

1 Corinthians
Chapter 12:1-11

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Today we're starting a brand new sermon series today called *Dear Church*, looking at the Book of 1 Corinthians. Okay, that's a joke, but since it's been a minute, let me do a brief recap of the series so far.

- At the beginning of the letter, in chapters 1-4, Paul addresses one giant problem: division in the church. People are NOT getting along.
- Then, in chapters 5-6, a transition happens. In chapter 5, Paul switches from talking about a specific issue (division) to addressing *reports* he is hearing of things happening in the Corinthian church (see 5:1, "it is actually reported..."). Paul addresses reports he's hearing about cases of incest, lawsuits, sexual immorality in the church, that he must respond to with pastoral care.
- Finally, from chapter 7 to the end, Paul makes another change. "Now for the matters you wrote about..." (7:1). In these chapters, Paul responds to things the Corinthians have written to him in a letter. Each issue has the potential to bring about more division.

Our journey today begins in 1 Corinthians 12 with questions they had about gifts of the Spirit. But first, a story. Back in 2022, I wanted to visit a bookstore downtown that was housed in a Greek Orthodox Church. I was curious what they carried, what were the similarities to and differences from bookstores I was used to. So a friend and I went downtown to St. Seraphim of Sarov bookstore. We walked up to the door and knocked. After a few long moments, suddenly a woman appeared. She opened the mail slot near the bottom of the door, peaked through and asked who we were and what we were there for. We told her we were there for the books. After realizing we weren't thieves, she unlocked the door and we started chatting in the doorway. When I got my first look at her, I was surprised. She was olive skinned, had braided hair—and was wearing her pajamas.

She opened the door and, naturally, we followed her in. She led us into the sanctuary of the Orthodox church and made us tea. After that, we finally made it into the bookstore and were able to peruse the shelves. As we looked at the books, I asked her questions.

"What books would you recommend?" She said she didn't really read anything.

"Ok, I'm interested in this one. How do I check out?" She said she didn't know how to work the cash register. "I'm a *savant idiot*" she said.

"A *what*?"

"A *savant idiot*. It's basically the term for a person who is really smart in one area of their life but struggles in others. That's why I can't do the cash register. They tried and tried with me, but I can't ever remember what to do."

"Ooooookay...so what are you a *savant* at?"

"Well, I'm REALLY good at languages."

"REALLY?!"

"Yeah, test me."

"Ok, do Spanish." And she spoke in Spanish.

“Ok, everyone knows Spanish. Do Russian.” And then she talked in Russian.

“Ok, do Swahili.” And then she spoke in Swahili.

“Ok, do Mandarin.” And she mandarin-ed!

I’m wondering, “WHO IS THIS LADY?”

Come to find out, her name was Marianne. She lived in the church/bookstore/house with others—in *purity*— she made sure to emphasize, and out of a common purse.

“Have you always been Greek Orthodox?” I asked her. That’s when she told me her story. She said she didn’t grow up Christian or Greek Orthodox. She was a convert. She was spiritual, but not religious. But during a stay in Greece as she was traveling around the world (of course), she ended up with a really bad burn on her leg due to an incident with a motorcycle. She was taken to the hospital where she was told her leg needed to be amputated. She wasn’t having that, so she left. She found her way to a café, sat down, and tried to figure out what to do.

She was then approached by a little girl. She couldn’t speak Greek, but she was able to make out enough from the little girl to know that the girl was telling her to board the bus and take it to the monastery outside of town. So, she did (of course).

At the monastery, she was taken in by a group of nuns (of course). She couldn’t really make out what they were saying, but she figured out that they were giving her a place to stay. Fresh clothes. Food. Water. A cell to sleep in. That evening they came into to her cell and began praying for her leg. Praying for it to heal. They told her to pray. SHE asked for healing. They stormed heaven with their intercession. The next morning, her leg was healed. Through these nuns, God moved and built his church.

When you hear a story like that, don’t you somewhere inside want to be able to experience the work of God like that? Not only for yourself or to be a witness, but wouldn’t it be so cool to be like the nuns? To have God working through you like the Spirit worked through them?

I wrestled with this story, though. I had all kinds of questions:

- *Did what she said really happen? She had to be lying, right? Did she slip something in our tea?*
- *Wait—am I too cynical? Skeptical? Fearful of what I don’t know? Don’t quite understand?*
- *Okay, I know the Scriptures talk about this kind of thing. Why don’t I experience this in my own life? I hear stories like this a lot; why won’t God repeat them in my day? How do I live life empowered by the Spirit of God like that? Do I not have enough faith?*

A couple weeks ago, our staff had a staff meeting with a focus on prayer. We worshipped and prayed. Towards the end of our time, Dan led our whole staff through praying Scripture, choosing Scriptures that related to the Holy Spirit.

We read Genesis 1:1-2, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” And just as the Spirit was hovering over the emptiness before creation, we prayed for the life-creating movement of the Spirit in our lives. “Holy Spirit, like you created and shaped life *then*, bring and create life *now*!” From this moment, I was hooked.

Next we read Acts 1:4, “On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.’” This was the promise of the Holy Spirit that Jesus gave his disciples. We prayed, putting ourselves in the shoes of the disciples, asking God, “Lord, give us more of your Spirit. You promised him to us. Help us to see him. Walk with him. Love him. Be moved by him.” This was getting good.

Then we read, in John 20, after Jesus’ resurrection, the disciples were huddled in a room in fear. “They killed Jesus! They might kill us too!” Jesus suddenly came to them. “(He) said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” And I thought, “Wow. Ok, I’m intrigued. This is Jesus giving us his Spirit.” We prayed, “Lord, we want more of your Spirit in our lives, breathe Him on us like you did then.” At this point, I hoped for more.

Finally, Dan shared John 14:26, “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” Here too, we prayed, “Lord, help us to do ministry in the power of your Spirit. Not with our own strength or our own ingenuity or our own wisdom or our own strategy, but in the strength and by the guiding of your Spirit.”

Afterwards, I walked up to Dan and said, “Thank you for leading us through this! It was so powerful! You did a great job leading this. It was a really moving time.” We talked, read, and prayed Scriptures that showed us (1) the life-creating movement of the Holy Spirit; (2) that the Spirit was promised to each of us; (3) that Jesus gives us his Holy Spirit; and (4) that as Jesus’ disciples, we are to do what Jesus did, in the *power* of the Spirit.

This means that just as the Holy Spirit created life back in creation, the Holy Spirit is creating new life and is crafting new creation today. It means that the Holy Spirit is promised to YOU, and that, in baptism, the Holy Spirit is given to YOU, and that as Jesus’ disciple, God wants to send YOU out to do ministry in the power of his Spirit to bring new life to people and places in this world! *Do you believe that? Don’t you want that?*

Here’s the reality: God wants you to WALK IN what he’s BREATHED IN to your life.

This is the core of 1 Corinthians 12. Look at verse 1: “Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters...” The first thing to note is that the phrase “gifts of the Spirit” is a bit of a misnomer. There’s actually only one word for that phrase “gifts of the Spirit” here. That word is the Greek word “*pneumatikōn*” and it means “empowered by the Spirit.” “Pneuma” is the Greek word for spirit, wind, or breath. Some of you tool people have a *pneumatic drill* in your garage—a drill that’s powered by what? Air. That’s what Paul is talking about here. He’s addressing the Corinthians as *pneumatikon*, as people who have and are empowered by the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 5:18, Paul says, “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” What’s the word picture here? Drinking! Paul’s saying, “You know how when you’re intoxicated it makes you think differently, act differently, move differently? That’s how it should be with the Holy Spirit.”

Question: what *powers* your life? What *moves you* throughout your day? Paul wants you to be *pneumatikon* like Phillip, a disciple of Jesus. Phillip was told to take a trip. He did. On that trip, he encountered a prominent Ethiopian eunuch who was the treasurer to the *queen* of Ethiopia. So, this guy is an important person. The eunuch had been worshipping in Jerusalem and was returning home, reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Bible tells us that the Spirit said to Phillip, “Go over and talk to him.” So Phillip did. He asked the eunuch, “What are you reading?” The eunuch was having trouble with the passage in Isaiah that says, “He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of

his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.”

The eunuch asked, “Who is this about?” And Phillip is like, “Jackpot!” He told the eunuch about Jesus, baptized him, and went on his merry way. Actually, verse 39 tells us that, “When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.”

I WANT that kind of life. I want to be so close to God, to the Holy Spirit, that when he says take a journey, I go. And when he says, talk to this person, I talk. And when he says come on, time to go, I go. *Don't you want that too?*

That's the picture, my friends. We win when we're in step with the Holy Spirit. When he's guiding and directing our steps. **God wants you to WALK IN what he's BREATHED IN to your life.** But, hey, I get it. Maybe you still have questions. Even the Corinthians had questions. And to those questions, Paul has a response. Look at how he goes on. He does not want them to be **uninformed** about how the Holy Spirit works. That word “uninformed” *can* connote **ignorance**, which means that sometimes our questions spawn out of our head but sometimes they generate from our hearts.

I grew up with a lot of skepticism in my heart towards the Holy Spirit. Not because that's what my parents or really anyone explicitly taught me, but because I didn't know. That's just what happened. A lot of us are like that because we hear crazy stories of a person with no arm and then some televangelist prays for them and **shrieking** out grows the arm! But we see stuff like that and we're like, *really?* Like you just had that thing stuffed up in there, didn't you?

We don't do that here. If you want healed here, just see me after church and I'll let you buy a Dan Hamel hanky. Kidding!

This ignorance for me went all the way into college. I remember in college going to a church service at a friend's church up in Akron, Ohio. We had another friend with us who ran track for our school who had broken his ankle. After the service, we were trying to get out of church to get some food. We had skipped dinner because of the drive from Cincinnati to Akron. As we exited, we were stopped by a guy who wanted to pray for my friend's ankle to bring healing to it. So, the guy started praying, “Lord, heal this boy's ankle. Lord, bring these bones together...” I'm not proud of this, but lowkey, in MY heart, I was like, “Ugh. It's late. I'm hungry...I don't want his foot to be healed.” It was like anti-prayer. The prayer ended. Nothing happened. Do I think it was my fault and that somehow I hindered God? No. Of course not! But, sorry pal.

So, the Corinthians had **ignorance** about “gifts of the Spirit” in their minds and hearts. Look at the next couple verses:

Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:1-3)

Paul wanted the Corinthian Christians to remember that their past of pagan idolatry did not prepare them for an accurate understanding of spiritual gifts. He did not want them to be ignorant, but because they were Gentiles, they came to the issue of spiritual gifts as ill-informed. For **SOME** of them, it was an ignorance of the mind thing: *How does this work? What kinds of things does the Holy Spirit gift us with? How do I know what is of the Holy Spirit and what is not?* For **OTHERS** in Corinth, it was a heart thing: *Oh, I know all about this already, no need to learn more. Are other people's gifts really of use? Are*

THOSE gifts really that important? Look, no offense but I can speak in tongues, so OBVIOUSLY my gift is most important.

What is it for you? What's holding you back? Lack of information? Is it truly a mind thing? What is it in your heart? Is there fear? Insecurity? Simply pure dismissiveness? What is it?

God wants you to WALK IN what he's BREATHED IN to your life.

Paul goes on. "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work" (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). Paul's like, "There's ALL kinds of ways the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are moving and working in our world. And there's ALL kinds of gifts they're going to hand out."

Here's the reality: "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given *for the common good*" (1 Corinthians 12:7). Question: to whom does Paul say a "manifestation of the Spirit" has been given? To each one. Right!

Jump down with me to verse 11. Paul says, "All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines." Question: to whom does Paul say that the Holy Spirit distributes gifts to? To each one. Correct!

So, there's ALL kinds of ways the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are moving and working in our world, and there's ALL kinds of gifts they're going to hand out, and they're giving those gifts to ALL kinds of different people. Why? For the common good. For the good of the church. For the good of your neighbor. For the good of THIS church. For the glory of God. Earlier, Paul said that the Corinthians were converted from their pagan ways where they followed "mute idols." What is a mute idol? When something's mute, what's the issue? It doesn't talk. What's an idol? Something that doesn't move. Do we worship a mute God? Do we sing about an idol? We know the answer.

But let me tell you this: when you do not walk in what the Spirit of God has breathed into your life, for all intents and purposes, to the outside world, God may as well be mute and inactive. Why? Because, for whatever reason, God has chosen to bring his good purposes through his church. The Holy Spirit determines WHO to give the gift to, WHAT the gift should be, WHEN it should be given, and for whatever reason he wants. Why? Because our God is on the move.

Ask yourself: Am I going to let the world get by thinking God is mute? Thinking God's gone idle?

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What are some examples of gifts of the Spirit? Look at verses 8-10. In our passage, Paul lists out these gifts: message of wisdom, message of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in tongues, and the interpretation of tongues.

In other places in the New Testament, *later* in 1 Corinthians 12, in Romans 12, in Ephesians 4, we see other gifts mentioned. Gifts such as serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, showing mercy, helping, administration, evangelizing, shepherding, etc.

Obviously, we can get hung up on some gifts feeling more "supernatural" than others. But that's not the point. The point is that the Holy Spirit has gifted each one of us with a gift that he intends for us to use to

exalt Jesus, build up his church, and love the people around us. So, what has the Holy Spirit given you to walk in?

When I think about my *own* spiritual gifting, one of the last things I think I would have thought about, as being one of my gifts is preaching or teaching. When I was growing up, I never wanted to speak in front of people like this. My dad would always make me do it as a kid. He'd guilt me into it (if you don't do it someone might end up in hell. Kidding!). But seriously, I'm too nasal-y (where it sounds like I talk out of my nose sometimes), too lisp-y (I think the tech team uses a de-"s"-er actually!), and I kid you not, when I take the StrengthFinder test, you know what my lowest strength is? Communication! It's like *IS* this a gift of the Spirit? *SHOULD* I be preaching?

And then I get emails (I love you all so much, seriously) from you guys in which you tell me how God used whatever came out of my mouth (or nose) and touched you. I don't share any of that to pat myself on the back or to say, "Look at me," or to showcase insecurity. I share it that because I know that God wants to use us even sometimes despite ourselves to build up one another, exalt Jesus, and love others.

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I recently read an article about Michael Nicholson (view online sermon to see photo), a 71-year-old man who has earned 29 degrees and is now working on his 30th. Nicholson has one bachelor's degree, two associate's degrees, 22 master's degrees, three specialist degrees and one doctoral degree. And he wants more. His wife said of him, "He likes going to school and doesn't want responsibility" Hilarious. She goes on, "This is what Mike lives for."

What does Mike live for? Learning and never doing. All talk, no action. Dumb. Sorry, Mike. My friends, despite what you've heard, DON'T BE LIKE MIKE! Be like Mary instead. I heard Mary Oliver say once, "May I be the tiniest nail in the house of the universe, tiny but useful." That's all I want. I want to be like this nail. I want to be a partner with God, even if in some small way, to build his kingdom. To build his church. To love other people. To bring renewal to our city.

God wants you to WALK IN what he's BREATHED IN to your life.

That's what Paul tells the Corinthians. "Yeah, I know you've got different viewpoints and different states of heart on this stuff, and I know you don't get along, but just as the Holy Spirit created life back in creation, the Holy Spirit is creating new life and is crafting new creation today, and as Jesus' disciple, God wants to send YOU to OUT to do ministry in the power of His Spirit to bring new life to people and places in this world!