

We've been talking about building up the church this month through a series we've called "Edify." How many of you have felt edified by the Word of God over the past few weeks? How many of you have noticed a change in the way you speak and act towards others? I've noticed that I've been more sensitive to the things in my life that are not edifying to others, like selfishness and sarcasm.

But I've also been led to express love to my brothers in the body in ways that I've shied away from in the past. This has been a two- or three-year journey for me, and actually **a lot** longer if I'm honest with myself about how long God has been working on me in this area. Discipleship has been a keyword in my spiritual development over the past 15 years. The problem is that the first discipleship groups I was a part of left me feeling like I hadn't grown at all, and even left me feeling empty. I watched as the main discipler in those groups either had or developed a much closer relationship with one or two of the other guys and I felt like I was just along for the ride.

Then, I tried to disciple another guy who was younger than me. I used the same kind of curriculum that was used with me, but the relationship only went as deep as those other groups I was a part of. We shared some of the things we struggled with and supported each other through them, but the relationship wasn't deep enough for him to share his deepest struggles with me. We lost touch with each other and about a year later I learned that he chose to pursue a worldly answer to the struggle that he kept hidden.

A few years ago, Pastor Bob told me about a guy that I should get to know. He said it would be good for both of us. He had just come through a situation that would have destroyed most marriages, and most men. There was a wake of consequences following him, but he was in a process of restoration. I was hesitant, but we started spending a little bit of time together. I asked him to help me with some projects around the church and started simply getting to know him and his wife. That was the beginning of that two- or three-year journey I mentioned.

A few months ago, we started going to the gym and spending a lot more time together. Then a few weeks ago we both felt God prompting us to work on our hearts and minds as well as our bodies. So, last week we started a little men's group with a focus on spiritual development. Three of us met at Denny's at 4:30 in the morning for a meal and discussion around the Word.

I might have felt an obligation to try to force some sort of discipling relationship three years ago, but God showed me a better way. A still more excellent way that took me years to actually learn and apply. Like the verse from last week:

**...I will show you a still more excellent way.**  
**1 Corinthians 12:31b ESV**

We developed a love for each other. Then love for each other's families grew. We served together. We've kept each other accountable. And now, as we build each other up, love for God's Word is growing and there is an ever-deepening desire for God to work in and through us.

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Friendships have always been hard for me. Relationships in general are hard for me. But I think I've gained more friendships in the past year than I have the previous 39 years. And that is more a testament of those friends than it is of me. They've loved me through my hard-to-read expressions, foot-in-mouth statements, and even through the winter seasons when I withdraw from people in general and hibernate at home.

Those kinds of friendships are so edifying because we go beyond simply enjoying each other's company. We are safe to ask hard questions and we navigate through the ups and downs of life together. As love abounds, things like grace, wisdom, joy, encouragement, and help just flow naturally.

I have the privilege of spending a few hours with the other elders of the church every other week. Those meetings include the business side of leading this body but are even more focused on our relationships with God and each other. I've known these men for less than four years and there are still moments they share that I get to hear about for the first time. They're love for God and each other runs deep and I've been invited into that love.

When that love for each other is pursued, God's gift of the Holy Spirit acts freely in our presence and spiritual gifts like wisdom, discernment, leadership, encouragement, administration, giving, faith, teaching, and serving abound. That's not to say that the Holy Spirit is hindered when we are not loving each other, but love allows us to fully and easily receive the edification that comes from those gifts. How much easier is it to receive a word of wisdom or a corrective teaching when it is done from a foundation of love?

Last week I talked about how the "love chapter" is the in the middle of a spiritual gifts sandwich and I'm bringing up love again because it is more important than knowing what gifts God may have given us or learning how to practice them. I cannot overstress how important it is to start from a deep foundation of love. If you missed last week's sermon, check it out online. It's on our website, on our app, YouTube, and if you listen to podcasts, all of our sermons are available as a podcast as well.

Today, I want to talk about spiritual gifts. What are they? How do we get them or identify them? How should we use them? Before we dive in, I want to pause and pray because the topic of spiritual gifts can lead us to unity as the Body of Christ, but is also a place where division can happen.

Would you pray with me?

Lord Jesus, I come before You with a humble heart as a part of Your Body, the Church. Just as I prayed during my studies, I ask that you fill me with Your wisdom and truth. Father, I thank You for the gift of the Holy Spirit and for filling me with Your love. Continue to fill me. Holy Spirit, I ask You to empower me this morning with the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, and teaching as I seek to speak what You have for everyone who hears my voice. Let it be Your words that come forth and let anything that is not of You fall to the floor. Thank You, sovereign God. Amen.

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When we look at spiritual gifts, Paul's letters are probably a good starting point. I put together a couple of slides to show you how his lists of gifts compare to each other. **[VERSE SLIDE]** He lists a number of gifts in Romans 12, which by the way, also exhorts us to love one another. There's prophecy, service, teaching, exhorting, giving, leading, and mercy. In 1 Corinthians 12:7-10, Paul touches on prophecy and teaching again, but also lists discerning spirits, speaking wisdom, working miracles, healing, various tongues, interpretation of tongues, and faith. In verse 28, he notes apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, healing, helping, administration, and various tongues. Then in his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul lists what some call the five-fold ministry.

**<sup>11</sup> And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,**

We see spiritual gifts listed as specific roles in the Church, but they are still just parts of the body. And why did God give each of these gifts to some within the Church?

**<sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ**

Not only do the people with these gifts edify the Body, but they also equip others for the work of ministry. They help others learn to use their gifts in love to build up the body.

**<sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness.**

These gifts help us grow in the likeness of Christ, maturing in our faith.

**<sup>14</sup> Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit.**

As we grow and mature in our faith, we will grow in our discernment as well. There are a lot of false teachers and false doctrine floating around today. And they are clever with the way they teach. They point to Scripture and say things that are encouraging, motivating, or enticing. But God's goal for us, through building one another up, is that we will not be pulled back and forth by teachings that are not the full Truth.

**<sup>15</sup> But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head— Christ.**

And there it is again. These gifts are bound to love. Speaking the truth for the sake of growing in the likeness of Christ.

**<sup>16</sup> From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love by the proper working of each individual part.**

***Ephesians 4:11-16 CSB***

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You see, it's the whole body that promotes growth and health in the Church. The fullness of weight does not fall on Pastor Bob to build us up every week. The health of the church is not the responsibility of the elders alone. Pastor Craig's teaching on Wednesday night should not be the only guidance offered for deeper spiritual growth. Sunday morning worship and preaching should only be a small piece of the edification that happens in the Church. The diversity of spiritual gifts given to each member of the Body are God's body building regiment for the Church.

When your brother or sister is struggling through something, come alongside them and build them up with the gifts God has given you. If you see another member of the body harming themselves or someone else with actions or words that do not look like Christ, speak the truth in love to them. When you recognize someone utilizing their gifts filled with love, encourage them and celebrate how the Holy Spirit is working in and through them! Affirm the gifts you see in your sisters and brothers and encourage them to use them in love.

Now, you might be wondering what spiritual gifts actually look like. Unfortunately, the Bible doesn't give us definitions of all the gifts. And like I said last week, Paul's lists of gifts are representative, not exhaustive. You can see from this slide [gifts slide] that his three letter that include gifts don't even line up completely. Even so, we can get a good idea of what the gifts look like by looking at how they've been used throughout the history of the Church.

Let's look at the gifts that Paul noted in his letters as well as a few others that have been recognized through the history of the Church. Remember, these gifts are pointless if not done from a foundation of love. I also want to point out that they are not meant to become your identity. Our identity is in Christ alone and any gift given to us by God is meant to be like an instrument that a musician plays. Practice them and use them for the edification of the church, but don't hold so tightly to them that you lose sight of the One who gave you the gift in the first place. Also, hold these definitions loosely because spiritual gifts don't simply fit into a nice box just because we want them to.

I'm going to go through these kinda fast and it's ok if you don't catch them all. It's not an exhaustive list and the definitions are more like ideas of what the gifts might look like in your life.

**ADMINISTRATION** can be understood as the ability to help steer the church, or a ministry, toward the successful completion of God-given goals, with skills in planning, organization, and supervision.

An **APOSTLE** gifted person is generally sent to new places with the gospel. Someone with the gift of apostle can also provide leadership to other churches or ministries and offer advice on spiritual matters. The gifting ought not to be conflated with the past office of Apostle like the twelve who were designated by Jesus. The gift of apostle does not give the same authority as Scripture.

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**DISCERNMENT** is the wisdom to recognize truth from untruth by correctly evaluating whether a behavior or a teaching is from God or from an ungodly source. This is a gift that I often lean on the other elders for to help me, and it is an increasingly important gift in our current culture.

**EVANGELISM:** is the ability to successfully communicate the message of the gospel, especially to nonbelievers.

**EXHORTATION** is the special and timely offering of encouragement, comfort, and support to help someone in following Jesus. Someone with this gift is good at affirming others in their walk with Jesus.

The gift of **FAITH** gives a believer great confidence in the power and promises of God so they can stand strong in their belief, no matter the depth of the challenging circumstances. This edifies the Body by helping others when their faith needs an increase. I think of Mark 9:24 when I think of this gift: "I believe, but help my unbelief." This gift enables believers to help the unbelief of their brothers and sisters.

**GIVING.** Those who have this gift are particularly willing and able to share what resources they have with pleasure, and without the need to see them returned.

**GIFTS OF HEALING** involve a capability given by God to restore the health of others, be that physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually.

Someone with the gift of **SERVICE** or **HELPS** is able to see the physical needs of the Body of Christ and joyfully support its members along with the desire to enhance the effectiveness of the ministry of other members of the body.

**HOSPITALITY** is not in Paul's lists of gifts, but it is the gift to make people—even strangers—feel welcome in one's own home or church as a means to disciple and/or serve them.

The gift of **KNOWLEDGE** conveys truth grounded in and from the Word of God and applied by the Spirit to the body of Christ for a specific context.

The gift of **PROPHECY** enables the believer to speak the message of God to others, either formally or informally, in the way of current or future events and in regard to people's needs and experiences. One who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouragement, and consolation. Much like the gift of apostle, the gift of prophecy is not used today in any "Revelatory" sense and does not have the same weight or authority as Scripture.

*I want to pause here and share something kind of funny. Earlier this week, my family was hanging out at home watching Dry Bar Comedy together. After one of the episodes, I leaned over to Cooper and said, "I bet you want to go and pick up some ice cream for us." He said, "That's funny because I was just thinking about going and getting some ice cream for the family." Then Elise chimed in and said "You're not going to believe this, but I was just thinking I could really go for some ice cream." THEN, Isaiah added, "You're not going to believe this..." and before anyone could say anything, I said "You want some hot*

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*cocoa." He stopped dead in his tracks. His face had a look of shock and fear mixed with awe as he simply said, "Yes." Now, I'm not saying that is an example of the gifts of knowledge or prophecy, but when Cooper came home with everything needed for root beer floats, we were all edified for sure.*

**LEADERSHIP** manifests in a person, enabling them to stand before the church, direct the body with care and attention, and motivate them toward achieving ministry goals.

**MERCY** is the ability to deeply empathize and engage in compassionate acts on behalf of people who are suffering physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual distress. Those with this gift manifest concern and kindness to people who are often overlooked. We just hosted REST here a couple weeks ago, and those of you who served those people most likely have this give in abundance.

**SPEAKING IN TONGUES** can be one of two different things. It is the supernatural ability to speak in another language that has not been learned, but it is also a form of private prayer that edifies the individual or a form of public speaking that edifies the body when accompanied by the **gift of interpretation**. The **INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES** is the supernatural ability to understand another language that has not been learned and share what was said for all present to understand and be built up.

**TEACHING** is the given ability to clearly explain and effectively apply the truths of God's Word so that others will learn by clearly proclaiming, expounding, and warning such truths to them.

**WISDOM** is the ability to apply the principles of the Word of God in a practical way to specific situations and to recommend the best course of action at the best time. The exercise of this gift skillfully distills insight and discernment into excellent advice.

The gift of **MIRACLES** empowers the believer to serve as an instrument through whom God accomplishes acts that manifest supernatural power.

Now, you probably heard some of those gifts and thought to yourself, "Aren't we all called to that as Christians?" For instance, we are call called to evangelize based on the Great Commission:

**<sup>19</sup> "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you...."**  
***Matthew 28:19-20a CSB***

But those who are given the gift of evangelism have an extra measure. They are able to share the Gospel with every person they encounter and feel led to do so.

Faith is a core principle of Christianity, but those with the gift of faith are given an extra measure to express hope in the face of utter hopelessness. We ought to all give with cheerful hearts, be hospitable to others, express mercy, and ask God for wisdom, but those things are manifested more profoundly in those who are gifted by God with them.

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Paul wasn't the only Apostle to write about spiritual gifts. Peter also wrote about them in his first letter to the Church spread across Asia Minor:

**<sup>8</sup> Above all, maintain constant love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup> Be hospitable to one another without complaining. <sup>10</sup> Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God. <sup>11</sup> If anyone speaks, let it be as one who speaks God's words; if anyone serves, let it be from the strength God provides, so that God may be glorified through Jesus Christ in everything. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.**

***1 Peter 4:8-11 CSB***

Peter ties the gifts to love as well but summarizes all the gifts into two categories: gifts of speaking and gifts of serving. They are given for the purpose of serving others and results in glorifying God.

As you recognize a gift in your life, it can be tempting to start chasing after it or try to shoehorn it into situations where it does not serve to build up another. That's why it is so important to start from a place of love and operate through love. And remember that God gives the gifts as He sees fit for the purpose of serving others to the glory of Jesus Christ.

If you are interested in learning more about spiritual gifts and how God may be gifting you, we have a tool available on our website called S.H.A.P.E. It was developed by another church years ago to help their congregation find where they might fit in ministry, and it stands for:

Spiritual Gifts  
Heart  
Abilities  
Personality  
Experience

We want to simply use it to help identify the way that God is gifting members of the Body. After working through the assessment, I encourage you to meet with someone to talk through it and learn together how you might use your gifts to edify others.

As the band prepares to lead us in another song and the ushers serve communion, I want to leave you with a reading from The Message paraphrase.

**<sup>4-11</sup> God's various gifts are handed out everywhere; but they all originate in God's Spirit. God's various ministries are carried out everywhere; but they all originate in God's Spirit. God's various expressions of power are in action everywhere; but God himself is behind it all. Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people! The variety is wonderful:**

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wise counsel  
clear understanding  
simple trust  
healing the sick  
miraculous acts  
proclamation  
distinguishing between spirits  
tongues  
interpretation of tongues.

All these gifts have a common origin, but are handed out one by one by the one Spirit of God. He decides who gets what, and when.

<sup>12-13</sup> You can easily enough see how this kind of thing works by looking no further than your own body. Your body has many parts—limbs, organs, cells—but no matter how many parts you can name, you’re still one body. It’s exactly the same with Christ. By means of his one Spirit, we all said good-bye to our partial and piecemeal lives. We each used to independently call our own shots, but then we entered into a large and integrated life in which *he* has the final say in everything. (This is what we proclaimed in word and action when we were baptized.) Each of us is now a part of his resurrection body, refreshed and sustained at one fountain—his Spirit—where we all come to drink. The old labels we once used to identify ourselves—labels like Jew or Greek, slave or free—are no longer useful. We need something larger, more comprehensive.

<sup>14-18</sup> I want you to think about how all this makes you more significant, not less. A body isn’t just a single part blown up into something huge. It’s all the different-but-similar parts arranged and functioning together. If Foot said, “I’m not elegant like Hand, embellished with rings; I guess I don’t belong to this body,” would that make it so? If Ear said, “I’m not beautiful like Eye, transparent and expressive; I don’t deserve a place on the head,” would you want to remove it from the body? If the body was all eye, how could it hear? If all ear, how could it smell? As it is, we see that God has carefully placed each part of the body right where he wanted it.

<sup>19-24</sup> But I also want you to think about how this keeps your significance from getting blown up into self-importance. For no matter how significant you are, it is only because of what you are a *part* of. An enormous eye or a gigantic hand wouldn’t be a body, but a monster. What we have is one body with many parts, each its proper size and in its proper place. No part is important on its own. Can you imagine Eye telling Hand, “Get lost; I don’t need you”? Or, Head telling Foot, “You’re fired; your job has been phased out”? As a matter of fact, in practice it works the other way—the “lower” the part, the more basic, and therefore necessary. You can live without an eye, for instance, but not without a stomach. When it’s a part of your own body you are concerned with, it makes *no* difference whether the part is visible or clothed, higher or



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**lower. You give it dignity and honor just as it is, without comparisons. If anything, you have more concern for the lower parts than the higher. If you had to choose, wouldn't you prefer good digestion to full-bodied hair?**

**<sup>25-26</sup> The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don't, the parts we see and the parts we don't. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance.**

**<sup>27</sup> You are Christ's body—that's who you are!  
*1 Corinthians 12:4-27 MSG***