

Opening

When I was in 7th grade, I made the decision to join the cross-country team. Why did I do this? I have no idea. And I know that I definitely didn't think this through. I know this because in other sports, when you practice, you get to do lots of different exercises and drills. Basketball you do some running, shooting, and ball handling drills. Football you get to run all sorts of play and scrimmage. But cross country is different. All you do is run, that's it. Everyday you know that practice will literally just be running for as many miles as the coach decided to make you run that day. Well, there were days that we changed it up and added in ab workouts and leg workouts. You know, the fun stuff.

So naturally, after the first year, I kept on joining the cross-country team.... for 6 more years. So, I mean the thought is that I must have been pretty good, or at least decent at this because in cross country only the top 7 runners on your team count toward your score. But me, I usually ended up dead last on our team and was little help to the team scoring wise.

SO WHY DID I DO IT!

I'm still not 100% sure. But I think that I was learning things about myself. I was realizing that I was a very determined person. I realized that I could stick it out even though it was tough, even though I wasn't the best. I learned that my coach and others could help me see the areas in which I could improve and also the areas that I didn't realize I had potential. I had potential to become much more than I was when I started.

And that's what I want to talk about today. About how God has given each one of us something that we excel at. Something the bible calls spiritual gifts. We'll learn about how the Holy Spirit reveals these in us through our life experiences and others. These gifts enable us to be who God has truly made us to be.

As we're entering into worship together today, I want to invite you to participate fully. As you can see, we're going to be receiving communion together at the end of our gathering. Grab some bread and grape juice (or apple juice or water or whatever else you have on hand) so you can be ready to participate with us. And even though you're at home, stand up and sing the songs with us. Clap along, bow for prayer. Do the things you'd do if we were all in the same room. Because just because we're socially distant doesn't mean the Spirit isn't making us one Church this morning.

In that Spirit, let's join together in worshipping the God who has made us and loves us unconditionally.

Message

Easter has passed, but we aren't leaving the story at the night that Jesus appeared to the disciples because afterward we received one of the greatest gifts God has given us, the holy spirit. See, Jesus breathed on them, giving them the Holy Spirit. This is a powerful image - in

both Greek and Hebrew, the word "Spirit" can also mean 'wind' or 'breath'. John imagines the Holy Spirit as the very breath of Jesus, filling us with Jesus' own life and power.

So during this season following Easter, we're going to explore what a life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit looks like. Where does a life whose sails are filled with God's divine wind take us? What does it mean to have the Holy Spirit's divine power transforming us?

First, we saw that the Holy Spirit is our ADVOCATE, God teaching us how to know God, speaking for us, praying with us. Making us look more like Jesus.

Then we spent a couple of weeks exploring how the Spirit helps us to face our sin and repent so that the Spirit can transform us. Last week, we began asking how the Spirit changes us. We saw that the Spirit's work is a gift - not works we do, but fruits grown when we let the Spirit work.

Today, we're going to continue exploring that transformation with something that's about how the Spirit works in all of us, together. We're going to talk about Spiritual gifts.

I realize that we may have two groups of people listening to this today. If you are in the first group you may have absolutely no idea what I am talking about. And if that's you, that's perfectly okay. I will not leave you behind and everything we talk about today will apply to both groups. Everyone of us starts this spiritual journey at different points in our lives and those points can both have benefits and drawbacks to them. But I promise you that this is absolutely an essential part of being a christian and seeing how the Holy spirit is involved with your life

Or you may be in the second group. You have an experience with the idea of spiritual gifts that was similar to mine. From the time I became a Christian, which was about 7 I believe, I was told that I have a spiritual gift and that everyone who is a Christian has one. I have heard dozens of sermons about them and have taken at least a dozen spiritual gift inventories. I have seen people debate about which spiritual gifts are better and people abuse their gifts. I was convinced for a period of time that I had no spiritual gift because I didn't feel like I was good at anything. I have talked about spiritual gifts so much over my Christian life that I *almost* rolled my eyes when JR said this was the topic for this week. And I'm guessing some of you may have heard these words several times too.

But as we talked, I felt convicted because I realized for as much as I have read, talked, and been preached at about these gifts, that that doesn't mean I have been using them how I should or as much as I should. What I should say is that I haven't been allowing God to use me and my gifts. Because without God I am just working out of my own knowledge and energy. God is the one that truly brings out these "super powers" in us.

[Scripture Slide 1] Let's look at exactly what the scriptures say about spiritual gifts and what they are. Turn to 1 Corinthians 12. In this section of Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, he wants to address some confusion and issues that the church had in understanding what the spiritual things were and how they related to them as new Christians. They had, before following Christ, worshipped all sorts of false gods and had had "spiritual" experiences. They had been worshipping literal pieces of stone and metal. People would often get carried away during their worship and make a scene of it. And to everyone else around them it seemed as though they were truly "spiritual" people. Like they had been in contact with other worldly beings.

Paul wanted to make clear that those experiences were not the same as the relationship that they now had with God. That getting excited and shouting or carrying on is not the same as being a follower of Christ because those brought the attention to the person and not God. The point was that they needed to understand that it is only by the Holy Spirit that they can say Jesus is Lord. That the Holy Spirit now lived in all of them and all had equal footing. This meant that there was not a hierarchy of spiritual gifts. That the point of these gifts was that of service, not self-adulation.

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.

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 so we can help each other. 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. He alone decides which gift each person should have. - 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Now to make clear, this is not an exhaustive list. So, if you don't feel like any of these apply to you, don't worry. What we need to take away is that each of us has something inside us that has been tailor made by God to enable us to serve in an extraordinary way. That this is exciting, YOU HAVE A SUPER POWER! And while you may have a similar gift to others, that doesn't mean

you aren't needed! You have a way of using that gift in a way that others can't. You have a lifetime of experiences that have shaped you and how you view your God given abilities.

Now, as a short side bar, we won't really be getting into whether or not these are things that are bestowed upon you when you become a Christian or that you are born with them. Like maybe she's born with it, maybe it's Maybelline. Because what is important is realizing that these are given to us by God. And through the Holy spirit we are able to truly use them to His glory and to have the greatest effect. As it says in verse 7 "A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other." Ultimately, we must remember the point of these gifts, to love God and serve those around us.

One thing I learned as I've played sports and gotten older is that one of the main roles of a coach is to see how your team fits together. Everyone is going to want to be the star hitter or score the most goals but the role of the coach is to see how the pieces of his team fit together. They need to identify the strengths in each player even when the player may not see it themselves. And once identified, the coach gives each player a specific role to play at certain times of the game.

This is a bit of how I see God and the Holy Spirit working in our lives and even more importantly in the church as a whole. For us, as the body of Christ, to have the most impact on the world around it we must be looking to God for his direction and offering up to him ourselves and these abilities he has given us. We must always remember that we are part of a team. But it gets even better! See God is not trying to figure out what we are best at because he made us! He knows exactly in what ways we can have the most impact at different points in our lives. He has given us the Holy Spirit to guide us in our daily lives and enable us to live into our true calling of loving and serving. I know this kind of sounds all pie in the sky. But I know from my own life that the times when I have felt the most fulfilled and like I am living my full life is when I know that God has been working through me to love and serve others. This is what we are made for and God knows it because he made us!

So then what about if you feel like you don't have one. Or maybe you have no idea what it could be? I can understand that feeling of inadequacy. For a long time, it seemed like everyone else knew exactly who they were or had the "cool" spiritual gifts. It felt like maybe sometimes I wasn't worthy of one, like I wasn't a good enough Christian. I didn't know that these were all lies I told myself that directly contradicted scripture.

Paul tells us that each and everyone of us is important. He highlights that fact later on in the chapter in verses 22-26

22 In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect those parts that should not be seen, while the more honorable parts do not require this special care. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. This makes for harmony among the

members, so that all the members care for each other. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad. -- 1 Corinthians 12:22-26

And I feel that one of the best ways that we can discern what our gifts are, is by asking those who are spiritually closest to us. Those that truly see us for who we are and know our heart. The fellow Christians that you have known for years and have great respect for. These people can be helpful like coaches to point out to us the areas in which we excel that we may not realize because often times it can come natural to us. And that's not surprising either because God made us with these abilities so why shouldn't it feel natural?

Also, there are tons of those spiritual inventory assessments out there. I have found one or two that may be helpful. Now don't view these as a final answer. Spend time in prayer and consulting those close Christians about the results you get. The test is just a starting point. You may have taken a test 5 years ago that gave totally different results than this one now. That's because you are way different than you were even 5 years ago! It's good to always be asking God where he wants you and how you can best be of service.

Now my cross-country coach tried as hard as he could to make me a faster runner, but I wasn't that. I never was going to be one. And I think we realized that around the same time. But that final year or two I realized that my true purpose on that team had nothing to do with running. I found that I was great at encouraging the team and even my coach. There were times where I would see a teammate or my coach upset and my natural reaction was to ask them how they were doing or feeling and then just sit and listen. I would love to cheer on my better teammates in the better heats. This just felt like the right thing to do. I never thought I was doing anything special until the coach brought it up on our senior night. In front of everyone he spoke not of how much I helped the team win or how much I'd progressed in my running, but of my heart and character. He totally caught me off guard by telling a story of a seemingly random time I had hung back to ask how he was doing and how much that meant to him. I'm proud to tell this story because those were times that I was truly allowing the Holy Spirit to work through me and use my gifts to serve others. I didn't feel like serving, it just felt like I was doing what I was meant to be doing.

It is so exciting to know that every one of you listening has that. You were made with a special gift that you can use in only the way that you can. So whether this is your 50th time hearing this or your first. Take time this week to sit down and do a spiritual gifts inventory and then pray over that and discuss it with your close Christian friends. What matters is that you are applying this to your life. Otherwise you are missing out on a HUGE part of what it means to be a Christian or really just the person that God made you to be.

Communion + Examen

[Communion Slide] The Spirit gives us these gifts so that we can be a part of something bigger than ourselves - the Church body. We celebrate that spiritual family every time we receive communion together. When we approach the table together, we come with all the people God

makes a part of our family. Our gifts aren't for our own benefit, but to serve each other the way Jesus serves us.

Before we receive communion, we're going to spend some time in prayer. I'm going to lead you through four questions for you to ask God and reflect on in prayer. Then I'll pray for all of us, and we will receive communion.

1. In the last week, how have I been focused on others?
2. In the last week, how have I been focused on serving myself?
3. When in the next week might I be tempted to be self-focused?
4. How is the Holy Spirit empowering me to serve others this week?

Prayer

God,

You have gathered us today that we might know you have invited us into a life of faith. But you do not call us to come on our own power. You give us your Holy Spirit, the very same Spirit who raised your son, Jesus from the dead. Through your Holy Spirit, you give us gifts that enable us to be more than ourselves, gifts that enable us to be pictures of your self-giving love to each other and to the world. Now, you invite us to your table, that we might participate in your ultimate act of self-giving love. We receive these wafers and juice (or whatever elements we have been able to bring together) and we ask the become a spiritual food for us. May we receive the grace we need to be your people. Give us eyes to see how you have empowered us to be your people.

We offer these prayers and sit at your table in the name of your son, Jesus.

The night he was betrayed, Jesus ate with his disciples. During the meal, he broke bread and offered it to them, saying, "This is my body, broken for you. Take and eat." After the meal was over, he gave them a cup of wine, saying, "This is my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sin. Drink it all." So too, we eat and drink and announce Jesus' death until he returns.

Assignment + Blessing

Do a Spiritual Gifts assessment and/or discover your spiritual gifts!