

How to Receive Spiritual Gifts

Rich Nathan

Spiritual Gifts: God's Way of Building Community

1 Corinthians 12:8-11

Over the last month or so, I've been teaching about spiritual gifts. I want to begin today by giving you a little bit of historical perspective on what has become the fastest growing portion of the Christian church in the world today – that portion in the church that seeks for, believes in, and practices spiritual gifts. The growth of the Pentecostal, charismatic and what we call here at Vineyard, Empowered Evangelical wing of the church is likely the major story of the Christian church in the last 100 years.

But the story begins at a little Bible college in Topeka, Kansas with a 31 year old woman who was seeking more of God. The woman's name was Agnes Ozman and she was attending Charles Parham's Bible School in Topeka. Charles Parham was a Holiness preacher who taught that the Spirit of God was going to be poured out in these last days, bringing about a worldwide revival before Jesus' return. But the way the worldwide revival would come would be that the Holy Spirit would give the gift of speaking in other languages that would create instant missionaries. In other words, Charles Parham taught that the gift of tongues that we read about in the Bible was a gift that would instantly give individuals the capacity to speak Mandarin Chinese or Hindi, or Filipino, or New York. And with this newfound ability to speak in languages that people hadn't learned, folks would become instant missionaries.

So Charles Parham secured the Bible College in Topeka to prepare perspective missionaries for the outpouring of the Spirit. He directed students to especially study the book of Acts and Acts 2.

During the Christmas break, a few students decided to fast and to seek God for the filling of the Spirit. One of those students was Agnes Ozman. And in the providence of God, as the 20th century began, God gave Agnes Ozman, this 30 year old single woman, who simply wanted to be used by God more and felt called to be a missionary, the gift of tongues. While people all over the world were celebrating the new century, at exactly 12:01 a.m. January 1, 1901 Agnes Ozman became filled with the Holy Spirit and received the biblical gift of tongues. Not a known foreign language like Chinese or Japanese or Hindi, but a prayer language that assisted her to pray better, worship more fervently, connect more intimately with God.

The news about this phenomenon spread like wildfire throughout the Bible College and many other students began to receive the gift of tongues. They then went out to the churches around Kansas and other people began experiencing the Holy Spirit in a new and fresh way and they also spoke in tongues.

Parham took this message of the coming of the Spirit and the gift of tongues down to Texas and started a little Bible College there where he taught the doctrine of the baptism in the Holy Spirit accompanied by speaking in other tongues. Charles Parham was a terrible racist. There was a black man named William Seymour who wanted to attend his school. Some days Parham made him sit outside the window and listen to Parham speak. Other days William Seymour was required to sit in the very back of the auditorium, separated from the class.

Seymour left that Texas school and headed out to Los Angeles. Finally, in 1906 during Easter week, he experienced the spiritual breakthrough he was seeking for. The day after Palm Sunday several people who William Seymour was ministering to experienced the Spirit's filling accompanied by speaking in tongues. His little group grew. They needed a larger facility to hold the growing crowds. And so an old 2-story building at 312 Azusa Street was procured. The parishioners who were poor blacks and whites put together a little pulpit made of two wooden crates in the center of the room with a prayer altar in front of it. The pews were formed by redwood planks laid across nail kegs and old boxes. The upstairs part of the room was called "the upper room" where people went to pray, silently waiting for the Holy Spirit.

People came from virtually every segment of society over the next three years to that old building on Azusa Street – whites, blacks, men, women, the poor, the rich, folks from all over the world came to the meetings that were held three times a day for three years. Inside the building about 800 worshippers would pack in with about 500 outside. Women, in particular, were empowered by the Spirit and went out from that place as evangelists and Bible preachers, and missionaries.

This phenomenal revival on Azusa Street under the leadership of William Seymour gave birth to modern Pentecostalism and the modern Pentecostal churches such as the Assembly of God Church, and the Pentecostal Holiness Church. It also created division in many denominations as different denominations eliminated the name Pentecostal from their denominational names because they didn't want to be associated with this filling of the Spirit and speaking with other tongues. So the Church of the Nazarene, for example, changed its name from The Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene, to simply The Church of the Nazarene.

Well, the phenomenon associated with the Spirit's filling remained quarantined within poor Pentecostal churches that met in tents on the fringes of town and in storefronts in the inner city until an April day in 1959 when Dennis Bennett, the rector of St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Van Nuys, California apprised his very proper and upscale parishioners that he spoke in tongues. This was not received as good news. He spoke of his experience at each of the three morning services. After the second service, his associate resigned and in a hastily called board meeting, called for Bennett's resignation, which he gave at the third service.

Dennis Bennett's admission in front of a large Episcopal Church that he spoke in tongues sent a shockwave across the American church landscape. The story was

reported in Time Magazine and in Newsweek and in various newspapers around America. It shocked the church world and created an interest in Pentecostal phenomenon in mainstream churches, especially the Episcopal Church, the Lutheran Church, and the Roman Catholic Church. So you saw growing charismatic movements during the 60's in these various churches. And then in the growth of independent charismatic churches with the birth of the Jesus Movement in the late 1960's.

But there was still a portion of the church untouched by this 20th century move of the Holy Spirit and that was the conservative evangelical wing of the church. In 1982 the Holy Spirit breached the wall. God used John Wimber, who was teaching a class at Fuller Seminary called Signs, Wonders and Church Growth at the Fuller School for World Missions. I have been told that there are only two famous seminary courses in the history of seminaries – theologian Karl Barth's famous lectures at Princeton Seminary and John Wimber's MC510 "The Miraculous in Church Growth" at Fuller Seminary. The course was the most popular in the seminary's history. I've been told that students were lined up outside the class to get in. John's class created a raging controversy within evangelical orthodoxy because he actually prayed for individual students. He just didn't talk about the Holy Spirit.

But the class grew out of his study and work in church growth and world missions as he and several other professors observed the dramatic growth of Christianity in the third world through Christians addressing disease and demonic oppression in the power of the Spirit. They observed that the gospel was spreading more effectively when it was accompanied by signs and wonders and the experience of the Holy Spirit. Right now, there are about 500 million Christians around the world who not only have trusted in Christ as their Lord and Savior and believe in the Bible as their final authority for faith and practice, but who also believe in and practice to some degree the gifts of the Holy Spirit that we find present in 1 Corinthians 12.

In fact, by the year 2020 about 1 out of every 7 people in the entire world will be a charismatic Christian. Let me say that again. By the year 2020, with the present trend lines, about 1 out of every 7 people in the entire world, taking account of population growth and everything else, will be a charismatic Christian. And about 1 out of 10 will be an evangelical Christian. In other words, $\frac{1}{4}$ of the world's population will be Bible believing, born-again followers of Jesus Christ.

What I want to talk about today is how you and I can get in on this. The momentum has been building for 100 years from a single 30 year old woman who desired to be a missionary to a half billion people today, and well over a billion by the year 2020. This is, in the history of the church, one of the most amazing stories, this recent outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Today what I'd like to do as I continue to teach on the gifts of the Holy Spirit is to talk very simply how you can receive spiritual gifts. Let's pray.

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.

The starting point for being able to receive spiritual gifts is the starting point of the Christian life – and that is the gospel. You will not be able to adequately receive spiritual gifts unless you preach the gospel to yourself over and over again.

Martin Luther, the great father of the Reformation, said, “The gospel is more than God’s Son Jesus Christ died, was raised, was made Lord.” Luther said that you haven’t grasped the gospel unless you can say about yourself, “Christ’s death was for me. Christ’s resurrection was for me. Christ’s Lordship is of me.” It’s not gospel unless it becomes yours – until Christ becomes your own, until Christ belongs to you. Until then, it is not good news for you. Christ has to become so much yours that it is as if his deeds were done by you. It wasn’t just Christ that died on the cross, Paul says, but it’s you. It wasn’t just Christ who rose from the dead, but you.

The gospel is the gift of Christ to you. Handel, in his famous Messiah, plucked out that wonderful line from the Book of Isaiah, “For now unto us a child is born. Unto us a son is given.”

Here’s what I’m saying, if you believe in God’s gift of Christ to you, if you believe in God’s gift of Christ in you, if you believe in God’s gift of Christ for you, if you believe in God’s gift of Christ with you, if Christ is really yours, then why is it so hard for you to believe that along with Christ God may want to give you the gift of tongues or prophecy or healing? This is the logic of Paul’s argument in Romans 8. I want you to see this for a moment. Romans 8:31, the apostle Paul writes, *What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*

In other words, having given us the greater gift, why would God withhold the lesser gifts? Having given us his Son, why would he withhold something as meager as the gift of tongues? Paul’s argument is like this. Someone gives you a really expensive mountain bike, but you struggle in believing that they want to also give you the bell on the bike. Or you purchase a Mercedes S600 Sedan for \$120,000. It has a 5.5L, 36-valve, V-12 engine and you ask the car dealer, “Now, that does come with the floor mats, doesn’t it?” You are shopping for one of these McMansions in New Albany for three-quarters of a million dollars. It is a 4000 square foot new house on a ½ acre of land. You are walking through with the builder and you say, “For this \$750,000, do I also get a garbage disposal in my kitchen sink?”

Our problem with every issue in the Christian life – whether we’re talking about Christian therapy, or Christian marriage, or the Christian church, the believing in or

receiving spiritual gifts - needs to be brought back to whether you really understand and have grasped the gospel about Jesus Christ.

John Wesley, the father of the Methodist Church, struggled for many years to really lay hold of the gospel. He pursued Christian holiness, served in various prisons, became a missionary, prayed, and fasted. And then according to his journal, one evening he went very unwillingly to a meeting at Aldersgate Street where someone was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine while he was describing the change that God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. That's Wesley's famous experience. His heart became strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and he saved *me* from the law of sin and death.

Now, I don't believe this was Wesley's conversion experience. In fact, Wesley didn't regard it as such. But it was an experience of assurance. He, as a follower of Christ, needed to have the gospel preached to him again. You know, we often relegate the gospel as a message relevant to outsiders, to those who have not yet embraced Christ. But I believe in the pastoral wisdom of those who say "every morning before you get out of bed, follower of Christ, preach the gospel to yourself." Many, many Christian saints who have gone before us have taught us that the reason why we followers of Christ are so ineffective and often so depressed and oppressed is because we don't preach the gospel to ourselves before we get out of bed.

The gospel is God's way of making us right with him. The gospel tells us that God the Son took to his divine nature a human nature and as the God Man, Jesus of Nazareth came to earth. He perfectly obeyed God the Father, never failing God the Father in anything he ever did, and after living a life of perfect obedience, perfect love, perfect loyalty to the Father, Jesus of Nazareth died on a cross as our perfect substitute so that our sins might be removed and God's judgment might be satisfied.

Here is the message that we preach to ourselves, Jesus took on himself the punishment due to me, to you, for our sins and failures. At the cross God's judgment is appeased and a way is opened up for me and you and everyone who trusts in Christ to be made right with God. Right now, before I get out of bed in the morning, before I do anything either good or bad, God regards me as righteous and he declares me to be righteous.

The reason I go through all of this, friend, is because I have conversations with people all the time about spiritual gifts that go like this:

I ask them, "Have you ever spoken in tongues? Have you ever given a prophetic word? Has God ever used you to heal the sick?"

The person will say, "No, I don't think so. I don't think I've ever done any of those things."

So I'll say, "Why do you think you've never been given any of the gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12? Why do you think God has not used you up till now in the way outlined here?"

They'll say, "Well, honestly, I don't know. I'm a new Christian. I don't really know that much of the Bible. I haven't been consistent as I should be in my devotions. I still struggle with my temper."

Or one of the common things I hear from people is, "Well, I'm an engineer you know." That explains it. "I'm an accountant." "I'm an attorney." "I'm not very emotional." In other words, "I'm logical, analytical. I'm not the kind of person who cries easily. I'm not real touchy feely. So because of the way my brain is wired, it is hard for me to receive. I think it would be easier to receive the gifts of the spirit if I were sort of a more loosey goosey type of person – an artist or musician."

But the bottom line of what I hear from most people, if you boil it all down, regarding why a person doesn't function in the gifts of the Spirit as outlined in 1 Corinthians 12, is that it is due to some personal defect, some failure of character, some personality quirk, some performance failure, some temperamental bias, that renders them a poor candidate for receiving spiritual gifts, especially the gifts of the more spectacular kind.

Do any of you feel this way? Can you identify with any of this? That really at bottom that you in your heart of hearts believe that you are an unlikely candidate to receive gifts of healing, prophecy, or discerning spirits, or miracles? If you at all think of yourself as an unlikely candidate to receive these things, then you do not fully understand the gospel.

Stop thinking about yourself, friend, all together. What is wrong with you, what is defective about you, how you are nothing like John Wesley, John Wimber, or any of the other wonderful men in the history of the church, or people around you here in the Vineyard. Stop focusing on the ways that you are screwed up.

Let me put my cookies on a much lower shelf and state this as plainly and as affectionately as I possibly can. You say that there is something about you, that you are screwed up in some way because of what your parents did, or your personality, or your own sins that render you an unlikely candidate to exercise these 1 Corinthians 12 gifts. I say with all affection, "Of course you are screwed up. You will, in this life, always be screwed up. Indeed, you are more screwed up than you in your most humble moments ever confessed." And so am I.

There, I've said it. Forget about yourself. Forget about what you've done. And how unworthy or worthy you are. Forget about how much you know. How much you pray. What your personality is like. Here's a way to test whether you really grasp the Christian way of salvation: do you believe that someone is more worthy of receiving spiritual gifts than you are? Do you think that there is anyone else in the world that is a more likely candidate for being used by God to heal the sick, or to prophecy than

you? Someone who is a more likely candidate for God to use with the gift of miracles than you? Maybe someone who is more emotional than you or someone less emotional? Or someone who is not as analytical or someone who is gentler or kinder, or who knows more Bible than you?

The Christian way of salvation, when you really grasp it, teaches that God has eliminated all the distinctions we normally draw between men and women in terms of our acceptability to God. You and I and the thousands of other followers of Christ who call Vineyard Columbus their church home, and the billion plus followers of Christ worldwide, we are all on the same level playing field with God. We're all at the same starting point in the race. No one is ahead of you. No one is behind you, in terms of righteousness or acceptability or worthiness. All the distinctions between men and women who trust in Christ – our wealth, our knowledge, our relational connections, and our social skills – all these distinctions are eliminated. We are, all of us, equally qualified candidates to receive God's gifts.

As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4, in a negative vein to those who thought they were ahead of someone else, "Who made you different than anyone else?" Do you get it? Your understanding of the gospel is tested by whether or not you really believe God in Christ eliminates all the distinctions we draw between people regarding worthiness or unworthiness, personalities, knowledge bases.

That's why a murderer in prison who trusts in Christ to save them, or some poor guy who is a follower of Christ, but has no home, or a seven year old child who dresses up like Spiderman on Halloween – that's why all the different people you meet, who might be followers of Christ are just as likely candidates to prophecy as is a pastor who is trained at an evangelical seminary. In fact, they are more likely candidates! That's why the least likely candidates, in our opinions, people with funny theologies and weird mannerisms, and very affected ways of talking may press forward in certain spiritual gifts. The gospel eliminates all of our distinctions of worthiness.

Friends, you are never going to get out of the blocks regarding spiritual gifts, unless you preach the gospel to yourself every day, unless you are rooted and grounded in the gospel, unless you are drenched in the gospel, unless before you get out of bed in the morning you say to yourself, "I am right with God simply through my faith in Jesus Christ. I'm looking to him alone. So I'm a likely candidate, as likely as anyone else, to move in the 1 Corinthians 12 spiritual gifts."

Well, you might say, "If all of these human distinctions of worthiness and acceptability are eliminated, then I guess it's completely up to God concerning what gifts I receive. After all, 1 Corinthians 12:11 says, *All of these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one just as he determines.* And in 1 Corinthians 12:18 we read, *But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, everyone of them, just as he wanted them to be.* So many of you reason this way, "Well, God is the one who determines which different gifts are given. He's the one who arranges the body as he wants." I guess God has determined not to give you these 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 gifts. After all, you've never healed anyone to your

knowledge, or prophesied, or spiritually discerned the presence of a demonic spirit. You have been given the gift of cleaning up after people. You've been given the gift of being able to remember TV show theme songs. Or the gift of being able to recite movie lines. Or the gift of remembering baseball stats. Or more seriously, you've been given the gift of teaching or the gift of mercy or the gift of administration. So you think the appropriate thing for you to do is to be content with God's sovereign determination.

And it all sounds so very humble. "If God wanted me to speak in tongues he could do that to me. I'm open." I've heard people say that for years. "I'm open. Here I am. If God wants to use me to heal the sick, here I am. I'm open. I'm available. But it's apparent that God has sovereignly determined otherwise."

Do any of you feel that way? I guess God has determined that you won't be given gifts of healing or the gift of prophecy or the gift of miracles? It reminds me of an incident in the life of a father of modern missions, a man by the name of William Carey. Carey, through his studies, became convinced that foreign missions were the chief responsibility of the Christian church. His ideas were revolutionary. Many people, especially in the 18th century, believed that the great commission was only given to the apostles. And therefore converting the heathen was no concern of theirs. When Carey presented his ideas to a group of ministers, one of them responded, "You young man, sit down. When God pleases to convert the heathen, he will do it without your aid or mine."

But William Carey refused to be silenced. And in the spring of 1792 he published an 87 page book that has had nearly the implications of Martin Luther's 95 Theses and its influence on Christian history. The book was called "An Inquiry into the Obligation of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of Heathens" and that's not even the whole of the title. What Carey argued is that God's sovereignty is never ever an excuse for our human irresponsibility or our failure to obey God's commands. God is sovereign over people's salvation, but he uses the means of us preaching the gospel to save people.

God has commanded us to bear witness to Christ in our workplaces, our families and our schools. Paul asks in Romans 10, *How shall they hear without a preacher?* God is going to hold us responsible not for whether someone gets saved, but for our refusing to witness. God will hold us responsible for our refusal to share the gospel with people around us.

God is sovereign. He's sovereign over everything. He's sovereign over our food. He's the one who provides food for everyone on the earth. But God expects us to pray to him for our food. Matthew 6:11, *Give us this day our daily bread.* God expects us to work to get our food as Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, *If anyone will not work, let him not eat.* God expects us to share our food with those in need. As Paul says in Romans 12:13, *Share with God's people, who are in need.*

Students, God is sovereign over your tests. But he expects you to study and to work hard and to pray before your exams and not just go in and say, “Well, you know, whatever I get is up to God, I guess.”

God is sovereign over your money, but he commands you to be a good steward, to use wisdom in your purchases, to not fritter your money away on the latest fashions or the latest home decorating ideas, or some useless gadget.

God is sovereign, in other words, not only over results, but the means of obtaining the results. And regarding spiritual gifts, we will not be able to stand before God on the Day of Judgment and say, “Well, Lord, you sovereignly determined to not give me the gift of healing. It’s not my fault that people around me remained sick and weren’t helped or healed. You sovereignly determined to not give me gifts of discernment. It’s not my fault that people around me with demons were not set free. It’s not my fault that people around me weren’t encouraged or strengthened or comforted. You sovereignly determined to not give me the gift of prophecy.”

The Lord on that Day will say to you and to me, “Did I not command you in 1 Corinthians 12:31 to eagerly desire greater gifts? Did I not tell you to excel in gifts that build up the church? Did I not say to you to zealously pursue spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy, in 1 Corinthians 14:1? Did I not give you example after example of my servants in my word that sought me for more of my presence, and more of my power? My servants were not just open to my presence. My servants didn’t say, ‘Well, if you want to, fine.’” My servants sought me and pursued me. Consider my servant Moses who wasn’t satisfied with his experience with me, but he prayed earnestly that he might see my glory. Have you not considered Elisha, who would not leave his master, Elijah’s, side, but stayed by him that he might receive Elijah’s gifts and power when I took Elijah up. Have you considered my servants Peter and John who after experiencing the gift of my Spirit on the Day of Pentecost kept pursuing me for more? They asked me for more boldness in Acts 4 to speak my word. They prayed that my hand would be stretched out to heal and to perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of my Son Jesus.”

God will say to you and me, I believe, on the Day of Judgment, “Why did you feel free to disobey my command to you to ask me for more spiritual gifts? Why did you feel free to not follow the example of my servants that I gave you in my word? Why did you feel free to cast off to my sovereignty your own negligence and inertia and unbelief and prayerlessness?”

Friends, God’s sovereignty over spiritual gifts can never be an excuse for you or me failing to ask for what we presently do not have. You do not have gifts of healing, ask for them. You do not have gifts of discernment, ask for them. You do not have the gift of prophecy, ask. Jesus says, “Ask and it will be given; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”

I do believe that spiritual gifts are both sought after and also discovered. On the one hand, we are instructed to seek after spiritual gifts – to ask for gifts we presently

don't have. For example, Paul tells those who have the gift of tongues to pray that they might be able to interpret what they've said, 1 Corinthians 14:13.

On the other hand, Paul tells those in the church in Rome in Romans 12 that we have different gifts according to the grace given us. In Romans 12, Paul writes, *If a man's gift is prophesying; let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve, if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.*

Paul assumes that believers will know their gifts, that our gifts can be discovered. Likewise, Peter writes in 1 Peter 4, *As each one has received a gift, employ it for one another as good stewards of God's very grace.* Again, the assumption is that you know the gift that you are called upon to employ.

Now, many of you who are followers of Christ here today would have to admit that you do not know what gifts you have been given. If you were to be asked right now, follower of Christ, what spiritual gift God has given you, many of you would frankly just shrug your shoulders and say, "Well, I don't know." Part of the problem in America is that many churches don't provide opportunities for various kinds of gifts to be used. One of the main reasons we have small groups here at Vineyard is to provide you with the opportunity to employ all of the spiritual gifts that we read about in the Bible.

In many churches you might be given the gift of prophecy, but there is simply no opportunity in the church to use the gift of prophecy. It is not believed in. It is not welcomed. It is not prayed for. It is not taught about. In many churches there are gender-based distinctions regarding certain gifts. Women are not permitted to lead or to administrate or to teach, or to lead small groups. In this church, we make no gender-based distinction regarding the exercise of spiritual gifts. We believe gifts are given without distinction to men, women, young and old.

Let me share with you a few simple ways for you to discover what gifts you have been given. And again, I want to underline, this doesn't mean that these are all the gifts you will ever have, or that you are off the hook for seeking God for more and in discovering your gifts. You might wish to consider where you've been effective in the past. What have people said to you in groups when you've gathered together with other Christians? Again, part of the reason we encourage small group participation is so that you might have an opportunity to not only exercise, but to discover the gifts that God has already given you.

Have you regularly heard that people love coming over to your home? That you make folks feel so welcome? That your home is warm and inviting? Perhaps God is indicating to you that you have been given a gift of hospitality.

Do you regularly hear that you help people understand the scriptures? That you have the capacity to lay things out so clearly and so plainly that you are easy to follow? Do

you regularly hear that people get it when they listen to you? Maybe you've been given the gift of teaching.

Where have you been effective? Where have you experienced joy? What is it in ministry that really floats your boat? Do you love seeing people in need get their needs met? Do you love giving extravagantly beyond a mere tithe? Do you live giving quietly, thoughtfully with lots of premeditation? Do people say to you, "You gave me exactly what I needed"? Would anyone who is poor stand up for you on the Day of Judgment and say, "Lord, look what she did for me. Look what he gave me. Remember her in your mercy. Remember and reward his gifts." Perhaps, friend, you've been given a gift of giving.

Where do you experience joy? What floats your boat?

Here's another way to discover your gifts. Where do you experience what I call "holy dissatisfaction" with the status quo? I'm not asking, "Where are you critical of the church? Where do you see flaws in the church?" It certainly doesn't take the Holy Spirit to find the church's shortcomings. Any pagan or cynic can point out the church's flaws. It doesn't take the Holy Spirit to write a critical email or to complain. You do not have the gift of discernment because something in a group or ministry bugs you. A lot of criticism can be contributed to our fallen, judgmental, unhappy, sinful natures.

But there is what I would call a holy dissatisfaction, a recognition that something is not the way it ought to be, and a passion to do something about it. For example, a woman in our church named Deb Petermann has a developmentally disabled brother. She experienced what I would call a true holy dissatisfaction because our church did not have a ministry for those who were developmentally disabled and to their families who have additional needs and burdens. She calls the ministry Bridgebuilders. It touches dozens and dozens of lives not only within this church, but also outside the church.

I had an experience of holy dissatisfaction when I came to this church as a 21 year old almost 26 years ago. I had in my previous church experience the privilege of experiencing excellent Bible teaching. I also experienced excellent Bible teaching in my college fellowship group for four years. I was around serious students of the word. And then I came to this little church, it was about 30 people, and I sat week after week listening to less than excellent Bible teachers. To be perfectly frank, the teaching was on many occasions horrible. But I love the people. Things got so bad that I sent away for a well-known Christian preacher's manuscripts and on Sunday afternoon I used to read the manuscripts out loud to my wife so that we would get Bible teaching every week.

Finally, I felt inspired to write to the leaders of the little church a 10 page memo in which I very warmly suggested without any kind of bitterness or hyper-criticalness that we might want to consider teaching Bible series, going through various Bible books. I outlined the way it could be done. The leaders brought me and said, "We

think this is an excellent memo. And we would like you to head up our teaching ministry.” The way I became the lead teacher in this church was that I responded to what God was doing in my by way of holy dissatisfaction.

Friend, is the Holy Spirit making you dissatisfied with the status quo in some area or another. Do you see some area of injustice in the world? Or need in the church where you say, “Someone’s got to do something.” That could be God’s indication that you are the one who he’s equipping to do this very thing. Is there a drive in you to see something fixed? Something better?

Now, I recognize that you may not be listened to by this or that leader. Or you may not be given the opportunity to fully employ what you think God has given you. Keep seeking God for the right time. God had a time for his Son to be revealed to his people. It took 30 years before it was the right time. Moses was frustrated by the injustice experienced by his people, the Israelites. But it took 40 years for God to give him the opportunity to address the injustice. When he tried prematurely, he was shut down.

If you haven’t been listened to, do what you can do now. Don’t quit. It may simply not be the right time for what you have. God may be reordering things in the church or in your group. I’ve seen lots of people with true holy dissatisfaction over the status quo become bitter or disillusioned, cynical, because they couldn’t wait on God’s timing in the church. If what they had wasn’t received by the church’s leadership when they offered it, well, then forget it. I guess the only option available to me is to gossip.

Friend, if you have something that is truly from God for the church, if you have something that is truly from God for the world, and you are seeking him for your gift to be employed, God will open up a way for your gifts. Proverbs 18:16 says, *A man’s gift makes room for him and brings him before great men.*

Finally, the way gifts are discovered is through prophetic words. Paul writes to Timothy, *Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.* It is possible that a new gift was imparted to Timothy at that time, but it’s just as likely that Timothy’s gifts were unwrapped and spotlighted for him. That Timothy was given insight into his spiritual gifts and call.

Prophecy is often used in the Bible to underline someone’s calling and gifting. The prophet Samuel was used by God to identify first Saul and after that David regarding callings and gifts they didn’t know they had. Be open to receiving prophetic words regarding how God may wish to use you.

Sometimes, friends, we don’t need to discover spiritual gifts, but we need to allow spiritual gifts to discover us. In Sam Storm’s, the Wheaton College professor’s, words, “It may not be so much a matter of us finding our gifts, but allowing God’s gifts to find us.”

You say, “How can a gift find me?”

God may be giving you a spiritual gift wrapped up in the package of a need that he presses you to meet. Is there anyone in your small group financially needy? Is God pressing you to meet the financial need of someone in your family? Someone in your relational circle? What if you took \$50 out of your wallet or \$10 out of your wallet and you gave it and said, “God give me the gift of giving.”

Is anyone around you sick? What if you stepped out and prayed for a family member or someone in your small group or office and you asked God in that moment to give you the gift of healing.

Do you know anyone who needs encouragement? Anyone who needs comfort? Anyone who needs strengthening? What if you stepped out and asked God in the moment to give you a prophetic word that would strengthen, encourage and comfort another.

God often wraps spiritual gifts in the packaging of needs.

God is doing an awesome thing on the earth today. He is pouring out his Spirit in a way unprecedented in the history of the church. Will you allow God to use you in ways that go beyond what God has done with you and for you in the past? Will you receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit that God wishes to give to you? Let’s pray.

How to Receive Spiritual Gifts

Rich Nathan

Spiritual Gifts: God’s Way of Building Community

1 Corinthians 12:8-11

I. Obstacles Overcome

A. Not Grasping God’s Global Purpose

B. Not Grasping God's Gospel

1. The Greater Gift (Col. 3:1-4; Rom. 8:31,32)

2. The End of Distinctions (1 Cor. 4:7)

C. Not Grasping God's Sovereignty and Our Responsibility (1 Cor. 12:11, 31; 14:12)

D. Not Grasping God's Gifts (Rom. 12:6, 7; 1 Pt. 8-11)

1. Find God's Gifts

a. Where Have You Been Effective?

b. Where to You Experience Joy?

c. Where Do You Experience Holy Dissatisfaction?

d. Where Have You Gotten a Prophetic Word?

2. Letting God's Gifts Find You