



from the East Mercia Methodist Circuit

Session 2.3: GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

INTRODUCTION: GOD'S GIFTS FOR THE CHURCH

We thought last time about the fruit of the Spirit – the qualities that grow in us as we mature in our relationship with God. Now, we think about the **gifts** that the Holy Spirit gives us to equip the church and the world, to help God's Kingdom to grow.

We often talk about people being 'gifted' or 'talented' – usually meaning the same thing: a natural ability or flair for something. Both terms have their origins in the Bible. In ancient times, a '**talent**' was a weight of money, often a considerable sum of gold. In the Parable of the Talents (**Matthew 25: 14-30**), Jesus told of a rich landowner entrusting talents to his servants, exploring what happened when the different people invested their talents (or buried them). In that story, each talent given should have been used to bring about more. We

could say that the talent was meant to be shared for a greater good – not kept for the benefit of the holder. The servants were meant to be *stewards* of the talents, ultimately for the purposes of the Master.

Over the years, the word ‘talent’ then became associated with God-given abilities or ‘gifts’ – perhaps because the abilities displayed could not really be explained in any other way. There also came an understanding that ‘talents’ were meant to be shared with the world.

Of course, talents also need to be honed, improved, practiced. A talented musician, dancer, sportsperson, actor, artist or gardener only gets to reach the top of their game with lots of practice. (But some people with endless practice might never display the same ‘talent’!)

St. Paul never referred to talents, but he did write a lot about **gifts**. The sort of gifts Paul wrote about were particularly those which helped the early church to grow. They were the gifts needed in a church community. He was very clear that these things came from God, not to be demanded or expected, but prayed for and desired. We’ll be thinking about these gifts of the Spirit – for God’s purposes through the church – but you might also like to think about gifts and talents in a wider sense – since (as James says) “every perfect gift is from above” (**James 1:17**).

PREPARING FOR THE SESSION (before you arrive)

Group leaders:

You will need a number of coloured-paper ‘flames’ for this session, one for each group member. Please also have some pens ready.

Questions to ponder for all participants (before session):

Do you consider yourself to be gifted or talented?

When did you last use your talents or gifts to serve others or to bring blessing or joy to others?

What talents are you bringing with you to this session?

STARTING THE SESSION: FINDING OUR ROOTS!

Questions to get us started:

How do you understand 'spiritual gifts'?

*What gifts or talents do you think are **God-given**?*

And which are not?

Who is the most talented person you've ever seen?

What talents or gifts do you think are important but under-rated or not appreciated as they should be?

A PRAYER

Loving God,

We come with all our experiences, talents, gifts and skills,
We come just as we are, with all you have given us,
We come only as ourselves, shaped by life, yet wonderfully
made and eternally loved.

Help us to see in each other a picture of beautiful creation;
Help us to find your image in each of us;
Help us to see each other as your gift to be shared.

In the name of Jesus, your one perfect gift to the world.
Amen.

READING THE SCRIPTURES

In the first century AD, the Christian church in Corinth (in Greece) was a vibrant and diverse group, and the Holy Spirit was powerfully at work among them. It was one of the churches actually founded by St. Paul, along with the wonderful Christian missionary couple Priscilla and Aquila (see **Acts chapter 18**). Paul wrote at least two long letters to the church in Corinth (**1 Corinthians** and **2**

Corinthians). We tend to focus today on certain passages or chapters, but it is a lot more enlightening to read the letters as a whole, as they were intended. Over the years, scholars have also helped by trying to fill in the back-story, as to why Paul was writing certain things, and why he seemed very upset with them at certain points.

A lot of the controversy in the heart of the first letter (1 Corinthians) is certainly around 'Spiritual Gifts' and their attitudes to one another as a result. One of the main gifts they were apparently excited about was the gift of speaking in tongues. Some obviously felt this type of speaking or praying to God in strange languages was a sign of a higher class of Christianity or God's special favour.

By the time we get to chapter 12, Paul is very keen to point out that all of their gifts are in fact of mutual value and equal importance – all are needed by the Christian community as a whole – and everyone has a part to play. Then – in a 'eureka' moment – he finds his wonderful illustration of the Body...

1 Corinthians 12 (New Revised Standard Version)

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, ¹⁰to

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. ¹¹ All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴ Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many... [the illustration continues in verses 15-26]

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸ And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

DIGGING DEEPER

Paul starts off this chapter by reminding them that actually Jesus is Lord! And that if they are all in agreement that Jesus is Lord, then they are all on the same side, and have the same Spirit! (So, *why are they arguing among themselves?!*) [See also **Ephesians 4:1-6**]

Are there any parts of this reading (1 Corinthians 12) that you find hard to understand?

What do you think of the illustration of the Body? Is it helpful? Can you think of another example of different things working together in unity?

We might think Paul's list of the spiritually-gifted (verse 28) are far-removed from our own experience. But are they? Who do you know who might fall into any of these categories?

Apostles – those who are sent in God's name;

Prophets – those who speak out;

Teachers – those who help us understand;

Deeds of power – *who are the ones who achieve the miraculous?*

Gifts of healing – *who are the healers among us? Miraculous or medical?*

Forms of assistance – *who are the helpers, without whom nothing would get done?*

Forms of leadership – please note that Christian leadership should also be humble, servant leadership, in the way of Christ;

Various kinds of tongues – some have a gift of praying to God in an intimate language, others have language-gifts which have helped the Gospel to spread around the world, into different cultures, and have brought people together in understanding (this was the original purpose of the tongues at Pentecost – **Acts 2**)

In the letter to the **Ephesians**, Paul also wrote along similar lines:

¹¹ The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. (Ephesians 4: 11-13)

Here he adds evangelists and pastors to the list:

Evangelists – those who share the good news of Christ;

Pastors – those who tend God's flock.

And he notes that the purpose of all the gifts is to equip God's people to do God's work, and for the building up of the body of Christ. God's gifts should only be used to build up – never to hurt or destroy.

What other gifts would you add to the list as being essential for the growth, worship and wellbeing of the church in our time and place?

Finally, what was '**the more excellent way**' Paul goes on to explore in **chapter 13**? How does this help us to get all gifts into perspective?

ACTIVITY – PAPER FLAMES

So, what gifts do you have? What talents or abilities has God given you to be used for God's service or shared for the common good?

Everyone should take a **paper flame** (or just an ordinary piece of paper if you don't have them in flame-shapes) and a pen.

On one side of the paper, write **your name** and the word **GIFT**. On the other side write the word **BLESSING**.

Think of one gift that you think you have... it could be something obvious that people know you do (like preaching or music) or it could be something hidden, which not many people are aware of (that would be more exciting!). Write it down on the GIFT side of the paper.

Next, try to imagine (or pray for inspiration) how you might use that gift in a new way to be a blessing to others, or in the church or community. Write a sentence or two on the BLESSING side if any ideas come.

Then, if you are willing, place your paper flame in the centre of the room (perhaps best on a table). Here you are offering it to the rest of the group. This might make you feel very vulnerable. Please only do this if you feel secure and safe with your group.

By placing it in the middle, you are inviting the rest of the group to also write on your flame. *What gifts do they think you have?* Try to be as affirming to one another as possible, and remember that in the

Body even the seemingly insignificant parts are very important. They might even want to suggest (on the other side of the paper) ways in which your gift could be used as a blessing to others.

Together, affirm and bless one another, appreciating and exploring the gifts God has given us.

PRAYING TOGETHER

- Ask God to be with you in this time together;
- Thank God for those who use their gifts for building up the Body of Christ, and for those who use their talents for the common good in the wider community;
- Pray for the gifts of the Spirit you think we need more of in our church;
- Pray for any gifts you believe God is calling you receive or improve, for God's glory;
- Bring to God any prayers for members of the group, or for others you know who are in need, or in grief;
- Pray for those who are suffering in our world or community;
- You might like to **say the Lord's Prayer**.

SUGGESTED SONGS TO LISTEN TO (or your own choice) – at home or in the group

Available on YouTube using the links below:



Lord, you call us to your service by Marjorie Dobson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MtsubiBA78s>

Spiritual Gifts by Heather Parker

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JU_74n_pMLQ