

Hungry for God

Rich Nathan

Spiritual Gifts: God's Way of Building Community

1 Corinthians 12:8-11

As we go into the holiday season, many of us are going to indulge in a feeding frenzy. I'd like to warn you against that. You are just going to feel awful in January when you have to take off the extra 10 pounds you put on eating 10 pounds of Thanksgiving stuffing and dozens of Christmas cookies. Have you ever eaten so much that you couldn't bear to look at more food?

My oldest sister was married to an Italian guy in New York. My brother-in-law's dad worked on the docks as a longshoreman unloading ships. It is a tradition among Italians in New York, and particularly among those who are working on the docks, to have a seafood meal on Christmas Eve. Well, I was invited to join my sister and brother-in-law, along with his dad and mother, at their home for a Christmas Eve dinner. I was 17 years old and I had an appetite. But no amount of hunger could have prepared me for what I was about to experience at my brother-in-law's mother's house.

We started with a salad and antipasto. And then she went into the kitchen and brought out five large bowls of different kinds of pasta. Remember, there were only five of us eating, and she didn't eat – she just walked behind the four of us while my brother-in-law's father picked at the food. She had five different kinds of pasta –

shells, linguine, and rigatoni. And then she brought out five or six heaping bowls of seafood to put on these huge plates of pasta – calamari, scungilli. And she served it up and gave me this heaping plate of pasta and seafood, which I ate with Italian bread, of course.

And then she immediately served me another heaping plate of food. I ate that too. Now, the third plate I simply could not eat. I picked at it a little bit, but I ran out of room. Three heaping plates of food, and that, of course, was before desert.

And then she brought out fruit and nuts and about five or six different cakes. Again, remember, this is just for four people. She made an Italian cheesecake, a chocolate cake, and I don't remember what else. My brother-in-law and I stumbled out of there holding our stomachs. I could hardly breathe as I walked down the street. I just waddled to the car.

The next day my brother-in-law's mother complained to my sister, "Richie no lika my cooking." Why did Rich not like her cooking? Because I didn't eat the entire third heaping plate of food.

Most Americans can tell stories of times when you have just pigged out, as they say. For some of you, it was just last night. I love Pastor Rick Warren's line. He was teaching on light and he suddenly had this little inspiration. He said, "I'll tell you what my favorite light is. It's the light on the inside of the refrigerator. I see that light all the time."

My father is in the Hall of Fame of Great Eaters. He still calls me up most weekends and asks me what Marlene is cooking for dinner. He just loves talking about food. Half of our long distance phone conversations involve him describing to me a meal that he ate in the past week, something that he cooked – spareribs, or turkey. He can remember meals back 70 years ago, and pies that he ate when he was in high school.

When Marlene and I were first married we went into New York and spent the day with my dad and stepmother at my sister's. We went to her apartment where we ate a very traditional Jewish breakfast in New York, lox and bagels, different kinds of fish – white fish, baked salmon salad. There were a couple of huge New York bagels, each loaded down with this fish. We had coffee and talked for a little while. And then my dad said, "What do you say we walk along the pier by Coney Island?" So we jumped in the car and went down to Coney Island where there's a very famous hot dog stand called "Nathan's." Sadly, no family relationship with me.

My dad said, "What do you say we have a couple of hotdogs?" So we each had a hotdog and some French fries and walked along the boardwalk by the beach. My dad bought some caramel corn for himself and his wife. We walked a little while longer and then got in the car and drove a bit. Then my father said, "You know, why don't we go to this Italian restaurant that's right here in Coney Island? Let's call up some of the family and we'll all meet at the Italian restaurant." Marlene and I just stared at each other thinking, "How in the world can we possibly eat any more food?" We'd

had a huge breakfast followed immediately by some hotdogs and fries. It hadn't been an hour and a half or two hours since we last ate and we are going out for Italian food? We went to this really great restaurant, but we just had no appetite for the food.

You know, hunger for things that are really great can be blunted by filling up on junk food – hotdogs and French fries and caramel corn. Every parent knows that. Every parent has said to their kids at some point in their lives, “Now, don't eat those cookies now. It's going to ruin your appetite for dinner.” All of us have experienced the feeling of being so stuffed that there's no appreciation or appetite for things that are really good.

Have you ever watched a kid, maybe one of your kids, who is tearing into their Christmas presents? You have an 8 year old and your parents and aunts and uncles and everyone have showered this kid with so many Christmas presents that they just sort of rip open 20-25 presents in the course of about 3-4 minutes. They don't even look at what they've got. They are just tearing at other boxes and opening the paper. There's no real appreciation, no gratitude, no thankfulness. You get done with the whole exercise and you say, “What was that all about? Why did we do that?”

And then you read Laura Ingalls Wilder's “Little House on the Prairie” books. I remember reading the books to my son and daughter when they were little. And I was so struck by the thankfulness of those children as they received for Christmas one or two pieces of hard candy. Do any of you remember those “Little House on the

Prairie” books? These little girls would get one or two pieces of hard candy for Christmas and they were so grateful. They would take a lick and then wrap it up and save it for the next day.

Well, friends, we can become so satiated, so full, so indulged that we have no appetite for the really good things. Men who are addicted to pornography know this one. The real thing is destroyed by the junk food of pornography. Kids who are raised on junk reading and junk literature lose their appetite for good literature. If you listen to too much junk music, you lose your appetite for great music.

Have you ever come to church and just felt spiritually dull? Maybe you spent the evening before watching TV all night, or you have been spending all week in front of the TV. You are so filled with media, TV and videos that there’s not a lot of hunger inside for God. You just don’t feel hungry for worship. You aren’t hungry for God’s Word or God’s presence. Yes, you’ve come. Some of you feel this way today. Yes, you’ve come, but you just don’t feel engaged. You are just mumbling through the worship while you sip a cup of coffee or flip through the bulletin, or chat with your neighbor.

Have you ever had the spiritual feeling that feels like you have a belly full of caramel corn? You know you should be more excited than you are. You know you should be more into worship than you are. You know you should be longing for God’s Word, but you are just so full that you have no appetite.

I've been teaching on the subject of spiritual gifts and I can't think of anything more important regarding spiritual gifts than that we as individuals and as the church become hungry for a greater experience of the gifts and hungry for God. I've called my message today, "Hungry for God." Let's pray.

I've told you over the last several weeks that the apostle Paul sets his teaching on spiritual gifts into the setting of unity and diversity in the church. And I've also said that I believe that there is a calling on Vineyard Columbus in particular to model for the community racial and ethnic diversity.

1 Corinthians 12:8-11 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 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. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

C.S. Lewis, the great Christian writer, and in fact, he still remains my favorite Christian author of anyone, talks about the problem of satiation and how we often lose our appetite for what is really great by spending ourselves on lesser pleasures. Lewis illustrates this by saying, "Imagine a boy who is playing in a mud puddle in his backyard. He cries and screams when his parents tell him to put down his little shovel because they are going to spend a day at the beach. This little boy can't

imagine that there's anything more pleasurable than what he's presently experiencing."

Friends, that's what we are like. We are like little children playing in our mud puddles and can't imagine a day at the beach. I wonder what your mud puddle is. What do you fill yourself on, so much so that you have lost your appetite for God and for the things of God?

The apostle John, in book of Revelation, talks about the problem of being overly stuffed, overly full, and losing what is most valuable as he writes to the church at Laodicea. Here's what John writes: *These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing." But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.*

Here's a church so full, so wealthy, so prosperous, so stuffed that they've gotten out of touch with their spiritual poverty. Have you ever felt, friends, so stuffed that you lost your hunger for God? Have you ever felt so stuffed that you lost your hunger to worship God? Or to read God's Word or to pray? Have you ever felt so stuffed that you lost your hunger to ask God for spiritual gifts?

How do you regain hunger for God? How do you regain hunger for God's gifts of the Holy Spirit?

Christians who are a lot wiser than us, and who have lived much better lives than we do in the 21st century American church, have for centuries advocated the importance of deliberately emptying ourselves so that God can fill us again. The way that a person empties themselves is what Dallas Willard, who is coming to speak at our church this next week at a conference we are hosting, calls "The Disciplines of Abstinence." Here's what Willard writes in his book, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*:

"If we feel that any habit or pursuit, harmless in itself, is keeping us from God and sinking us deeper in the things of the earth; if we find that things which others can do with impunity are for us the occasion of falling, then abstinence is our only course. Abstinence alone can recover for us the real value of what should have been for our health, but which has been an occasion of falling...It is necessary that we should steadily resolve to give up anything that comes between ourselves and God."

Dallas Willard says that for 21st century Americans perhaps the most important discipline of abstinence is simply solitude – just getting alone in a quiet place and allowing God to speak to us. Just getting some space, the importance of solitude.

We spend all day answering phones, dealing with dozens of people, handling stacks of paper, answering or deleting tons of email. We spend all day caring for a newborn

or a house full of kids – cooking and cleaning. Dallas Willard says that of all the spiritual disciplines a Christian today could practice, perhaps nothing is more important than just being alone for a few hours without the TV on, without the radio on, without more stimulation, just being alone and being quiet. Taking a walk in the park, not a shopping mall. Just pulling away so that you can develop an appetite again for God.

Obviously, there are some of you who are single, divorced, or widowed who may spend evening alone in quiet. Your needs are different. You need connection. You need relationships. You need fellowship. But the majority of people, singles included, have this need for space.

It is a good thing when you deliberately abstain from something that is dulling your appetite for the real thing, for the good thing, for the best thing, for what God's things are. The reason why Lent is so spiritually meaningful for so many Roman Catholics is not because every Roman Catholic is trying to earn God's favor before Easter by giving up chocolate. It's because Roman Catholics have found that something good happens in their soul when they abstain from something that's good, but that's keeping them from something better – namely God.

How many of us would be spiritually much better off by next Sunday if we simply abstained from watching TV this week. Starting today or starting tomorrow you said, "I'm just going to take a break. I'm going to practice the discipline of abstinence from the TV." Or from computer games. Or from going online. Or from listening to my car

radio. How many of us would be better off if we said, “Well, this week I’m going to fast from watching my morning news show, or from reading the morning newspaper. I want to create some space in my life for God.”

Friend, I believe that you and I are not going to be hungry for spiritual gifts when we are filled up with the junk food of current American culture. But sometimes the issue is that we aren’t desperate enough.

My dear friend, Danny Meyer, who for years was the associate pastor here and who is a very skilled counselor, often said that without desperation, nobody he ever counseled ever changed. You can go through the motions of counseling. Some of you have done that. Your mates have done that. You dutifully show up at the meetings with your counselor. You say the right things in front of the counselor. You may even do some of the homework assignments. But if you aren’t desperate, if you haven’t been cut to the quick by God’s Spirit with how awful your behavior has been and your great need for change, if something hasn’t happened where you’ve become humbled in your heart by God, you’ll never change.

I’ve watched couples stuck for years, sometimes decades, in a less than happy marriage because one or both of them is simply not desperate enough to push for a change or to change themselves. Some of you are living in that kind of relationship. You live together without any real intimacy. There’s almost no closeness. There’s very little connection. There’s very little affection. Your conversation with your mate is, at best, superficial. You talk about things. What you are going to buy for the

house, or the news, or something at church, or something about one of your kids. But there's almost no bond between the two of you. There's no personal encouragement. There's no playfulness. There's no communication of hopes and dreams or pain or fears. There's nothing below the surface. And that's where you stay year after year.

Maybe you've resigned yourself to your situation. You reason, "Well, this world is full of limits. You can't always get what you want. Sometimes we just need to lower our sights, and adjust them downward." And that's true. Sometimes we simply need to find God's grace to endure what is a much less than ideal situation. Sometimes that is the reality that you live in or that I live in. We want more, but we just need to pray for grace to endure.

But it is equally true that we need to find God's power that is available for the desperate. Friend, are you desperate to change your life? Are you tired of living the way you are living with a secret addiction? Are you sick and tired of being sick and tired? If you're not, will you at least pray for desperation? Will you pray for desperation for your spouse? In the areas where you know you are satisfied or resigned to living with way less than God's best, in areas where you know you are living with way less than God's ideal, in places where you are living in the shadows and not fully in the light, will you at least pray for a desperate heart?

Father, I'm not right inside. Something in me has died. I've become complacent. I'm spiritually sluggish. There's no way in this situation, in this area, Lord, that I'm

following the apostle Paul's example that he lays out in Philippians 3, "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Paul talks about pressing towards the goal of the prize of the (I love the KJV) high call of God in Christ Jesus. Lord, there's no way in this area that I'm expressing in my life your high calling. I feel spiritually fat. Make me desperate. Make me hungry.

Where does desperation for spiritual gifts come from? Sometimes it comes from circumstance. God places you in a situation that will not change unless his power shows up. Maybe you have a child who has a severe medical condition that has no known medical cure – autism or kidney failure or asthma or leukemia. You have a parent, spouse, or best friend who has cancer. Someone you really love has chronic debilitating migraines or MS or arthritis that's so bad they can hardly walk or hardly move their hands. There's nothing like the sickness of someone you love and care for that makes you desperate for gifts of healing.

Let me tell you the story of a woman who became desperate for healing. At a conference I attended back in 1986 - in fact the conference at which God spoke to me about leaving my job at OSU where I was a professor of business law and becoming the first pastor of our church - there was woman from a North England city who attended that conference at Harrogate, England. Let me share with you her story.

She said, “We’d been doing a stream of door to door visitation, but I started off on the wrong street. I knocked on the door and then realized that we had already done that street, but in fact, no one had visited that particular house. I explained who we were and asked if there was anything that this woman needed or anything I could pray for.

She looked at me and she said, “My baby has cancer.” I had only been a Christian for 8 months and it was the first in everything. I spoke to my pastor and he encouraged me to pray for the baby. I had gone to Harrogate with him just for the last day. It was a conference on healing and then I went to the team visit at the grammar school. My pastor said to me that I should just do what I saw the other people doing and imitate their model of praying.

Well, I saw stage by stage, week by week, the baby recover. One day I prayed all day for that little baby boy. I couldn’t get him out of my mind. Even at bedtime I was still praying. I prayed through most of the night. I was about to give up because I felt that maybe God wouldn’t heal the little baby. His mother wasn’t a follower of Christ. But the next day, when I went to visit her, she told me that she just took her baby to the hospital and he was pronounced healed.”

A social anthropologist named David Lewis decided to check up on some of these stories of healings, of people who were trained at this Harrogate conference, and then went out and practiced. In his book, which contains the analysis of contemporary healing, David Lewis writes, “From a hospital consultant who treated

the baby I was able to obtain copies of the baby's records. They confirmed this account in detail and showed that the tumor did suddenly disappear in between two of the hospital examinations." It was exactly the time that this young woman who was a new Christian had been praying for the baby.

The consultant claimed that this was a case of spontaneous remission. However, the available medical literature on this particular type of tumor called "infantile fibro sarcoma" contains no reference to any other case of spontaneous remission. A detailed follow up study of 48 cases showed that 8 patients had died, the others were treated by surgery, followed up by intense chemotherapy or radiotherapy. In some of the more severe cases there had to be amputations of the limbs. There was no recorded case of spontaneous remission.

But this woman was desperate. God put something in her heart for that baby and so she prayed for the gift of healing.

Have you ever felt your heart break in the presence of someone who was sick and you begged God to break through with healing? Maybe you have a friend or sibling who has struggled for years with some illness. Or you have a friend or sibling, a family member, someone in your group that has struggled for years with some bondage – cutting themselves, terrible suicidal urges, or horrible blasphemous thoughts. Or you meet someone in one of your small groups who tells you that they have been to the occult or that their parents were in the occult and now they are visited nightly by an awful demonic presence.

Have you ever been desperate for what Paul calls in v. 10 the gift of distinguishing between spirits? That you want to get to the root of this spiritual bondage that this person is in and want to set them free?

Or maybe the circumstance you find yourself in is that you are totally confused by a situation with some person and you feel like something is wrong, but you can't quite put your finger on it. You know that there is something wrong in this individual's life. Something is off, but you just don't know what it is. Have you ever longed for the gift of prophecy, been desperate and said, "Help me, God, to see below the surface of things. Reveal to me what's happening in my teenager's life. Lift the veil; give me a prophetic dream or a vision. Give me spiritual insight so that I can see what's really going on in my friend's life, in my sibling's life, in my spouse's life. I know something's wrong here. Give me prophetic insight."

Have you ever been desperate for a spiritual gift? I think of some of our dearest friends who are missionaries in Muslim countries. There's been very significant growth of Islam worldwide in the last century. It's gone from about 12.5% of the world's population in 1900 to 21% in 2000. Most of this has been the result of a much higher birth rate among Muslims. And the Muslim world stretches from West Africa across the Middle East through Central Asia all the way to Indonesia.

Christian missionaries from this church have gone to Muslim countries. But the truth is, friends, that the number of Muslim-background believers in Christ is low. There

are a few places, like in Indonesia and in Central Asia, Nigeria, where there's been a significant number of turnings to Christ. But almost always, especially with Muslim background people, you don't find almost anyone turning to Christ apart from a deep working of the Holy Spirit through supernatural revelations or healings or miracles. You can't be a missionary in Muslim country and not be desperate for spiritual gifts.

Hunger for God comes from adopting a new orientation to life. It is appropriate that we regularly ask ourselves, "What are we living for?" Let me ask you that. What are you living for? What is your ultimate goal in life? What do you believe is the ultimate purpose for your life?

You know, your real beliefs are not what you say they are. Your real beliefs are shown by the way you act, by how you spend your free time, and your discretionary income. You can look at your checkbook and daytimer, look at the way you spend your money and your time, look at your credit card bills, take a look at your actions and that's where you'll discover your real beliefs.

The great Protestant Reformers said that the ultimate purpose of life was to live for God's glory. They were echoing the apostle Paul who wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:31, *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.* That's why we have that banner over there. It is a wonderful quote from the Westminster Catechism in 1647. It became the standard for the Presbyterian Church and for Reformed Churches worldwide. We read, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever."

Is that your purpose in life? Is that your chief end? Is that why I get up in the morning and do what I do because I want to glorify God in every area of my life?

It's not very often that I want to talk to you not as a crowd, but as individuals and really as your pastor and look you in the eye and say, "What are you living for, friend? You're making this or that decision, but what's your purpose in life? How do you square this business decision or this major new purchase, or this decision to throw in the towel on your marriage with the call on your life to live for God's glory?" Sometimes I just want to talk with you as individuals and not just as a crowd and look you in the eye and say, "You know, the decision you're making here may have as a goal having an easy life, a comfortable life, but where is the desire to glorify God?"

Where's the desire to say, "Jesus Christ, by my perseverance, I want the world to know that you give the grace of endurance even in difficulty. Jesus Christ, by my tearing up the list of grievances that I have with my spouse, I want the world to know that you are a forgiving God and that you have given me a heart of forgiveness and grace. What do you think life is about?"

I say this with all affection. Some of you maybe are being pressed by the Holy Spirit to confront a problem, to confront a person, but you've been avoiding that confrontation even though God is telling you to speak up, to draw lines, to hold someone accountable to God. But you've been running from that confrontation and

I'd ask you if life, according to the Bible, is really about avoiding pain and unpleasant situations and pursuing the path of least resistance? Or is it about glorifying God?

Do you know, being hungry for spiritual gifts communicates that you understand what life is about. Lord, I want your glory manifested in this church. I want people to be healed. I want to see some people get freed up from their bondages and addictions. I want to see folks get well, get encouraged, get strengthened, get saved so that all over this church, all over this city, all over this world people would turn to Jesus Christ and lift their hands in gratitude and praise.

Peter tells us that the practice of spiritual gifts is all about understanding the ultimate purpose in life is the glory of God. He says, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and power forever and ever. Amen."

If pursuing and practicing spiritual gifts is all about finding a way to glorify God, then, "Lord, you've given me this gift of hospitality. I need to use it for your glory."

"Lord, you've given me this great passion to work in the public school system to help kids who don't have any other supports or props. For the sake of your glory, I won't run away from this great need."

“Lord, you’ve given me this gift of teaching for the sake of your glory; let me employ it in this church.”

“For the sake of your glory, heal the sick.”

Finally, I would say that hunger for God and hunger for God’s gifts, in fact, hunger for more in any area of life, is often stimulated by seeing what is possible through someone else’s life. You see what God is doing in another person’s life and you are inspired by their example and you want what they have. Maybe you don’t yet have a relationship with Christ, but you see something in the life of a friend. You see something in some of the lives of people in this church. You see something in the life of a family member and you want what they have.

That’s what led me to Christ at age 18 from a Jewish background. I met a young woman named Marlene who was a follower of Christ. And I saw that she had something in her life that I didn’t have. She had a peace and joy, an honesty and love that I did not have. I discovered that the source of all the things she had in her life was Christ. What pulled me, as a Jewish teenager, to Christ was seeing Christ in the life of Marlene and wanting what she had.

Haven’t you found this in your own life, friend, when you see someone doing God’s will and being blessed in it? Or when you are in the presence of such great Christian character, they just live out the beauty of God’s presence and you say, “O Lord, let

me be like them. Give me what they have.” Sometimes just being around someone else, being around their marriage, being around their family provokes in you a hunger. There is such a thing as godly jealousy.

Very often, friend, I’ll be honest with you, change in my life, change in this church, is provoked by what I believe is a godly jealousy when I see what another church is doing, when I see God in it. I say, “I want that, Lord.”

I read the story of the Brooklyn Tabernacle starting off with 15-20 people, and now ministering to thousands in Brooklyn. And once a week 2000 church members gather together in the church sanctuary for intercessory prayer. And I say, “God, I want to be a part of a church where thousands of people gather weekly for intercessory prayer.”

And God has answered the prayers of this church so powerfully. They’ve seen incredible miracles in their midst – healings and instant deliverances from drugs. It is a church in which dozens of single mothers are being freed from the welfare trap. They are getting job training. They are getting job placement. It is a church that is really racially diverse. It is a church that’s sending out missionaries. I say, “God, make Vineyard Columbus like that church.”

May I stimulate godly jealousy in you by telling you some stories of people who ministered in these 1 Corinthians 12 gifts? You know, it was the apostle Paul’s expectation that every church that he planted would be a charismatic church, to use

a modern word. There was no such thing in the New Testament world as a non-charismatic church. The assumption in every one of Paul's letters is that the church that he was writing to experienced the presence and power of God in a very evident way, and that spiritual gifts were operative in the church.

And these spiritual gifts that we read about in 1 Corinthians 12 didn't end with the death of Paul. You know the great St. Augustine, the Christian teacher whose writings have shaped Christian thoughts since the 4th century, wondered about the lack of miracles in the Christian community of his day. His conclusion, stated in his Tract on True Religion, seemed reasonable: once the church had been established and been extended through the world, "miracles were not allowed to continue" because they were no longer needed to "kindle" faith.

Earlier, Augustine did not believe in spiritual gifts. Wonderfully, as an aged Bishop who had been on record as denying the miraculous, Augustine received the startling events with joy. He was a very careful thinker and so he examined, verified, and recorded each instance asking for a written report from each person he healed. He published the results as a compelling testimony to the pagan community.

And you can read in *The City of God* his lists of documented healings. He writes about a blind man whose sight was restored. He writes about a woman named Innocentia in Carthage who was instantly healed of breast cancer. He writes of a doctor in Carthage who was healed of gout and of several people who were healed of demons. He writes about a child who was run over by a cart and had his bones crushed and

who was prayed for and showed no signs of any injury whatsoever. He talks about the resuscitation of a nun and he talks about a dear friend's son who was raised from the dead.

According to the great historian, Jaroslav Pelikan, the Yale church historian, "You find the gifts of the Holy Spirit through the history of the church.

Tertullian, the early church father who died in 225 AD and who was the greatest theologian of his day, used to instruct new Christians that when they came out of the water of baptism, they should expect the gifts of the Holy Spirit to come upon them. They should expect to prophesy and to speak in tongues.

Wouldn't it be wonderful, friends, if after we baptized folks they came out of the baptismal waters not only wet but full of the Holy Spirit prophesying and speaking in tongues? We ought to add that to our baptism class.

Let me tell you about Catherine of Siena. Perhaps the most famous of the supernaturally gifted Christians of the 14th century was Catherine of Siena, whose profound insights to the Christian life made her one of only two women in the history to be designated "a doctor of the church." Catherine worked miracles, including resurrections, and was known to demonstrate personal prophecy and words of knowledge and wisdom in conversations with those who sought her counsel. Catherine's gifts were so widely respected that she counseled kings and even popes. In fact, she once sent a letter rebuking a Pope for failing to keep a secret vow he had

made to the Lord years before. He had never disclosed the vow to another human, but God revealed it to Catherine so she could hold him accountable.

And here's an incident from the life of John Wimber, who was the founder of the Vineyard Movement. I take this again from David Lewis, the social anthropologist who studied John Wimber's Harrogate conference. John gave the following prophetic revelation. He stood up on the stage and he said, "There's a woman here whose name is Janet, who at the age of 11 had a minor accident that's proven to be a problem through her adult life. It has something to do with an injury to her tailbone that's caused all kinds of other problems. Janet, you have pain radiating down your lower back over your backside and down your legs. There's some kind of damage to your nerve and there's also a functional problem with what I think is called the sacroiliac."

There was someone in the crowd who matched this description exactly. Her name was Janet, and at age 11 she had this accident. She had these problems. She received prayer. And David Lewis, the social anthropologist, wrote to her a year later. She said, "I got prayer and I got completely healed that day."

What do you think the odds are at guessing at all of these details? Ten million to one? A hundred million to one?

Let me share with you my own experience. Several years ago there was a woman who came to our church who was very skeptical about our church's belief in spiritual

gifts. She was a newer Christian and the church she went to taught that all this business of the Holy Spirit was just emotionalism. I talked to her for a little while and met with some other people after church. I was driving my car out of the parking lot when I saw her talking with a church member in the parking lot. So I drove by them and just wanted to wave goodbye.

But this guy said, “Rich, I was just talking with her about spiritual gifts, and I know if you pray for her she will really feel something right now.”

I thought, “Oh no. He’s scaring the living daylights out of her.”

He said, “Rich, why don’t you get out of your car and pray for her.”

I said, “Well, you know, I don’t think she’d really like that right now.”

He said, “No, you gotta come out and pray for her. You gotta pray for her.”

So just to shut him up, because I could feel her discomfort, I said, “Would you like prayer for anything?”

She folded her arms across her chest and she said, “Well God knows everything that I need.”

So I thought, “Oh great, this is going to be fun.” I got out of my car, it was still running, but in park, and I just wanted to pray a quick prayer and get out of there. So I picked up my hand to pray for her and I had the distinct impression that she was partially deaf in her right ear; that she had lost 30% of her hearing, particularly in higher frequencies. So I looked at her and thought, “She is just going to think I am the weirdest person if I mention this,” so I just said, “God bless you.” I sensed this again that she had this problem with the loss of 30% of her hearing, particularly in the higher end frequencies in her right ear.

So I thought, “Well, she already thinks I’m really weird anyway. It doesn’t matter.” So I said to her, “Do you have a problem in your right ear where you’ve lost about 30% of your hearing, especially in the higher end frequencies?”

She said, “How do you know that?”

I said, “Well, I felt like God just told me as I was praying.”

She said, “How do you know that?”

And I said, “Again, I felt like God told me that.”

She said, “Yeah, but how do you know that? I just went to an audiologist a week ago, and he told me that I’ve lost 30% of my hearing in my right ear, especially in the

higher end frequencies. My mother has that problem and my grandmother has this problem. How did you know that?"

I said, "Well, God just told me that." So I prayed for her briefly and drove off. I thought, "Gee, that was cool. I don't do that very often." The next week she came running up to me at church. She said, "Rich, Rich, you'll never guess what happened."

I said, "What happened?"

She said, "My ear was hurting and ringing for several days after you prayed." I thought, "Great..."

She said, "And then it stopped. So I went to the audiologist to see if anything had happened. He said, 'Something amazing has happened, but you hear perfectly now. There's no hearing loss at all.'"

Are you hungry yet? Don't you want to see more of God's power, more of God's presence? Don't you want to see breakthroughs in your life and in the life of people you love by God granting spiritual gifts?

Hungry for God

Rich Nathan

November 9-10, 2002

Spiritual Gifts: God's Way of Building Community

1 Corinthians 12:8-11

Hunger for God and for Spiritual Gifts Comes From:

I. Overcoming Your Satiation

II. Praying for Desperation

III. Rethinking Your Orientation

IV. Responding Inspiration