

[Texting question: What makes someone "spiritual"?] A fair question, and it's worth noting that most of our answers don't apply only to so-called "Church people". Of course they don't, because the Church doesn't corner the market on Spirituality. We all know people who consider themselves very spiritual (and whom *others* consider very spiritual) who aren't church people, who don't call themselves Christians.

So what is it about spiritual people that makes them spiritual? We often call them gurus or sages. We consider them to be particularly wise, as though they can perceive something beyond what the rest of us can. And if we press on that a little bit, we get to the heart of what makes someone Spiritual in our eyes - we're dualists. [Illustrate w/ Map] If we stop to think about it (and we almost never do), we imagine a sharp divide between the "regular" world - the everyday world, the world we live in - and the spiritual world. The realm of the spirit is literally other-worldly, so most of us don't have whatever it takes to be spiritual. We can try all we want, but only those few spiritual people get it.

But if you were here last week, you know that for the next several weeks, we're pushing back against that belief. This is the season of Epiphany, when we celebrate in the Jesus, God has come to the whole world. That there's no one left out of this new thing God is doing. And this year, we're focusing specifically on the idea of calling - that God is calling each of us to participate in the new life Jesus offers us, that each of us has a part to play in God's new world and that part begins here and now.

We began last week by looking at how the Spirit calls everyone, and seeing that God's call looks very different from what we expect. We opened ourselves to the Spirit, made space in our lives to hear the Spirit's calling. This week, I want to spend more time investigating the claim that God calls *everybody*. Because the way we usually end up hearing the statement goes something like this:

"God calls everybody." He means *most people*. God hasn't called me.

"Everybody has a God-given calling." He means other people. I don't have a calling. I'm just plain ole me.

So let me be very clear: God calls everybody. Yes, you too. You are called by God. God is calling you into life. And even better, your ability to respond to God's call isn't up to you. The Holy Spirit empowers you to respond to God's call - the Scriptures call this power "spiritual gifts". The Spirit gives you abilities that enable you to respond to God's call.

How awesome is that?

We might be dualists, but God is not. That sharp divide between the real world and the spiritual world is one we made up, and one God happily ignores. We believe ourselves to be ordinary, unspiritual, observers at best of the *real* spiritual folk using their callings.

But God calls all of us. And God goes beyond calling to gifting us, inviting us to join in and making us able to do so.

So why isn't that our experience? If we're all called, if the Spirit gifts us to engage that calling, why aren't we aware of it?

There are a couple of reasons. First (and in my experience most common) is that we often *are* using our gifts, just not in the Church. The Spirit has gifted you to teach, and so you teach - you're in education, or you're the go-to person at your company for presenting new information. You're gifted in service, so you *serve*. You're one of the most helpful persons anyone knows, willing to bend over backward for people you know and people you don't. You're gifted in hospitality so your house is *never* empty. People know you throw the best parties, and everyone who knows you feels... welcomed around you.

These gifts you often don't realize are even gifts because they come so naturally to you. They're just what you do, who you are. (We'll talk more about this next week, but rest assured people in your life definitely recognize your gifts, even if you don't.) And because you don't recognize them, you've never thought much about using them in the Church.

The other reason we don't experience a life of spiritual calling and giftedness is more cultural - our culture today is a "professional" culture. Few of us today would consider ourselves jacks-and-jills-of-all-trades. If the car has problems, we take it to the mechanic. If we feel bad, after WebMD convinces us we're dying, we go to the doctor. We get our recipes from professional chefs more than family cookbooks. We listen to a lot more music than we play. We're a professional culture, and we import that into the Church as well. Church is a place we come to learn, to receive - in this case, spiritual wisdom from professional spiritual people.

So we don't even consider the possibility that we might come with something to *give* - why would we? We're not the professionals.

And yet, as we'll see in the Scriptures today, the Spirit's gifts are our invitation to life. When we understand and use our gifts, we grow in our calling.

Let's begin with a word of caution: not every use of our gifts is acting out our calling. In other words, it's actually possible to be spiritual without being Christian, even if you consider yourself a Christian. And that's an important observation because as I've already suggested, many of us are probably already using our gifts and don't realize it.

[Scripture Slide] If you have a bible, turn with me to 1 Corinthians 12. We're going to be in 1 Corinthians 12-13 for the next several weeks because this section of this particular letter deals directly with what a life in the Spirit looks like in the context of a church community.

1 Corinthians is a letter written by Paul to the church he planted in the city of Corinth. The Corinthians have some problems (to put it nicely), and they've written to Paul for counsel. So we're reading Paul's response to their questions. This section of the letter (which is actually chapters 12-14), deals with a particularly nasty problem in the Corinthian Church.

You may remember last week that we cautioned against thinking the Church works the same way as the larger world. This is a struggle the Church has always had - living as an embassy of God's kingdom rather than another group that looks like the surrounding culture. The Corinthian church was no different. Greek worship of that day featured idols - statues of the gods and goddesses. The gods communicated to the worshipers through prophets and oracles - special, spiritual persons who received messages from the gods.

Obviously, those persons were considered to be extra special. They had a special status in the Greek communities. As we can tell from Paul's letter, the Corinthians had the same problem - certain people in the Church had gifts of prophecy or tongues (which is an ability to speak in a divine language). These people would hijack the worship and draw attention to themselves, elevate themselves on a Spiritual pedestal above everyone else in the community. Paul is about to tell us why that's not acceptable:

Now, dear brothers and sisters, regarding your question about the special abilities the Spirit gives us. I don't want you to misunderstand this. You know that when you were still pagans, you were led astray and swept along in worshiping speechless idols. So I want you to know that no one speaking by the Spirit of God will curse Jesus, and no one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit. -- 1 Corinthians 12:1-3

A lot going on here in Paul's opening comments: first, the word the NLT translates as "special abilities the Spirit gives us" - other translations read "spiritual gifts" - is a word that really just means "spiritual things". This seems to be the word the Corinthians use to describe their spirit-given abilities (like prophecy or speaking in divine tongues). If you read the whole letter, you get the sense that the Corinthians are *obsessed* with the Spiritual world. The Greeks were dualists, too - they got it from Plato. According to great Greek thinkers, the best, most real and truest world is the Spirit world. Our world isn't the real world at all - it's just a shadow of the Spiritual world.

That's why "spiritual people" had such high status - they were closer to the real spiritual world than everyone else. Spiritual people were on a pedestal. They were better than everyone else. And that thinking was infecting the Corinthian church, too. People who experienced certain gifts of the Spirit were considered more important.

Which is why Paul criticizes them in verse 3 - "No one speaking by the Spirit of God will curse Jesus, and no one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit." We don't get the sense from Corinthians that anyone was actually cursing Jesus' name (if they had been, Paul would've been way more angry). Rather, Paul is reminding the Corinthians of the difference between the

Church - where we confess Jesus as Lord, and the culture around them, which confessed Caesar as Lord.

Confessing wasn't something that was just done with your mouth. To confess Caesar as Lord was to give verbal assent to what your life demonstrated - that you followed Rome's way. You *acted* like Caesar had say over your life. To confess Jesus as Lord is the same - you *act* like Jesus is has say over your life. What makes a confession a confession (and not just a statement) is that it aligns with your actions.

So Paul is reminding the Corinthians that when you confess Jesus as Lord, you're leaving the ways of the culture around you to adopt the way of Jesus - he has say over your life. Your life becomes cross-shaped. And a person can only enter into this life, live this life, persist in this life, through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit enables us to receive God's grace and empowers us to live God's life.

What's implicit (at this point, but Paul will make it explicit later) is that *everyone* is called into God's life. God's not a dualist - there are no spiritual and unspiritual people. Heaven is not a distant, detached reality separate from and realer than our world. Rather Heaven is even now breaking into our world through the work of Jesus and his Church.

Which brings us back to those spiritual gifts - they are how the Spirit enables *everyone* to live out Heaven in the here and now. Paul explains as he goes on:

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us.

A spiritual gift is given to each of us for the common good. To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. The Spirit alone decides which gift each person should have. -- 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

In the Greek, Paul has changed wording - he doesn't call these gifts "spiritual things" like the Corinthians do. He uses a word that means "gifts" or "grace". The emphasis there is important. The Corinthians want to emphasize the spiritual nature of these gifts, because then the people who have them are more important, more real, more spiritual.

But Paul reminds them that these are gifts. They're unearned, and they're for everyone. He lists off a bunch of gifts - and not accidentally lists prophecy and divine languages last. Paul is making the point that if you're part of the Church, if you've responded to God's invitation to life, then you have gifts. The Spirit has given you something that enables you to respond to God's calling to participate in the new kingdom.

Friends, this means the Spirit has gifted you. You possess spiritual power to do great things. And you were given those powers specifically so that you can respond to God's invitation to participate in bringing about Heaven here on Earth.

This is true whether you realize it or not. And if you don't realize it, you're a little like Spider-man standing in a cornfield. [\[Picture\]](#)

Allow me to explain. Spider-man is a superhero with spider-powers (I assume you could figure that out even if you didn't know who Spider-man is). Spider-man lives in New York City, which is really the perfect city for a hero with spider-powers because it's *filled* with tall buildings Spider-man can web to as he's swinging through the city.

Put Spider-man in a cornfield and he doesn't lose any of his spider-powers. But he's not going to be able to fight nearly as well without anything tall to web to. He can't swing through a cornfield. Because let's be real: Spider-man wasn't designed to be a midwest hero. He was designed for New York City.

Friends when we are not using our spiritual gifts for the work of building God's kingdom, we might be doing good work, but we are not doing what we were designed to do. We are out of place (like Spider-man in a cornfield).

We can stretch the analogy a bit further, too. If the Spirit has gifted us to do kingdom work and we don't - if we continue to treat church as a place we come to receive rather than a people on a mission, a mission that needs the important contribution I bring to the table, then we could say we're like Spider-man watching TV in his apartment in Queens while the bank across the street is being robbed.

With great power comes great responsibility, and if that's true for our friendly neighborhood Spider-man, it's most certainly true for you and me.

So what does it look like to discover your gifts? To identify them and lean into them?

I want to be careful here. Plenty of people comb through Paul's letters and compile a list of all the gifts he names, and then they write tests you can take to evaluate what gifts you have.

Those are okay - they're not the *worst* place in the world to start. But I've found they're a bit small in their focus. Because Paul never set out to write a comprehensive list of all the gifts the

Spirit gives. I don't get the impression anywhere Paul even though that was possible. Because Paul knew God - the giver of these gifts - has in infinite imagination.

Instead, consider approaching the question of gifts the way Paul does. He told the Corinthians, "There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us. A spiritual gift is given to each of us for the common good." We all have different gifts, and all serve in different ways. What God does in your life is different from what God does in my life. And yet, the gifts we receive is for *the common good*. As you discern your gifts, you'll want to ask how you're contributing to the common good (not just the good of Catalyst, but the good of the world!).

As we'll see next week, Paul goes on to challenge us to work out our spiritual gifts in the context of community. We need other people to help us determine our gifts.

And Paul's instructions culminate in a beautiful reflection on Love as the ground out of which all our gifts flow. So if you don't know what your gifts are and you want to, ask yourself a couple of questions:

1. **What do I love?** Be as specific as you can. What charges you up? What gets you excited? What makes you want to get out of bed in the morning?
2. **How is this love Jesus-shaped?** This one might be trickier. How does that love call you outside of yourself? How does that love orient you toward God and other people?
3. **How can I do that for the good of others?** When you can match what you love with real need in the world, you are very close to discerning your God-given calling.

[Debbie's Story?]

Friends, God is calling you forward. And God has empowered you to respond to that calling. What are the deep desires of your heart? What do you absolutely love to do, and how can you do that for the sake of God and others in our world? What kind of church would Catalyst be if every person who is a Catalyst person were like Debbie, doing what they love for the good of the people in their lives? What would dinner at your house sound like if everyone were sharing about how they were living into their callings? What would your friendships look like if you were helping them to hear God's voice, to identify how the Spirit has gifted them?

How can you identify your calling? How can you live into it this week?

### **Communion Setup**

We begin at the Communion table - the table that invites us back to the meal Jesus shared with his followers the night he was betrayed. At this meal, he broke bread, gave it to us as his body, broken for us. Later in the meal, he passed a cup of wine as his blood, poured out to begin a new relationship between God and humanity.

This meal reminds us that God is not a dualist, that we find grace and life not in some far-off spiritual realm, but in bread and wine. In shared meals. We come to the table today to receive God's gift of life, to respond to his invitation into his kingdom.

You don't have to be a member of Catalyst to receive Communion. If you're willing to discern your gifts and use them along with us to bring about God's kingdom here on Earth as it is in Heaven, then you're welcome to the table.