

Pastor Gretchen Barron



“Something for Everyone!”

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ²You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. ³Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says “Let Jesus be cursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit. ⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.”

When my daughter, Bethany, was almost 4 years old, she came home from daycare one day telling me all about Australia. I could hardly believe it. I didn't even know she could say the word, "Australia", little lone know anything about the country, its wildlife, it's climate! Well, immediately my motherly pride began to puff-up. As I listened to her talking I was thinking about the brilliance of this child, not quite four-years-old and already knowledgeable about foreign countries half-way around the globe. I couldn't help but think about what a brilliant child she was. So smart, so articulate, so gifted! For the next few weeks, Bethany kept bringing up the subject of Australia time after time and each time she talked about it, I marveled at her intelligence, her knowledge, her giftedness! I thought for sure I had a true prodigy on my hands!!!!

A week or two later, I had to make an urgent trip to her daycare center to take her a stuffed bunny that we had forgotten that morning, something quite necessary for a four-year-old at naptime. Before going in the classroom, I paused to look through the one-way window in the hallway. And there I saw my beautiful, creative, imaginative, brilliant daughter standing in the corner of the room. Well, she was half standing, half

doing gymnastics with her head on the little chair by her side, and she was looking totally bored. The little chair was the only piece of furniture in that corner of the otherwise brightly decorated room. But above the chair was a sign and a map and some pictures that I had never noticed before. In bold letters, the word, "Australia" was spelled out.

Ah-ha!!!! Australia! That must be it. That must be how Bethany learned so much about Australia! Just then, one of the teachers from another room walked down the hall behind me. I turned to ask her about the little corner of the room labeled "Australia". She looked through the window, and at Bethany, and said, "Oh yes", Australia. That's the time-out corner"!

It was indeed a humbling moment! My puffed-up parental pride bubble immediately collapsed. As it turned out, Bethany knew a lot about Australia because she spent a great deal of time there in recent weeks. She was familiar with Australia in more ways than I even wanted to know!

Giftedness! We focus a lot on giftedness in our society. We see and experience the

gifts and the talents of other people – the gifted musician or athlete or politician or entrepreneur. We look for talents and giftedness in our children – early signs of giftedness – academic, athletic, artistic, musical, intellectual – evidence that they will be unique and exceptional in some way. Then we tell our friends: “He’s on the computer for hours at a time! I just know he’s going to be the next Bill Gates.” Or, “You should see her on the soccer field! One goal after another, She’s the next Maya Hamm for sure!” We can’t help ourselves; we’re all talent scouts. The popularity of television shows like “America’s Got Talent” and “The Voice” capitalize on our notion that we can recognize true talent and gifts when we are confronted with them.

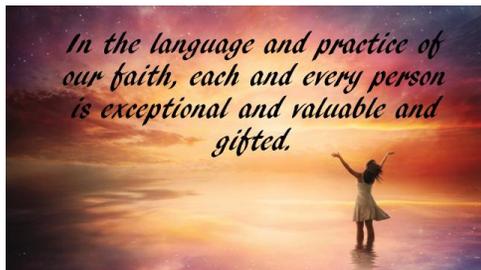
And so this morning, as we come to worship and give some thought to spiritual gifts, the idea of giftedness is hardly unfamiliar to us. Only... there is a difference. When we speak of spiritual gifts there is a difference.



According to the New Testament scriptures and specifically the writings of Paul, every Christian – every one of

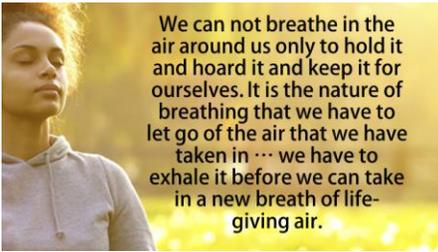
us here this morning in this sanctuary – has at least one spiritual gift, probably more, that have been given to us by God. Look around this morning – look to your left and to your

right, look in front of you. I even give you permission to turn around and look behind you. And now look down at your own hands. Each one here this morning has been gifted by the Holy Spirit. When It comes to Spiritual gifts, there truly is something for everyone! Perhaps you have a pretty good idea what your gifts might be – perhaps they are yet waiting to be discovered. But



rest assured, YOU have been gifted by the Holy Spirit. In the language and practice of our faith, each and every person is exceptional and valuable and gifted.

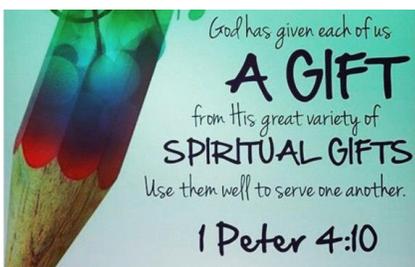
But unlike the giftedness that is valued in society, the purpose of Spiritual Gifts are not to set individuals apart, not to grant celebrity status on a few talented people. Rather the gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to build up the community of God, the church. This is such an important point to remember when thinking about Spiritual Gifts. In this morning's scripture we read, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (Vs. 7). The very reason we are given Spiritual Gifts is to use them in service to the church and for the Kingdom of God. Think about breathing for a second --



take a deep breath, breath it in ... and now, let it go, exhale it. The thing about breathing is that we can't breathe in the air around us only to hold it and hoard it and keep it for

ourselves. It is the very nature of breathing that we have to let go of the air that we've taken in, we have to exhale it before we can take in a new breath of life-giving air. Think about that for a moment ... You can't breathe in your next breath, the very thing that maintains your life, until you let go of the air that is already in your lungs, until you exhale. Living then, depends not only upon being able to take in new air, but to also use up the air that we've already inhaled.

This is the way it is with the God's Spirit. In fact, we shouldn't even think of Spiritual Gifts as being given to us. In reality, Spiritual Gifts are given *through* us. They are not ours to keep, but ours to use, ours to share, ours to give to others. We read in 1



Peter, "God has given each of us a gift from His great variety of Spiritual Gifts. Use them well to serve one another." (1 Peter 4:10). People who use their gifts in the

church are known not for how much better they are at something, but for how much

good they do using the gifts that God has given them.

While in our culture we look for talent and giftedness in the young, often to the exclusion of other age groups, with spiritual gifts no age group is overlooked; no person is ignored, regardless of age or ability or education or social standing. One of the most exciting and unique aspects of the church is that it is a place where people of all ages and all generations come together to discover and use gifts they never knew they had and to share in ministry together.

Perhaps most importantly, when exploring Spiritual Gifts, is the fact that while human, or natural, talent begins with a recognition of an individual's ability, with attention being focused on him or her, spiritual gifts begin with Jesus Christ, with the gift focusing attention on God's goodness, God's power and grace, and God's love.

Now, it's important to understand the difference between talents and spiritual gifts. Sometimes we have a tendency to confuse the two. A talent is also a God-given ability but it's also something that we work hard at to develop. A person may be an excellent carpenter or painter or musician, all wonderful talents. But behind every

excellent carpenter, painter or musician, there are hours and years of developing that talent. God may have given them the talent, but it was their own hard work and initiative that developed that talent to the level that it is. Talents are not given the degree of emphasis in scripture that are given to Spiritual Gifts. Talents can certainly be used for the glory of God and in service to God and the church, but talents can also be used for our own benefit --- they enable us to make a living, they bring us great personal enjoyment and fulfillment, for some they bring great fame. Talents can be used in cooperation with our spiritual gifts. That excellent carpenter or painter or musician may also have the spiritual gift of teaching or mercy or administration. When someone uses their talents in conjunction with their spiritual gifts, their spiritual journey, as well as the wholeness of the Body of Christ, will benefit. Perhaps that excellent carpenter used her talent to teach others the valuable skill or to winterize the house of an elderly person. She would be using her natural talent while at the same time exercising the spiritual gift



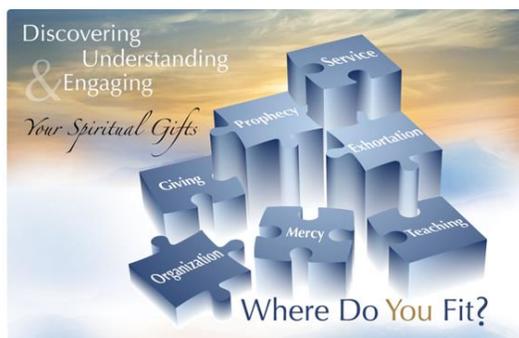
“Natural talent is what we do to accomplish something; a Spiritual gift is what God does through us to accomplish something.”

of teaching or mercy. Talents and Spiritual Gifts are not exclusive of each other. One way I’ve heard this explained is, “Natural talent is what we do to

accomplish something; a Spiritual gift is what God does through us to accomplish something.”

What then are the Spiritual Gifts?

Among the four lists of gifts that Paul identifies in the New Testament in his writings to the churches at Rome (Romans 12:6-8), Corinth (1 Corinthians 12:4-1 and 28) and Ephesus (Ephesians 4:11), he identifies at least twenty “charismata”, or gifts of grace, as the early church called them. Some of the gifts are mentioned in more than one list, and some are exclusive to only one. It is interesting to note, however, that in these passages, Paul always seems to mention the specific gifts last, after he has talked generally about the gifts given to all believers. Paul was painfully aware that the churches



needed to grasp that truly there are varieties of Gifts, not just a few and that everyone has been given at least one gift, very possibly more, and that

no gift is more important than another. Paul stresses the fact that all of the gifts work together, like pieces of a puzzle. The upper right hand corner piece is no more important than the one that is three rows up and four pieces over from the left. Each piece of the puzzle contributes equally to the whole and if even one piece is missing, the puzzle can never be complete.

There was no hierarchy of gifted people in the early church – everyone needed everyone else, the gifts were all given by the same God. Unity was the goal; ministry was the purpose.

In our passage this morning from 1 Corinthians, Paul mentions nine specific spiritual gifts. Listen for those gifts that may be your own. Don't eliminate a gift from consideration just because you've never used it. There is always the chance your spiritual gift is just waiting to be discovered. Just as importantly, think of people you know who have the other gifts. Consider the difference they make, and how special they are to this congregation and to the Body of Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul lists the gifts in three categories. In the first category are

the utterance of wisdom and the utterance of knowledge. They may sound the same to us, but they are different. The Corinthians, being Greeks, lovers of philosophy and learning, highly prized them both – and Paul would not disagree.

First, the gift of wisdom. More than just the benefit of age and experience, this spiritual gift is the special ability to apply spiritual truths to concrete situations in such a way that others recognize immediately that truth has been spoken. People with this gift tend to be quiet, yet when they speak, everyone listens to them. Remember that old advertising slogan? “When E.F. Hutton talks, everybody listens”? Well, when a person with the gift of wisdom speaks, everybody listens. They are probably very unaware of the high regard in which they are held. The person you would call first to help you deal with a burden weighing on your mind – that person very possibly has the gift of wisdom. Have you thought of someone you know who might have the gift of wisdom?

Just as important is the gift of knowledge. Knowledge is not merely knowing a lot of stuff. This spiritual gift is specifically about insight: insight into scripture, insight into people; insight into world events; insight into the church. Our congregation would come to a grinding halt were it not for people who have and utilize this spiritual gift! People

with the gift of knowledge combine understanding with alertness. They pay attention to both the details of their tasks as well as to the larger vision of the church. This would be the person we would call first about something important in the church's ministry when we need insight or answers. Can you think of someone you know who might have the gift of knowledge?

Paul continues with a second category, beginning with the gift of faith. Well now, isn't that a gift we should all have? True, we should all have and do all have faith. But the gift of faith belongs to those persons whose belief is incredibly strong. Think about the people you know who are faith-filled, who remind us why it is we believed in the first place. They may not always use religious language. But when it is needed, they can call to mind a particular scripture, no doubt one that has served to strengthen them in times of doubt or trial. The person we would call first in our own time of doubt and trial – this person very likely has the spiritual gift of faith.

Next is healing. Who comes to mind when you think of this spiritual gift? No doubt it is a person of prayer, for whether or not the healing you desired occurred, the individual with this gift was for you an instrument of grace and God's own healing.

Jesus was known as the great physician; how often it is his face we see in the face of these gifted people. When we think of whom we would call, or whom we have called, when we are hurting, when we are sick, when we are frightened – this is the person with the spiritual gift of healing.

The working of miracles is next. Not that the one with this gift can turn water into wine or miraculously heal the afflicted! The truth is that the spectacular things this person accomplishes seem so only in retrospect. When you think of the person who gets things done – this is one who probably has the gift of miracle-working. Who do you know who might have the spiritual gift of miracle-working?

Next, is the gift of prophecy. People with this gift are those who believe in the church and believe that the church is where God's word is proclaimed. Prophets today don't look like the Biblical prophets we often think of. Wild-haired, ragged men shouting out in the wilderness the gloom and doom that will befall human kind if they don't get their act together. Modern-day prophets stand up and speak out for justice and equality in their workplaces, at school meetings or in whatever setting they find themselves. They feel passionately that the truth of God's love and grace and justice is burning inside them

and it needs to be expressed. God uses passionate people to do this, people whose convictions and courage reflect Christ's. The person who comes to mind here, the person you would want on your side – he or she probably has the gift of prophecy.

To another, Paul says, is given the gift of discernment – the ability to distinguish truth from falsehood in order that the church may stay true to its course, and in order that the members of the church might grow in their faith. The person with this gift is known by their honesty and open-mindedness and grounded-ness. The person who comes to mind here, the person you would call when you need a second opinion about the direction of your life or the direction of the church's life – this person perhaps has the gift of discernment.

Two other spiritual gifts are mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians. Often known as the “ecstatic gifts,” they are speaking in tongues and the interpretation of tongues. These gifts deserve their own sermon! They are not easily understood by most of in mainstream Christianity. Let me just say that while speaking in tongues may not be part of our own tradition, we should also not dismiss what we don't understand. Remember, in the final analysis, all the spiritual gifts are mysterious. They are all more divine than human. We

may not think of ourselves as charismatic, yet – according to the scriptures – when we use our gifts, charismatic is exactly what we are.

Did you hear your spiritual gift in the list? Maybe someone else heard it for you. I wonder what would happen if we all claimed and used the spiritual gifts that God has given us? What would happen if we made a point of identifying those gifts in each other? How would we change? How would our congregation change? How would our ministry increase? How would our vision grow? What difference might this make not only in this congregation but in this community, in this country, in this world? We'll never know until we we discover and begin to explore the ways that God can, and will, use our gifts.

Now, last week, those of you in attendance were given a spiritual gifts inventory to spend some time with. I hope that you were able to complete that. And don't worry, for those of you who did not receive it last week, I have extras this morning. I also have a handout that will help you identify and understand more about each of the gifts and the gifts that you specifically might have. Now, if you haven't taken the inventory yet, please don't look at this second handout with the explanations, until you've completed the inventory.

In the next few weeks, we'll be speaking more about how you can identify and use and develop your gifts. We've taken the first important steps in trying to identify them. And now, as we continue through this process, it's important that we continue to pray about them, and about the ways God is calling us to use our gifts in service to each other and the church and this community. Please join me in prayer: Gracious and loving God, help us to claim these gifts for ourselves and for others. Let us use them for the building up of the church and for the equipping of the saints for ministry. Remind us daily of our need for each other and of our need for you. May we also be certain that we are needed, that we are here for a reason, that our abilities can make a difference in our community and even in our world. Then give us the grace, the courage, the humility to be true disciples of Jesus Christ, the one who shows us our calling, the one who gives us his Spirit.

Amen.

Let us stand now as we sing together our hymn of Discipleship,

#344 – I Have Decided to Follow Jesus