

Desperate For the Wisdom of God

Rich Nathan

June 3-4, 2006

Spiritual Gifts: Showing the Spirit Series

1 Corinthians 12:8

I would like to take you back a little over 50 years. It was late summer, 1954, when Martin Luther King, Jr. arrived in Montgomery, Alabama to become the new pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. He had just finished his comprehensive exams at Boston University and was working on his doctoral dissertation. He had some ambition to perhaps get a prestigious academic post or to become the president of his alma mater, Morehouse College.

He had recently married Coretta Scott King, who was a talented musician. She had studied music at Antioch College here in Ohio. She was concerned that her considerable talents in singing would decline dramatically in Montgomery because Montgomery, Alabama was not a place for a woman trained in opera. King's father had nothing good to say about the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. He considered it a "silk stocking" church run by big shots for big shots.

King did not come to Montgomery with an interest in social protest. He had been trained at Boston University in white, liberal Protestant theology, which taught very little about the black experience under Jim Crow legislation. King had almost no background in becoming a Civil Rights leader.

You know this part of the story. On December 1, 1955 Rosa Parks was arrested for violating Alabama's segregation laws when she refused to move to the back of the bus and yield her seat in the front to a white man. Rosa Parks had extensive background in participating in Civil Rights protests. She had been monitoring the bus situation for years waiting for the right moment to seize as a test case. Her arrest in December was not even her first arrest. She had been arrested as far back as 1944 for challenging the seating requirements on buses.

Once Rosa Parks was arrested, a meeting was held with Montgomery area pastors. King didn't even want to go to the meeting. He let the group know that he had more pressing matters. He said that this group of pastors could use the meeting space on the bottom floor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. Then, as only the Spirit of God could arrange things, the group of 18 pastors decided that King should be the president of this newly formed boycott organization because King was known as a great preacher. He said that the nomination and the pressure to accept the leadership of this organization happened so fast that he didn't have time to think it through. He later said: "It was probable that had I thought it through, I would have declined the nomination."

He began by trying to negotiate with the city bus line for the most minor of accommodations. King did not begin by attempting to overthrow state segregation laws. He asked the city bus line for three things:

SLIDE

- 1) that blacks would be treated courteously by drivers;
- 2) that black passengers would be seated from the rear to the front of the bus and white passengers from the front to the rear of the bus on a first come, first serve basis with no seats reserved for any race;
- 3) that black bus drivers be hired in predominantly black residential areas.

This was not a radical agenda. In fact, it upset the National NAACP because the agenda did not seem to go far enough. But these three minor requests were turned down. So blacks in Montgomery decided to boycott the use of buses.

Well, within a month the boycott began to flounder. There was a front page story run that some prominent black ministers had negotiated with the city and were calling to an end for the boycott. The mayor put pressure on white housewives that they should stop driving their maids home after work and supplying them with cab fare. The police commissioner began sending the police out to break up groups of blacks who were waiting on street corners for cabs. Cab drivers were arrested for transporting blacks.

King, himself, was picked up by the police, driven out to the country and dropped on a back rural road one evening. He came back to his parsonage exhausted. His wife and two-month old daughter were asleep. King was getting ready to join them when the phone rang. A man with a Southern drawl let loose with a string of obscene words and a death threat: "Listen, you blankety-blank, we've taken all that we are going to take from you. Before next week you'll be sorry you ever came to Montgomery."

King immediately hung up the phone. The threatening phone calls that he had received, which had grown to 30-40 a day, had taken its toll. King was overcome with fear. He said he got out of bed, made a pot of coffee, sat in his kitchen and thought through how he could escape his situation without appearing to be a coward. Was there any way out? He wanted to give up. He thought about his little girl sleeping and his lovely wife, who had given up her music career. He said: I felt myself growing in fear. And then he heard this voice in his heart that said: You can't call on daddy now. You can't call on mama. You've got to call on that something in that person your daddy used to tell you about, that power that can make a way out of no way. And with his head buried in his hands, King bowed at the kitchen table and prayed aloud:

SLIDE

Lord, I'm down here trying to do what's right. I still think I'm right. I'm taking a stand for what I believe is right. But I don't know the way ahead. Lord, I must confess that I

am weak now. I am faltering. I'm losing my courage. Now I'm afraid and I can't let the people see me like this because if they see me weak and losing my courage, they will begin to be weak. The people are looking to me for leadership and if I stand before them without strength or courage, they, too, will falter. I'm at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I've come to the point where I can't face it alone.

He heard a voice saying:

SLIDE

Martin Luther, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And lo, I will be with you, even until the end of the world.

Then King heard the voice of Jesus.

SLIDE

"I heard the voice of Jesus saying to fight on. He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone, no never, no, never alone. He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone."

Martin Luther King had an experience of the presence of God and he felt the direction of God clearly regarding how he should proceed. His faith moved from a sort of liberal belief in a higher power to a personal experience with the living God. King's uncertainty disappeared in that moment. He said: From then on, I knew exactly what I needed to do. He rejected his earlier gradualism, chipping away a little bit at a time at segregation. After he was visited by Christ in his kitchen, he stood up and made it clear that he was calling for immediate integration of the buses and a breaking down of the Southern laws of segregation.

A few days later his house was bombed. But even then he knew what he needed to do. His experience with Christ gave him the strength and the wisdom to speak to the angry crowd that stood by his bombed out house. People in the crowd were shouting, saying:

- I've got my .38. You got get yours.
- White folks are always pushing us around. Let's battle it out.

King said his experience just a few days before gave him the words to speak in the moment. He looked at the angry crowd and said:

SLIDE

If you have weapons, take them home. If you do not have them, please do not seek to get them. We cannot solve this problem by retaliatory violence. We must meet violence with non-violence. Remember the words of Jesus: "He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword." Remember this is what God has said to us. We must love our white brothers, no matter what they do to us. We must make them know that we love them. Jesus still cries out in words that echo across the centuries: "Love your enemies.

Bless them that curse you. Pray for them that despitefully use you.” This is what we must live by. We must meet hate with love.

In a moment of crisis, when Martin Luther King, Jr. was desperate, he cried out for wisdom from God. He cried out for God’s presence and strength. Friend, have you ever been desperate for God to show up? Have you ever been desperate to know the mind of God because you just couldn’t go on in your own strength and in your own knowledge?

Now, few of us are called to the scope of leadership that Dr. King was called to. It has often been said of Martin Luther King, Jr., that he was undoubtedly the most influential pastor ever in American history. But whatever scope of responsibility you have in your family, in your work, with respect to a ministry that God has given you, have you ever found yourself desperate, sitting down and having a kitchen table moment with God where you just said: I can’t move forward without you. I don’t know what you want. I can’t navigate this by myself. I need your wisdom. I need your mind. I need you to reveal your plan to me.

As we move forward in this series on spiritual gifts, I’ve called today’s talk: Desperate For the Wisdom of God. Let’s pray. 1 Cor. 12.4-8.

SLIDE

1Co 12:4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them.

1Co 12:5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.

1Co 12:6 There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

1Co 12:7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

1Co 12:8 To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit,

Last week I talked about spiritual gifts by way of introduction to this series. We saw that we gained some understanding of the gifts by looking at the four terms the apostle Paul uses to describe them. First of all, he calls them “gifts” in verse 4.

SLIDE

1Co 12:4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them.

That emphasizes the grace of God, the generosity of God as the foundation for our gifts. God gives these things in 1 Cor. 12 because he is generous.

The apostle Paul goes on and he calls them services.

SLIDE

1Co 12:5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.

This emphasizes the purpose of the gifts – to serve God and to serve other people.

Verse 6, he calls them workings

SLIDE

1Co 12:6 There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

This communicates to us that spiritual gifts are God's power tools. We are not talking about natural talents. We are talking about divinely energized capacities.

And finally, in verse 7, he calls these things manifestations.

SLIDE

1Co 12:7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

Spiritual gifts make the invisible God visible; they manifest God to the world.

Now, it is completely false that at conversion a Christian is given all the gifts that he or she will ever need or ever will have. I know it is very common evangelical teaching that at your conversion you got all the spiritual gifts that God ever intends to give you, but that evangelical teaching is completely false. There is no verse in the Bible, not one, that says that all the spiritual gifts you will ever have are given at the moment of conversion. In fact, on several occasions the apostle Paul tells us to seek or pursue gifts that we desire but don't yet have.

SLIDE – 1 Cor. 12.31

1Co 12:31 Now eagerly desire⁵ the greater gifts.

SLIDE – 1 Cor. 14.1

1Co 14:1 Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.

SLIDE – 1 Cor. 14.12-13

1Co 14:12 So it is with you. Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church.

1Co 14:13 For this reason those who speak in a tongue should pray that they may interpret what they say.

SLIDE – 1 Cor. 14.39

^{1Co 14:39} Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.

How many gifts can you expect to receive from God? I don't know. I do know that God is very generous. Jesus says in Matthew 7.9-11,

SLIDE

^{Mt 7:9} “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone?

^{Mt 7:10} Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?

^{Mt 7:11} If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

How many spiritual gifts can a Christian expect to be given over the course of his or her life? Well, how many gifts would a very wealthy, very generous earthly father give to his children over the course of their lives? I don't know. But it would be a lot. You are children of your Heavenly Father. What is your expectation regarding what God your Heavenly Father might give you? How many gifts can a Christian expect to receive from God? How many gifts would a wealthy, generous lover give to his beloved over the course of her life? I don't know, but it would be a lot. We who are Christians are called the Bride of Christ. Jesus is romantically involved with you, if you are his follower.

Let me ask you: How great is your expectation regarding receiving spiritual gifts? Do you expect to receive many gifts? Or would you say: I expect to receive few gifts from God.

Now, it appears that some gifts are permanent. The apostle Paul speaks about having certain spiritual gifts in Romans 12.6,

SLIDE

^{Ro 12:6} We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.

It appears that many of the gifts in Romans 12 can be exercised at an individual's will. And we read in 1 Tim. 4.14 this exhortation from the apostle Paul to Timothy:

SLIDE

^{1Ti 4:14} Do not neglect your gift, [literally that is within you] which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

Apparently, some spiritual gifts are within us.

But the 1 Cor. 12 gifts seem to be different than these. They seem to be less subjected to an individual's will and more subject to the will of the Holy Spirit. For example, we read in 1 Cor. 12.11 these words:

SLIDE

^{1Co 12:11} All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

John Wimber coined the term "situational" to describe the 1 Cor. 12 gifts. I think that is a helpful way to think about the gifts we have listed here. You see, spiritual gifts, at least in the 1 Cor. 12 sense, are not like the super powers that Superman has at any time he chooses. For example, he can use his x-ray vision at will. 1 Cor. 12 requires continual dependence upon God and an openness to see what God is going to do in the next moment. It may be that the tense of the verbs in the original Greek points to these gifts being situational. When Paul speaks about these spiritual gifts, he uses the present tense. Verse 7,

SLIDES

^{1Co 12:7} Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

^{1Co 12:8} To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit,

^{1Co 12:11} All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

Now, each of these verbs are in the present tense in the Greek. The Greek present tense often signifies an ongoing or continuing action. What Paul may be saying there is that the Holy Spirit gives a gift, and then he keeps on giving the gift. Paul does not use the Greek aorist tense. The aorist tense is often used to signify a one-time action in the past which is now completed. For example, Jesus died aorist tense. He doesn't keep on dying; he died. Hebrews 9.27-28,

SLIDE

^{Heb 9:27} Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,
^{Heb 9:28} so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

His death was a one-time action in the past that is finished. But the Holy Spirit does not give you many of these spiritual gifts listed in 1 Cor. 12 as a one-time action in the past,

which you now have as your own possession subject to your own control. Rather his giving of the 1 Cor. 12 gifts is moment by moment, as the Spirit chooses.

Let me underline this for a moment. I think this is really important. These gifts always remain gifts of the Holy Spirit and he distributes them as he wills. Many critics of the contemporary Charismatic movement say: Well, if you really have the gift of healing, why don't you go to the hospital and empty it? You can't do that? Well, that proves there is no such thing as a gift of healing today.

But friends, the issue is not whether a gift like healing exists; the issue is who controls the gift? Gifts are not gifts of Rich; or gifts of Craig; or gifts of you. They are called gifts of the Holy Spirit. He distributes them as he wills, not as we will. Even Paul, by the way, who was used by God to heal the sick, couldn't heal everyone as he willed. You may want to look at 2 Tim. 4.20,

SLIDE

2Ti 4:20 Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick in Miletus.

Paul left a man named Trophimus sick in a place called Miletus. He told Timothy in 1 Tim. 5.23

SLIDE

1Ti 5:23 Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.

If Paul could just heal Timothy at Paul's will because Paul had the gift of healing, he should have just healed him instead of suggesting an ancient remedy for stomach ailments. But the gift of healing wasn't subject to Paul's control; it was subject to the Holy Spirit's control.

It is the same thing with prophecy. The reason we don't have a dial-a-prophecy phone number, where we can just call someone and say: What is God saying to me right now, is because the gift doesn't work that way. The Spirit determines when he is going to give a revelation. You don't determine that. God's Spirit determines that.

So we are called to a position of openness and dependence upon the Holy Spirit saying to God:

- God, in this moment, since there is a need, will you use me with one of these gifts?
- God, here I am at my small group, my women's group, or my men's group. We're waiting on you to give direction for the group.

What a wonderful thing if you said: Lord, will you give me a prophetic word? Will you give me a message of wisdom for this group?

Perhaps you are in a setting where someone is ill. Now maybe you've never been used, to your knowledge, at any time to heal the sick, but God has you there. You can say to the Lord: Lord, will you use my hands and my prayers? Will you give me the gift of healing in this moment to heal this sick person? Wouldn't it be incredible if the 7000 folks who come to Vineyard approached life with this expectancy that in this moment God may want to use each of us in ways that he has not used us in the past?

I tell you that this understanding of spiritual gifts changed my life a couple of decades ago. I thought I knew what my spiritual gifts were. I saw that I had an effect on people in teaching. It seemed to me that God had given me some gifting in the area of leadership and evangelism, but I never thought that God would use me to heal the sick, or to give a prophecy. But now when I read 1 Cor. 12, it holds so many fresh promises for God's people, and for me as well. Goodness, today God may want to use me, God may want to use you in a fresh way. He may want to use you in a way that he hasn't used you before in the past. Instead of saying to yourself: Someone is sick. I had better find the person who is the healer in this church, you might say: Someone is sick, Lord, use me.

I want you to be expectant regarding what the Lord may want to do with you. Indeed, I believe that many of us have to go beyond being expectant to being desperate for God to give us gifts to meet the needs that are around us.

You know, I've been told by counselors over the years that the bottom line prerequisite for counseling to succeed is that the client be desperate for change. Lots of people go in for counseling, but they are not desperate to change. They go through the motions of marital counseling. Some of you have done that; some of your mates have done that. You dutifully show up for meetings with your counselor. You say the right things in front of the counselor. You may even do the homework assignments, but you aren't desperate. If you haven't been cut to the quick by God's Spirit regarding how awful your situation or behavior has been and how great your need is for change, if something hasn't happened inside where you've been humbled by God and you are crying out to him for change, you probably won't change.

I've seen individuals become desperate to change their lives, to change their marriages, to get free from an addiction. And I've watched God come to the desperate. Are you desperate to change your life? Are you unwilling to settle for your present low-level of living?

Sometimes it is the case that we need to adjust our expectations downward. Reality presents itself in such a way that we cannot adjust the reality; we need to be adjusted to it. Sometimes God calls us to live in a less than ideal situation and we need to pray

for grace to endure. But many times God has so much more for us, if only we are desperate enough.

Let me show you this slide.

SLIDE – Joseph, it is the graphic that Marta did for last week.

We always live on this bridge that has guard rails of human activity on one side and grace on the other. We've got to stay on the bridge, not crashing through the human activity side so far that we get into legalism or formula thinking where we say: Well, if I only pray enough, if I only fast enough, if we just get enough people to pray by forwarding prayer requests on the internet, there will be healing. If we push too far on the human activity side, we may lose God's sovereignty. We can focus so much on our activity that we lose sight that spiritual gifts are given as God determines.

But on the other hand, if we push through the grace barrier that may lead to a spiritual sluggishness or a smugness, or a lack of pursuit of God. I do believe that many of us have pushed through the grace barrier and we do not have the kind of desperation in our hearts that characterized Dr. King when he met the Lord at the kitchen table. Many of us need to say to the Lord: Father, I'm not right inside. Something inside of me has died. I've become complacent. I'm spiritually sluggish. There is no way out of my situation, Lord, humanly speaking. If you don't come and touch my child, they are going to have to live with asthma, or kidney failure, or autism. If you don't come and touch my parents or my spouse or my own body, this cancer is going to surely advance. If you don't give me direction, Lord, I'm going to be clueless regarding what I'm to do with this problem.

Have you ever been desperate? Desperate for healing? Desperate for a word from God? Desperate for wisdom?

Now, what specifically is the message of wisdom in 1 Cor. 12.8? In some translations it is called the "word of wisdom?"

SLIDE

1Co 12:8 To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit,

Dr. Steve Robbins, our Director of the Vineyard Leadership Institute, VLI, got his Ph.D. dissertation in part on the meaning of the gift of the message of wisdom and the gift of the message of knowledge. Steve says that the message of wisdom is basically a directive gift. My child is stuck; my family is stuck. This small group that I'm leading, the women's group, men's group, the recovery group seems to have reached an impasse. The church or ministry does not know the way forward. The message of wisdom gives

us God's way ahead for us. The Holy Spirit gives insight regarding the steps that we are to take, just as he did with Dr. King. Here is what you need to do. If you would like illustrations of the Holy Spirit giving this gift to the apostles, you may want to take a look at Acts 6 or Acts 15.

Now, the greatest illustration regarding this message of wisdom concerns God's plan for salvation in Jesus Christ and his cross. God, as the leader of the universe, demonstrates his wisdom by putting together a comprehensive plan for setting things right in the world. God showed the way forward for the world by revealing his wisdom.

Now, the apostle Paul speaks of this message of wisdom in 1 Cor. 2. In Eugene Peterson's Message version of the Bible, we read this:

SLIDE – The Message Version

We, of course, have plenty of wisdom to pass on to you once you get your feet on firm spiritual ground, but it's not popular wisdom, the fashionable wisdom of high-priced experts that will be out of date in a year or so. God's wisdom is something mysterious that goes deep into the interior of his purposes. You don't find it lying around on the surface. It's not the latest message, but more like the oldest – what God determined as the way to bring out the best in us, long before we ever arrived on the scene. The experts of our day haven't a clue about what this eternal plan is. If they had, they wouldn't have killed the Master of the God-designed life on a cross. That's why we have this Scripture text: "No one's ever seen or heard anything like this, never so much as imagined anything quite like it – What God has arranged for those who love him." But you've seen and heard it because God by his Spirit has brought it all out into the open before you.

This gift of wisdom that Paul speaks about is not a function of a person's education. You can be brilliant in your technical area of expertise. You can be a brilliant lawyer and yet be absolutely a fool regarding how life is to be lived. You can be a brilliant researcher, a brilliant college professor, and yet be clueless regarding how to have a successful marriage. So many brilliant people are not only on their second marriages, but their third, fourth, and even these 2nd, 3rd and 4th marriages are failing. You may know an amazing amount about running a business or selling a product, or making money, but you may know nothing about raising kids or how to find true and lasting happiness, or how to make a real difference in this world.

The gift of wisdom is not a function of a person's education. It is not a matter of a person's IQ. High IQ folks may lack this gift and simple people may have it. We are talking about Holy Spirit inspired insight regarding God's plan – God's plan for the world in setting it right, and God's plan for us.

How does the world in its wisdom think? Go back to the 1920's and 30's in Germany. Germany was one of the most educated nations in the history of the world. If you look at the first three decades of the 20th century, German scientists won the largest share of the Nobel Prizes that were handed out. German universities were the envy of the world. Germany was the nation that produced Einstein and Nietzsche, and Schiller, and Goethe. It had the world's greatest composers and philosophers. When Hitler took over in January 1933, do you know what happened?

If you read German history you will find that within months the Nazis had working for them almost all of the journalists, the lawyers, the physicians, the psychiatrists, the philosophers. Some of the most brilliant minds the world has ever known like the philosopher, Martin Heidegger, celebrated Hitler's coming saying that "in Hitler a new age had dawned." The best and brightest chemists and engineers and lawyers and doctors participated in the slaughter of six million Jews.

The world, in its wisdom, employs the most brilliant minds to justify the unjust. The best and brightest minds have schemed to defraud people of billions of dollars – whether we're talking about Enron and Kenneth Lay or Adelphi Corporation and John Rigas, or the Arthur Anderson auditors in Houston, or Tyco and Dennis Kowalski, or our Ohio Workers Compensation system and its work with David Noe. When the world in its wisdom looks at human history, do you know what it sees? The great historian Arnold Toynbee said "history is just the story of men and women going around in circles." There's no advance. There's no explanation. There's no rhyme or reason.

The French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre said that "the universe is absurd." The French existentialists said "life makes them nauseous." Paul says he speaks a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.

Ultimately, where we see the blindness and the futility of this world's wisdom is when it comes to the world's to perceive who Jesus Christ is. What did this world in all of its wisdom perceive and understand when it looked at Jesus of Nazareth?

The greatest men in the world didn't get it. They looked at Jesus of Nazareth and just saw a man, a carpenter, a Jewish rabbi, who was a threat to their power and pretensions. They didn't see that Jesus was God come in the flesh. They didn't perceive that this man Jesus was God the Creator of heaven and earth come down to rescue and save us. When the rulers and wise men and the religious and philosophers looked at Jesus, they didn't know that looking back at them through his eyes were the eyes of Almighty God. In rejecting Jesus, the wise didn't understand that they were rejecting God's wisdom embodied in human flesh. When the well-educated, sophisticated rulers crucified Jesus, they didn't know that the nails they were pounding into his hands were being pounded into the hands of God.

I like the way Mark Stibbe put it in his book Know Your Spiritual Gifts.

SLIDE – one slide

The cross is a picture of violence, yet the key to peace;

A picture of suffering, yet the key to healing;

A picture of death, yet the key to life;

A picture of utter weakness, yet the key to power;

A picture of capital punishment, yet the key to mercy and forgiveness;

A picture of vicious hatred, yet the key to love;

A picture of supreme shame, yet the Christian's supreme boast.

The only way we can understand the paradoxical wisdom of the cross of Jesus Christ is through the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. The natural mind cannot fathom the depth of God's infinite wisdom.

The wisdom of this world doesn't understand Christmas. When people today talk about Christmas - the wise and learned, the rulers of our hospitals and our government, and our media - they talk about family gatherings. They talk about "the spirit of giving." But they don't know; they haven't understood; they haven't perceived the identity of the Baby born in Bethlehem - that he, being born a man, was also God. Two natures, one human and one divine, eternally joined together in the one person Jesus Christ. Only God can give that insight through the message of wisdom.

Have you had this revelation from God? Has God given you the flash of insight regarding who Jesus is? See, friends, we are finite and our minds are sinful and darkened and fallen. We will not understand God's secrets, what Paul calls, "God's hidden wisdom" apart from his Holy Spirit. Your mind needs to be illuminated and enlightened by the Holy Spirit. You need God's revelation. You need the gift of wisdom, other wise you'll never get Jesus.

Oh, you can talk about church and being a good Christian and doing nice things for each other without the spiritual gift of wisdom. You can enjoy Vineyard's services, how laid back we are. You can sing our worship songs and even get moved emotionally. You can cry through the service. You can enjoy the message. You can like the people and the program. But you won't get who Jesus is without the Holy Spirit given gift of wisdom. Do you pray for the gift of wisdom? The flash of Spirit-given insight regarding Christ and his death on the cross? Do you pray for the gift of wisdom as you share your faith with friends and relatives who just don't get it? Do you pray that God would put in your mouth a message of wisdom so that you could communicate that insight, that revelation concerning who Jesus is so that the veil will be ripped off of people's minds. Help me, God, to communicate your message powerfully.

Followers of Christ, have you not been frustrated as you've tried to explain to someone else why you love Jesus, why you cherish him, why you've traded in your goals in life for his goals? Frustrated by trying to explain to parents or relatives why you do what you do with your kids? Have you never been frustrated when you look across the table and you realize that this person doesn't get it? Why you've taken the route you've taken in marriage. Have you never said to yourself about your relative, your friend, your spouse, or your child, "What's it going to take?" They've sat through some of the best explanations in the world about Christ. You've given them these great books. They've heard the arguments, but their hearts are still not moved to not only perceive who Jesus is, but to love him.

Ask God for the message of wisdom, the ability to disclose the hidden meaning of Christ and his cross. Sometimes God will give you the Spirit-given capacity to explain the message of salvation in a powerful way. I remember years ago sitting at a table with a friend trying to explain the gospel and being defeated at every turn. And then, I had this flash of insight. I took the salt and pepper shakers and put them next to each other. I said: Chuck, you are like this pepper shaker. Somehow you think you are equal to the task of understanding God, but you are in the wrong position.

I took the pepper shaker and slammed it down in front of the salt shaker. I said: Here is the position you need to get in. Bowing before God, humbly bringing your mind under God. And as you are bowing before God, [the pepper shaker was laid out in front of the salt shaker] God will not only reveal himself to you, but he will turn all the black pepper inside of you into salt. God wants to convert all the darkness inside of you and make you look like him.

It was a silly illustration, but God shot him through the heart.

Friend, are you desperate for the message of wisdom so that you can communicate the plan of God to someone who doesn't get it? Are you desperate for the message of wisdom to gain direction for your family, for your group, for your business? What is God's plan?

And there is, also, the message of knowledge. According to Dr. Steve Robbins, if the message of wisdom is primarily directive, it is a leadership gift, the ability to have insight and to be able to explain the plan of God, the message of knowledge, is an instructional gift. It primarily shows up in teaching.

What is the message of knowledge? Very simply, have you ever had the experience – I know you've had this – where you are reading the Bible and something just jumps off the page at you? The Spirit of God begins to speak to you through a text. There is a command that you need to obey. There is an example you need to imitate. There is a warning you need to heed. There is a promise you need to believe. There is something about God you need to trust. Has the Spirit of God ever picked up his Word and driven

it into your heart? What's going on there? The message of knowledge. You are getting Spirit-inspired insight into God's revelation.

Have you ever listened to someone teach and said, "They have the ability to open up text to me in a fresh way, in a clear way, in a relevant way? I read the same thing and didn't get that message." That is the gift of the message of knowledge.

The apostle Paul tells us about this gift in 1 Cor. 2.12-13

SLIDE

^{1Co 2:12} We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.

^{1Co 2:13} This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.

The message of knowledge is spirit-inspired insight into previously given revelation.

So where does all of this lead us? Friend, I would like to encourage you to read over the gifts of the Spirit listed here in 1 Cor. 12 and to think about your life situation – where God has providentially placed you – and to ask God to give you a desperation for these things. Make me hungry for these things, dear God. May I not be satisfied with my present low state of living. Make me desperate. Let's pray.

Desperate For the Wisdom of God

Rich Nathan

June 3-4, 2006

Spiritual Gifts: Showing the Spirit Series

1 Corinthians 12:8

I. The Desperation Of Dr. King

II. A Different Understanding Of Spiritual Gifts

- A. Do You Have All the Gifts God Intends To Give?
- B. How Great is Your Expectation For Spiritual Gifts?
- C. Are Gifts Permanent Possessions Or Given To Meet A Particular Need?
- D. Are You Desperate For A Particular Gift?

III. The Message Of Wisdom

- A. Leadership And The Need For Direction
- B. Insight Into God's Plan For Setting The World Right (1 Cor. 2.6-16)

IV The Message Of Knowledge