

No DIG this week

Good morning everyone! Once again I want to warmly welcome you to North Shore Alliance Church; my name is Mark and I am one of the pastors here. All week I've been looking forward to our being together, to singing songs of praise to the Lord, to submitting our lives to His Word...and here we are.

If you are discouraged this morning, may the Lord speak a word of encouragement to you. If you find yourself anxious and afraid, may the Lord reveal Himself as strong and mighty to save. And if you are a little too comfortable, if your life is on auto-pilot, may the Lord shake the ground of your life and re-direct your attention to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

Last week I talked about the role of the Holy Spirit in our pursuit of Intimacy with God; specifically, I talked about what the Holy Spirit produces within us. When you give your life to Jesus, **your life** becomes **His home**. Jesus indwells us by the Holy Spirit.

If you remember, I likened this partnership to a three-legged-race. The Holy Spirit binds us to the life of Jesus: our legs are cinched tight, and we are invited to get in sync with the rhythms of His life, His movements, and His priorities. And as we do, as we keep in step with the Spirit, the character qualities of Jesus begin to flower in our lives...things like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

This morning, I want to keep the spotlight on the Holy Spirit, and seek to outline another aspect of His work that has everything to do with intimacy with God. But to begin, let me direct your attention to Jesus, and the unique relationship He had with the Holy Spirit.

If you have your Bibles, you can turn with me to Mark 1, starting at verse 4 (page 1552 in the Blue Bibles). We're told that John was out in the desert, and the whole Judean countryside went out to be baptized by him. The people flocked to John but he pointed away from himself to the One who was coming.

And we read, *“this was his message: ‘After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’ 9 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.”*

This event ties back to a prayer that was prayed 700 years before Jesus was born. Isaiah the prophet, in the last of his great laments, offered up the following prayer in chapter 64:1, *“Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down”*. The prayer of Isaiah was answered in the coming of Jesus; God became flesh and made His dwelling among us. And here, in Mark 1:10, the heavens were torn open and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus.

The One who would later baptize with the Holy Spirit was Himself baptized (or filled) with the Spirit.

We're told in Acts 2:33 that when Jesus ascended to the right hand of God, the heavens opened again and this time the Spirit did not descend on the One, but on the many.¹ The prophecy of Joel 2 had come to pass: the Spirit was poured out on all who had aligned themselves to God, through Jesus Christ.² If you have given your life to Jesus, **your life** has become **His home**; the Holy Spirit lives within you...*the same Spirit that descended upon Jesus.*

This morning, I want to focus our attention on one specific work of the Spirit, something we see at play in the baptism of Jesus...the Spirit anoints us with both power and gifts for ministry.

If we only define intimacy with God in terms of rest, reclining, or receiving in His presence then we end up with a one-dimensional intimacy. The intimacy that marked Jesus' life with God the Father included all kinds of action. In John 5:17, Jesus said, "*My Father is always working, and so am I.*"³

But friends, Jesus did not participate in His Father's work until He had been anointed with power from on high. At His baptism, the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus, and we, like Him, have been filled with the Spirit that we might participate in the work of God.

If your Bibles are still open, please turn with me to 1 Corinthians 12; I will be reading from vs. 4-20 (page 1785). As you are turning there, allow me to spend a few moments laying out the context.

As I said last week, whenever we read the letters of Paul, we need to remember that these are letters. Paul wrote to particular people, in a particular place, with particular questions and issues. While 1 Corinthians 12 does give us some instruction, much of it comes in the way of correction; Paul is actively addressing problems within the church.⁴

The Corinthian church had a high opinion of themselves; they thought of themselves as being very "spiritual" people. They were so "spiritual" that they treated the physical (*or material*) side of life as second class. And so, the way they treated one another, what they ate or drank, or the way they conducted themselves sexually became unimportant. As far as they were concerned, they were already like the angels.⁵ They were attracted to the supernatural work of God in their midst but despised the more mundane.

It was to these concerns, and others, that Paul directed his writing. He wanted His people to know that life with God cannot be disconnected from life with one another. The Holy Spirit does not

¹ Acts 2:33, "*Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.*"

² Joel 2:28-29.

³ New Living Translation.

⁴ Gordon Fee, *The Holy Spirit In Pauline Literature*, 55 (Class Notes).

⁵ Gordon D. Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle To The Corinthians*, 573.

lead us into an other-worldly, individualistic, experience of God. True intimacy with God is caught up in how we honour God with our bodies, and how we live in relationship with one another.

Let me encourage you to follow along as I read:

4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

12 Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. 14 Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

15 Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do

not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

In the interest of time, I want to take verse 7 and use it as a framework for understanding Paul’s teaching on the gifts of the Spirit. This verse answers the *what*, the *who*, and the *why* questions. Paul writes, “*Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.*”

What has been given? The manifestation, or, the gifts of the Spirit have been given. **Why does the Spirit give these gifts?** For the common good...so that we might become like Jesus, and so that the world might be drawn to Jesus. **To whom does the Spirit give these gifts?** To each one who belongs to Jesus.

Let’s begin with what has been given.

1. Q: What does the Spirit give? A: His gifts.

Paul goes back and forth between using the words “spiritual gifts” in vs. 1, and referring to these gifts as manifestations of the Spirit in vs. 7. In this context, when Paul uses the word “manifestation,” he is talking about the tangible evidence of the Holy Spirit’s activity. Spiritual gifts point beyond the person to *reveal the Holy Spirit’s presence, power, and purpose.*

Now, it's important to understand that Paul hasn't given us, or the Corinthians, an exhaustive list of spiritual gifts. In verses 8-10, Paul names 9 different gifts, but he adds 3 more in vs. 28, and in Romans 12:6-8, he presents a very different list with 5 new gifts mentioned. What we have in 1 Cor. 12:8-10 is a representation of the Spirit's activity, not a comprehensive picture of all that He does in and through His people.

Illus: Before I give a brief description of these different gifts, I want to pause in order to reset our expectations around this word "gift". When someone buys a birthday gift and then gives it to you, a transfer of ownership takes place; you are now the proud owner of this new gift. If the giver were to come back in 3 months and ask for it back, the request would be seen as absurd and more than a little inappropriate; the gift belongs to you, to do with it as you please.

Can the same be said for the gifts the Spirit gives? Do we take what He gives and stamp the word "mine" across it? The Greek word that is translated as "gift" is the word "*charismata*," which could also be translated "grace". When we keep in step with the Spirit, He works within us, and His activity through us is what we call a "spiritual gift". The fact that He works through us at all is *charismata*...it's grace, it is undeserved favour from God.

In John 15:15, Jesus said, "*I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.*" Not only do we have inside information, we invited to join in God's work. While the Holy Spirit gives gifts, we are managers, not owners...we put His gifts to good use in order to serve.

Let's take a brief look at the gifts Paul outlines in vs. 8-10:

- The first two, *the message of wisdom* and *the message of knowledge* are likely linked. This isn't so much a gift to dispense wise advice in a particular context, though that could be a result of the Spirit's activity in your life. Instead, these two probably refer to a message, given by the Spirit, that is revelatory in nature.

Illus: I can remember, many years ago, being a part of a prayer ministry team in which we were praying for an individual's freedom and deliverance. We took some time in silence to ask God to guide our praying for this man, and soon after God brought a specific picture to my mind. It was a picture that reminded me of the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

The Father was running to embrace this man (His long lost son), but the son refused the embrace. Instead of being enveloped by the big, strong arms of the Father, this man was on his knees with his arms wrapped tight around the Father's legs. The Father kept trying to get this man to His feet so that he could embrace him as a son, but no matter how hard He tried, the man wouldn't let go of the Father's legs. This man's head was downcast and he was filled with shame and self-loathing.

When I shared the picture with the team, the man broke down...this was the single greatest issue in his life. He saw himself as completely unworthy to receive the Father's love. In that context, the Holy Spirit had given me a message of knowledge, and as we prayed for this man, God broke the man's shame and self-loathing...he was set free.

- Next, Paul mentions the gift of *faith*. He's not referring to saving faith, the faith that confesses Jesus as our forgiver and Leader. Instead, he is referring to a supernatural conviction that God will reveal his power or mercy in a special way in a specific instance.⁶ Every person, every church, every leadership team needs this gift in operation around them. When things are going from bad to worse, we need people with the gift of faith to remind us that God is living and active, that He is strong enough, that nothing is impossible for God.
- Next, *the gifts of healing*. When the Holy Spirit gives gifts of healing to individuals, often He pairs this gift with the gift of faith. Again, it's important to note that healing, like all the other gifts, are the Spirit's activity in and through us. In other words, God is the one doing the healing, not the person. But these people often have a keen sense that God wants to heal certain people in specific situations, and so they pray for healing.
- Next Paul mentions *miraculous powers*. Now certainly healing belongs in this category but this likely refers to other miraculous signs of the Spirit's presence.
- *Prophecy*: In the Old Testament, the prophet was a person who had been called by God, filled with the Holy Spirit, and set apart to be God's spokesperson. But after Jesus was exalted, the Holy Spirit was poured out on every person who had given their life to Jesus.

And so, in some sense, the gift of prophecy is available to all of us: because of the indwelling Spirit, all of us can hear the voice of God.

But as you trace Paul's descriptions about prophecy through chapter 13 and 14, it becomes clear that he understood prophecy as a spontaneous message, inspired by the Spirit, for the purpose of building up the Christian community.

- *distinguishing between spirits*: could refer to the ability to discern whether or not a particular spirit is from God or the evil one. I know people who can walk into a room and have either a strong sense of the Lord's presence, or, experience a strong sense of the darkness or evil that is present.
- The last two, like the first two, are also paired: *the gift of tongues* and the *gift of interpretation*. Clearly, Paul saw the gift of tongues as being a Spirit-inspired-language. As you read through the book of Acts, at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended on believers and they began to supernaturally speak the good news concerning Jesus in foreign languages. However, 1 Corinthians 13:1 seems to indicated that the gift of tongues can also include a heavenly language, a prayer language .

As you read through 1 Cor. 12-14, you will see that the Corinthians were really excited about this gift, and Paul was trying to contain their enthusiasm. Paul understood the gift of tongues as being largely unintelligible to both the one speaking and the ones listening...it was Spirit-inspired speech understood only by God (unless there is interpretation). And so, Paul's conclusion on the matter was, unless there is interpretation, speaking in tongues is something that is better used in your private prayer closet because no one else can understand what it is you are praying.

⁶ Gordon Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle To The Corinthians*, 593.

And that brings us to our second question:

2. Q: *Why does the Spirit give these gifts?* A: *For the common good!*

In verses 12-20, Paul uses the analogy of a physical body to make a point about the work of the Spirit within the church. He says that though there are many different gifts, there is only one Spirit. And while there are many different body parts, there is ultimately only one body. And this **one Spirit** has given **many gifts** to **one body** (a local church) so that the church may be strengthened.⁷

The Bible makes it clear again and again that none of us exist for ourselves; we've been made by God, for God and for one another. Romans 12:5 says, "*in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*"

If you have given your life to Jesus, the Holy Spirit now lives within you, but, none of us are complete apart from the rest of the body. The great theologian Rocky Balboa, in speaking about Adrian, once put it like this: *she's got gaps, I got gaps, together we fill gaps*". The Bible tells us that together we are the body of Christ, together we are the bride of Christ, together we are a temple, filled with His presence. When we gather together, when we intentionally connect our lives to each other, there is nothing we lack in the Spirit.

Intimacy with God is not primarily about a private faith or a private encounter, leading to private devotion; there is a communal aspect to

our intimacy. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are for the building up of the community, not primarily for the benefit of the individual.

Once we understand this, it makes sense for 1 Corinthians 13 to follow 1 Corinthians 12. In chapter 13 Paul talks about the true nature of love: *love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.* The gifts of the Spirit are expressions of God's love for us, and become our expression of love for one another simply because we employ these gifts to build one another up.

I may be hurting and discouraged but your *gift of mercy*, your coming along side becomes the thing that reminds me that God is both loving, and near. You might be confused, and unsure about the choice in front of you, but the gift of *wisdom or prophecy* residing in Dave might be the key to unlocking the direction God wants you to pursue. Do you see how this works?

I might need the gift of faith that the Spirit is working through you, you might need the gift of healing that He is working through someone else. We need each other! We do not experience all that God has for us on our own; the Spirit of God is present and active among and through His people.

And that leads me to the last question:

⁷ 1 Corinthians 14:26; c.f. Ephesians 4:11-13.

3. Q: To whom does the Spirit give these gifts? A: To everyone who belongs to Jesus.

God is the Greatest Giver I've ever encountered. Not only because He is generous (and He is), but because He gives the best gifts. The gifts He gives flow from His intimate knowledge of our lives. When it comes to God, He never runs out of gifts, and every one of us is included on His list.

Have you ever received a gift from someone that ended up being a dud? As a kid, I received my fair share of socks and underwear at Christmas; intensely practical but hardly engaging. God doesn't give dud gifts; He knows what will fit us best.

In vs. 11 and 18, Paul says something worth pondering. He reminds us that the Holy Spirit has sovereignly handed out His gifts; God has intentionally arranged us, and our gifts according to His plans. God "*knows*" you inside and out, He made you, and He has given you gifts that fit you, that fit your unique personality and experiences. Do you know what the Spirit wants to do through you? Do you know what gifts He wants to release through you to bless others?

God's "*knowing*" goes beyond what He knows of us to what He "*knows*" about any one particular body of Christ. He knows what each church needs: you are a gift to this community, and your presence, your gifts are necessary for this church to become all that God intends. We have everything we need to fulfill the destiny God has written over our church. The One who saved us, is the one who has gifted us, and gathered us together, and He knows what He's doing.

But God's "*knowing*" goes deeper still; He "*knows*" the purposes He is working out on the North Shore, within B.C., within Canada, and throughout the world. And He is arranging individual people (along with their gifts) within specific churches, within specific cities, and within specific countries so that His body (the church) might be built up, and so that the surrounding world might be drawn to Jesus.

A part of my vision for this church, is a vision of a people fully alive to the Spirit of God...people who know how to hear His voice, keep in step with His leading, and are willing to be used in His work. God's best is still ahead of us as a church. I'm convinced there is a deeper work He wants to release in our midst, there are new gifts for us to discover, new activity that will lead our maturity, and a new power to share the good news of Jesus that will result in lives being saved.

Now is not the time for any of us to sit on the sidelines, now is the time to pursue intimacy with God. Now is the time to say "yes" to the Spirit's leading, to keep in step with the character qualities of Jesus, to ask for new gifts, to expect His activity in and through our lives. Is it just me, or do you sense that God is doing something new in our midst...something new in us? Now is the time friends.

In a few minutes I'm going to pray for the Holy Spirit to anoint us with His gifts and His power. But before I do, we're going to take some time to worship the Lord in song. Let's praise Him as the Great Gift Giver...His greatest gift is the gift of Himself (Jesus, the Spirit)

Prayer

Come to Prayer on Thursday night.