who Is Given a Spiritual Gift?

Right now we're going to zoom in on verse 7, **1 Corinthians 12:7: "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."**

So, right off the bat, who is the Bible speaking to in this passage? Who is "to each"? Or your Bible might say "to each one." 1 Corinthians is a letter written to a church in the city of Corinth. And the author, the Apostle Paul, for eleven chapters has been addressing members of this church. Then in chapter 12 he says, "To each of you ..." So, this passage is for Christians. This is for us, to every believer who knows Jesus, to all those within whom the Spirit of God dwells.

For the past few months, Pastor Matt has been teaching us from the Book of John—a section of that gospel called "The Upper Room Discourse." And this is this intimate conversation and prayer. It's Jesus speaking to His disciples and speaking to His Father. And in John 16, Jesus says something shocking. We shouldn't miss it. He says, **"I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you."**

Do we understand what Jesus is saying?

Jesus tells His disciples that it's better for them. He says to us that it's to our advantage that He goes away, so that He can send the Helper, the Holy Spirit, to be with us. Do we believe that? Do we trust that this is true?

So often in my spiritual life I live with this "if only" mentality. If only Jesus was just right next to me every day. If only Jesus would counsel me and help me work through the

struggles that I have in my life. If only He was sitting next to me when I'm in traffic on Hwy 183. Then I could really be the person He made me to be. Then I could be more like Him in all of life. Then I could connect with Him and connect with God the way I'm meant to. Anyone else feel that way?

Jesus says, "No." He says, "I tell you the truth, it's better for you that I go away so that I can send the Holy Spirit to be with you." The Bible teaches us that when you become a Christian, you receive the Holy Spirit within you—the Holy Spirit—not a power or a presence, but a person, a person of the Trinity, now resides in your heart and your soul and your mind. And Jesus says that's to our advantage, for us, for each other, for the Church.

Because part of the good, part of the advantage of receiving the Spirit, as we're about to see, is that we also receive a spiritual gift. So, a prerequisite for having a spiritual gift is having the Spirit. So, to have a spiritual gift, you have to have a relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ the Son and by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit." This is something every Christian receives---the manifestation of the Spirit. It's called a spiritual gift.

This is what 1 Corinthians tells us. **"Concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed ... There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone" (1 Cor. 12:1, 4-6).**

So, when the Holy Spirit begins to live within you, He empowers you with a gift. So, if you are a follower of Jesus this morning, you have the Holy Spirit living inside you. And congratulations, you have a spiritual gift!

What Are the Spiritual Gifts?

And there are a variety of gifts for a variety of service and a variety of activities. So, we know that there are a number of gifts. So, what are they?

I'm so glad you asked. Because in the Bible there are five primary places in the New Testament where spiritual gifts are listed. We're going to put all five passages on the screen. We're not going to go through each of them today, but you can write them down and study them

later. Here they are: Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, another place in 1 Corinthians 12—verses 27-28, Ephesians 4:11-13, and 1 Peter 4:9-11.

Some of the gifts show up in more than one place. Others are mentioned only once. Some scholars read the Bible and say, *Yeah, there are seven spiritual gifts*. Others say there are over twenty. As several of us have wrestled with the Scriptures; as we've consulted commentaries and talked to theology professors, and as we've read the Bible, we believe that there are sixteen spiritual gifts that we see. They are: **apostleship, discernment, encouragement and exhortation (that's one), evangelism, faith, giving, hospitality, knowledge, leadership, mercy, prophecy, serving, shepherding, teaching, and wisdom.**

Those sixteen are all there in those five passages. And within Bible-believing Christian churches, these are the spiritual gifts that are most often agreed upon. A quick aside: if you have a question about a spiritual gift that is not on this list, please come back next week. Because I very well may answer it next week. If I don't, let's have a conversation—absolutely. Let's talk about it. I can tell you that we are a non-charismatic church, but we are not an anti-charismatic church. This list of sixteen gifts is what we believe we see most at work in the Church today.

Now notice what spiritual gifts are not. They are not the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Those are fruits. They are attributes that you should see in the life of every single follower of Christ. Because if you are abiding in Christ, if you are part of the vine, you're going to see fruit more and more, better and better.

Spiritual gifts are different. They're more specific. They're personal to you. So, there are a variety of gifts. The point is that you have a spiritual gift. In fact, you might have more than one. Scripture doesn't define or limit the number of gifts that a person receives. Sometimes it appears that people have more than one gift and those gifts work really well together.

But this is key: your spiritual gifts are not your natural abilities. They're not your talents. They're not acquired skills. They are manifestations of the Holy Spirit, so they are inherently supernatural.

Some folks are natural leaders. People are drawn to them, they want to follow this person. But that's not how God has gifted them. They're just a natural leader. Others are just naturally hospitable. Wherever they are they make you feel right at home; they make you feel welcome. But that's their personality. And God has supernaturally gifted them in some other way.

If I can just be very honest with you, I have always wanted the spiritual gift of evangelism. I love hearing the stories of Christians getting onto airplanes and sharing the Gospel with the person in the seat next to them. And before that plane reaches its destination, someone is praying to become a follower of Christ. I love stories like that.

One of our senior guys named Ryan has the gift of evangelism. We took a mission trip to Chiang Mai, Thailand, during Spring Break. And we were on different college campuses sharing the Gospel. And one afternoon I'm gathering up our group to go home, but I couldn't find one person. I'm looking all over and I can't find Ryan. I thought he was missing and I was a little nervous. And then I noticed that he was just off at a table on the side. But he was not alone. He was telling a Thai college student about Jesus. On the way home he told me, "You know what? I knew we have five minutes until we had to go, so I figured I had five more minutes to share the Gospel with somebody." I was looking to gather people to go; Ryan is searching for someone to share his faith with. That's his gift.

Now hear me out. That does not mean that I'm not called to share my faith. Matthew 28 is abundantly clear. Jesus commands us to go and make disciples. As a Christian, I should evangelize. I should share my faith with my friends, my family, my neighbors, the people who God brings into my life. But I'll tell you—it is not my gift. It is hard for me to do. It doesn't come easy and I'm not very effective. I do it. I share the Gospel. Most of the time, though, it's really simple math. It's $1 + 1 = 2$. And don't get me wrong—that is glorifying to God. I'm sharing my faith, I'm trusting to do it, and am also trusting Him for the outcome.

But when someone with the gift of evangelism shares the Gospel, there's a sense of ease. They're that person that chooses the middle seat on the airplane so that they can share with the person in the window seat and the person in the aisle seat at the same time. And they're effective at it. They're sharing the Gospel with one person and two others come and say, *Hey, what are you talking about? I want to hear this.* And with them the math doesn't make sense anymore. $1 + 1$ begins to equal 3 or 4 or more. Because they have a supernatural gift.

And sometimes people are gifted in a way that fits them, and you see it and you say, *Yeah, that makes sense.* And then other times, God gives someone a gift that you wouldn't expect, and you see them use it, and it's magic. Because God bestows gifts as He wills, and He has a plan and a purpose for which gift we get. That's what the Bible says: All these gifts are the

work of one and the same Spirit, and He distributes them to each one, just as He determines. God distributes the gifts that we receive as He determines.

Christmas morning, 2011: an infamous day in the Maurice house. My, thankfully, now wife Kate and I were just five days away from our wedding. So, this was our last non-married Christmas together. And my wife just knew that I was going to go all out. Right? I mean, I'm the love of her life, this great guy, extremely humble. I'm going to give extravagantly to her. She just knew it.

Young Kevin's thought process was just a little bit different. Because in five days we're getting married. I'm about to give her a diamond ring, and obviously, a lifetime of marital bliss and happiness. And so, I thought, I assumed, she probably does not expect Christmas to be a very big deal.

So December 25, 2011, I distributed three gifts that I had determined to give to Kate. A TV antenna, a DVD copy of the movie *X-Men*, starring Hugh Jackman, and a 1,000-piece puzzle of the Coca-Cola polar bears. And in my defense—there was a method to the madness. The antenna was so a young married couple could watch TV without having to pay for cable. *X-Men*—it's a great movie. It's one of her favorites. And the puzzle—what better way to spend time together than assembling a puzzle where every piece is either white snow or white polar bear? Hours of fun.

You would be right in assuming I don't have the spiritual gift of wisdom. My gift-giving ability wasn't great.

But that's not how God gives to us. God is perfect in His gift-giving ability. So, He doesn't scatter spiritual gifts willy-nilly, hoping that the right one ends up attached to the right person. He knew exactly what He was doing when He determined which gift you would receive. You have a spiritual gift.

What Is the Purpose of Spiritual Gifts?

So, what is it for? What do you use it for? You can go back to verse 7: "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." The reason that God gives you your spiritual gift is for the common good. Not personal—common good.

This is the most important point about spiritual gifts. After telling us that we have them, 1 Corinthians 12 spends the next twenty-four verses teaching us what they're for. And you can look at verses 12 through 20, and just look at the analogy and how many times it's used. The Bible says, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all of the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 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. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body."

The body is significant because each part is unique and valued. A hand is necessary and valuable and used for different things than an eye. An eye is necessary and valuable and used for different things than feet. It's true for every part of a body, and it's true of your spiritual gift within the Church. The Church—Christians gathered together—we are a body.

The Bible uses that word fourteen times just in this section. In this analogy, it's used over and over to drive this point home. Spiritual gifts are gifts to do certain things well, given by the Holy Spirit. And they're for the edification of the Church. They're given to build us up and unify the body of Christ.

So, the Church—this is our common good. We are the body of Christ. Which means that here at Grace, we have eyes and ears, we have hands and feet, we have arms and armpits.

And the Bible never teaches that each person in the Church would have the same gift. And nor should we. Because we need all of the gifts. You have a spiritual gift and we need your gift. We need your gift!

This truth is going to start shaping who we are and what we do here at Grace. We want this to impact and influence every single one of us in every single ministry here at church. And the way we're going to say it and the way you're going to hear it over and over—the way you're going to see it—is that we are gifted to serve.

We're gifted to serve. There are two parts to that. We're gifted. If you're a Christian, you've been given a spiritual gift from God. Part two—the purpose of that gift is to serve His Church. Your gift isn't primarily about your own growth; it's for the good of other people.

Because here's the truth: without you in this body, we are walking with a limp. If you are not using your spiritual gift, the unique gift that God gave to you, we've got cataracts. And if you're not serving here, our hands are arthritic. The contribution of every single member of the body matters.

So around Grace we're going to start asking two questions that we believe are going to change the heart and the nature of our church. And we want you to ask these questions. Ask them of yourself, ask them of your friends here, ask them in your community or in your men's Quest group or your women's Bible study. Parents, ask your kids. Kids, ask your parents. Two questions: What's your spiritual gift? How are you using it at Grace?

Can we just say that together? You do the first one when I count to three. One, two, three – What's your spiritual gift? Awesome. Number two, on the count of three. One, two, three— How are you using it at Grace?

We're gifted to serve. You're a part of this body. You have a spiritual gift. And we need your gift. Because we're better together than we could ever be on our own.

Warning about Spiritual Gifts

But let me just warn you that there is a danger around spiritual gifts if they ever become divisive; if in any way they lead to disunity or if they divide us. Because our gifts don't make us inferior to or superior to any other Christian. But our pride might tempt us to believe that we are.

So, as we begin to talk more and more about spiritual gifts, there are two pitfalls to avoid, and they're both based on pride. We have to beware of gift projection and gift rejection.

First of all, do not project your gift onto other people. If you find out that you have the spiritual gift of serving and you decide, "You know what? This is a great gift. In fact, my spiritual gift is the most important one. Every true Christian should have this gift." Gift projection is when you take the gift that God gave to you and you expect it of other people. And you end up disappointed, because they don't do what you do ... at least, not as effectively. But it wasn't their gift. It's yours. So, use your gift, but don't project it onto other people.

On the other hand, we have to be aware of rejecting our gifts. Sometimes people downplay or minimize how the Spirit gifted them. It's a huge mistake. Rejection says, "I don't like my gift. I want a different one." Sometimes people reject their gift because they feel like it's inferior to someone else's. It's this inverted sense of pride that says, "You know what? I'm not gifted. What I do doesn't really matter here. The Church doesn't need me." That is a lie. It's a lie. It's absolutely not true.

We have to be careful to not reject our gift because we idolize a different one. Remember, that's my temptation with evangelism. *Why don't I have that? I mean, I should have that gift.* Rejection places our desire for a gift above our desire for the gift-giver. We have to remember our sumpence theology. The gift is from God and it's for God. Spiritual gifts are for the glory of God and for the good of the Church, His Church. So, do not project your gift and do not reject your gift.

The truth is, we don't need everyone at Grace to have a leadership gift or an encouragement gift. We don't everyone here to have a primary gift of hospitality. We don't need or want every member to have a mercy gift. You have a spiritual gift, and we need you to have that gift. And we need you to use that gift, because we're better together. And we're gifted to serve.

How to Determine Your Spiritual Gift

So, what's your spiritual gift? Do you know what it is? Do you want to find out? We have a really great tool to help you learn what might be your spiritual gift. This was developed by some members of our church for our church. It's really cool. You can go online and take our spiritual gifts assessment at grace360.org/spiritual-gifts. It's ninety-six questions long. It might take twenty to thirty minutes. Take your time with it. Answer the questions thoughtfully. And just be honest with yourself. It's not a test.

And then once you have your results, ask a friend here at church, ask your spouse, "Do you see this gift in my life?" And if they say yes, great. That might be your spiritual gift. If they say no, no worries. There's a list of the gifts with descriptions on that same website. Read those lists and just pray. Pray—ask the Holy Spirit, "How is it that you've gifted me?" And I'm going to ask you to please do this in the next few days. Do this today.

Because next Sunday, June 4, we're going to have a ton of fun. On your way into church we're going to have these tables in the lobby with nametags for each spiritual gift. And as you walk in I want you to pick up one nametag with what you believe is your primary gift. Put it on, and then wear it into the service. Everyone's going to do this. We're going to do this all together. We're going to see how God has gifted this body.

Then after church next week we're going to have Pizza Under the Trees. And at lunch ask your friends, meet somebody new and ask them, read their nametag and say, "What's your spiritual gift? How are you using it here at Grace?"

Listen, we are not trying to put a label on anyone. We are not trying to put you into a box. But we absolutely are trying to put you into a body—the body of Christ. Because we are a church. We are better together. And you have a spiritual gift to use here.

I became a Christian my freshman year at high school in Gymnasium A of Martin High School through an evangelism outreach event through an organization called Seekers. It was a Christian club on campus. And after I became a Christian I got more and more involved in that group. I started to serve there. I just loved this organization.

Every Tuesday we would meet in one of the gyms at the high school, and we would have worship and teaching and a time of prayer. And going into my senior year, I had this wonderful idea that I should be one of the guys to lead worship. I had a number of reasons to want to do that. None of them were godly. I owned a guitar. I enjoyed worship songs. But mostly, I wanted to be seen up front. And God bless our group sponsor, an English teacher named Mrs. Clements. She allowed me to lead one week—just one. Because I bombed. I mean, it's no surprise to you—you've all heard me sing now. I have tried my best to remember how it went. I've tried to remember what songs I played, what happened, who was there. I cannot. I can't remember a single detail. My brain is protecting me from this horrible memory. I just know it was bad.

Because that Friday, Mrs. Clements invited me to come to her classroom just a few minutes earlier than our Seekers leadership meeting. And she gave me the most direct feedback I have ever received. She said, "Kevin, leading worship is not your gift. And you will never do that for us again." Yeah, ouch. But then she added, "I don't know how God has gifted you, but I can't wait to help you find out. And then we're going to find a place for you to do that." It changed my life. It absolutely changed my life.

I don't know how God has gifted you. But I can't wait—we can't wait—to help you find out. And then once you know what your spiritual gift is, let's find a place for you to do that. We're gifted to serve. So, what's your spiritual gift, and how are you using it here at Grace? Let's find out together.

Would you please pray with me?

Heavenly Father, we thank You for who You are. We thank You that we are able to gather together as a community to worship, to learn, to pray. God, we pray that our local expression of the body of Christ would be whole; that we would be able to love and serve and care for one another in this community; that this would be a body that represents you here on earth in such a way that others would see it and want to know You more.

God, we pray that we would be the men and the women You've called us to be; that we would become more and more like You in all of life. Father, we pray that You would guide us. Help us to see how we've been gifted by You and how You might be calling us to serve each other.

We pray these things in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.