

When I was seven years old, I sat in the living room with all of my cousins, aunts and uncles with a Christmas tree beside us. It was the TIME WE HAD ALL BEEN WAITING FOR! Who needs grandma's cooking when you got grandma's gifts?!

To my amazement, my grandmother called MY NAME to open the first present (the favor of God rested upon me). When I tore into the package, I could not believe my eyes!

Inside was a carefully wrapped collection — of three — pairs of black socks!

The look on my face had my dad believing, not that the favor of God rested upon me, BUT that the devil had entered me as I not only expressed disappointment *and* failed to say: "Thank you." to my wonderful grandmother.

For so many Christians and churches, the miraculous gifts we read about in 1 Corinthians 12, are like the black socks from grandma.

- Teaching, leadership, mercy, service? Remote controlled cars! Basketball cards! Barbie doll castles!
- Prophecy, tongues, miracles, and healing? Black socks.

Why is this?

Perhaps you can identify with my spiritual journey. For most of my life, though I did not reject these gifts, I kept them at such arm's length that I lived as though they do not exist.

I think there are four primary reasons for this:

1. The influence of Western rationalism: if it can't be seen or logically explained, it can't be true.
2. The churches I grew up in never really taught on these gifts. But it's not their fault! Why?
3. I never studied this question deeply and wrestled with what the Bible *actually says*. I was content in my complacency.
4. Finally, I had never deeply experienced them (maybe a taste here or there, a believable story from credible sources here or there), but never deeply and undeniably experienced miraculous gifts.

No matter where you are in your convictions and experiences today, you need to know: You are welcomed in our church. It's our privilege to continue studying the Bible and following Jesus together.

That said, I want to state in the clearest terms that our pastors believe...

**"Miraculous Gifts Are For Today!"  
1 Corinthians 12:1-11**

Let's hear what Paul teaches the Corinthians in...

**1 Corinthians 12:1-11 (text displayed)**

Two truths I want you to receive today: #1)

**1. God is still empowering his people with spiritual gifts. (1-6)**

When Paul says "Now concerning spiritual gifts," scholars would tell us he is responding to a question he received from the Corinthians.

What is his goal? "I do not want you to be uninformed."

If you have questions, [*please listen*] you're not alone. No one has it all figured out! Not the Corinthians, not me, not the person beside you. Not even the authors of the books we recommend! Let's keep living and learning!

In verses 2-3, Paul highlights the Spirit's presence in the life of a believer the moment they sincerely confess: "Jesus is Lord." When the Spirit gives us new life, he empowers us with gifts to serve others and reflect God's kingdom.

### So what are spiritual gifts?

- Spiritual gifts are Spirit-empowered abilities that uniquely equip followers of Jesus to build up the church and advance God's redemptive mission.
- *Jordan Seng*, in his book *Miracle Work*, says, "Spiritual gifts give us a power boost in [a] specific ministry." (63)

Paul goes onto to talk about our triune God's diverse, yet unified work through us.

He says the church possesses...

- "VARIETIES of gifts, but the *same Spirit*; and...
- VARIETIES of service, but the *same Lord*; and...
- VARIETIES of activities, but the *same God* who empowers them all in everyone."

These three terms are nearly interchangeable.

- The word "gifts" comes from the Greek word "charismata" which means "grace gifts." Paul would say: "You're all charismatic because you all have charismata, grace gifts!"
- "Service" refers to all kinds of everyday acts of service.
- "Activities" comes from the word "energeia" (hear our word energy) and refers to "ways . . . divine power is applied." (Barrett)

T: These verse teach us: God is still empowering his people with spiritual gifts.

## **2. God is still working miraculously to reveal his goodness. (7-11)**

Verse 7: is a critical verse.

- "To each" - that's every believer.
- "is given" - by God (4-6).
- "a manifestation of the Spirit"
  - "Manifest" means to "make known, to make clear to the eye."
  - When we serve, God shines through us!
- "for the common good" - here's the why?
  - This could be literally translated "with a view to profiting."
  - Spiritual gifts offer spiritual benefit to the people around us.

After stating this all important verse, Paul immediately goes on to list nine specific spiritual gifts. Most, if not all, are miraculous in nature.

Before we examine each gift, I want to share some reasons...

### **Why Miraculous Gifts Continue Today**

#### **1. Expansive Biblical Evidence.**

- This first reason is the most important reason!
- Consider all of the biblical evidence of the miraculous: Let's start with...
  - The Gospels: Jesus not only performed signs and wonders, but he empowered his followers to heal the sick, cast out demons, and do other crazy stuff — like walking on water! Jesus gave no indication his power through them came with an expiration date.
  - In Acts, we see the blind & lame healed, angelic messages and revelatory dreams received, the dead raised, and the apostles living with such power that Paul is twice accused of being divine (Acts 14:11; 28:6)
  - But it's *not just* the Gospels & Acts.
    - Galatians 3:5 - "Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith . . .?"
    - Romans 12 & Ephesians 4 talk about prophets and prophesying.
    - 1 Thess 5:20-21 says, "Do not despise prophecies."
    - James 5 - Pastors are commanded to pray for the sick that they may be healed.
  - Let's back up to the OT. There are miracles galore from creation to Christ. Some argue miracles only showed up with intensity at 3 periods of time: the days of 1) Moses and Joshua; 2) Elijah and Elisha, and 3) Jesus and the apostles. This is simply not true:
    - Genesis reveals angelic visitations, conception at nearly 100 years old (MIRACLE!), supernatural dreams and the interpretation of those dreams.
    - Go to Judges with Deborah's prophecy, Gideon's miracles, and Samson's supernatural feats.
    - In 1 Samuel, we see Hannah supernaturally conceive, the prophetic ministry of Samuel, and God's repeated supernatural guidance to David.
    - We don't have time to cover all the other prophets, but go ask our Redemption Kids about Daniel and his friends. [Give us childlike faith!]
- But not only this, the Bible *actually says we should expect these specific gifts* to continue until Christ returns:
  - 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 says prophesy and tongues will cease "when the perfect comes." Is this world perfect? It will be when Jesus comes back!
  - Ephesians 4:13 says that apostles and prophets are given to equip the saints for the work of ministry until we attain to the maturity of faith. Are we there yet? No! We are a work in progress! (See also 1 Corinthians 1:6-8)
- Finally, there is no indication in the Bible that any specific gift would cease.
  - Lock a new believer in a room with a Bible. Let them read it cover to cover.
  - Then ask them if they believe all of the NT gifts are for today. I think they'd say: "Jesus said he'd give us his Spirit. He said his Spirit would do all this kind of stuff. LET'S. GO!" (Tatum kiss to the crowd!)
- Most of the other arguments are provide additional biblical evidence, including reason #2...

## 2. The Age of the Spirit is now!

- In Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost people were "amazed and perplexed" as they heard the wonders of the gospel spoken in a variety of languages. Peter explained what was happening by quoting Joel. 2 "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy." (Acts 2:17-18)
- Question: Did the last days end with the time of the apostles? OR are we in the last days?
- Answer: These are the last days. We are we living in the age of the Spirit! This new covenant age!
- **\*\*We believe all the gifts listed in the NT are for women and men, young and old, all social classes, for everyone with the Spirit, right now!\*\***

## 3. Non-Apostles Practiced the Gifts.

- Cessationists often argue that miracles only served to authenticate the teaching of the apostles, and once the apostles died, miracles died with them.
  - This fails to recognize that apostles were also authenticated by the power of their preaching, their godly character, and their endurance through persecution (see 2 Corinthians).
  - This also fails to recognize all of the people in the NT who practiced these gifts but were not apostles.
    - The 72 commissioned in Luke 10.
    - Others among the 120 gathered in the upper room (if not all of them!) who spoke in tongues.
    - Stephen and Phillip in Acts 6-8, Ananias in Acts 9.
    - Antioch believers prophesied (Acts 13), New converts in Ephesus spoke in tongues and prophesied (Acts 19)
    - We read about Philip's four prophetic daughters and the prophet Agabus in Caesarea (Acts 21); not to mention the aforementioned Galatians, Romans, Thessalonians, and these Corinthians who were operating in the miraculous gifts.
- These gifts were being practiced all over the NT, all over the world.

#### **4. Purpose of Spiritual Gifts.**

- What is the purpose of the gifts? Serve the common good (v. 7), strengthen and encourage (Rom 1:11-12), equip and build up (Eph. 4:12ff), edify and console (1 Cor. 14:3). They bring conviction and point people to Christ (1 Corinthians 14:24-25).
- We also see from the Gospels & Acts how miracles: glorify God (John 9:3), display God's care and compassion (Mark 1:40-41), display the kingdom of God (Luke 11:20) and make way for the gospel (Acts 2-3).
- Why would God take away these precious gifts designed to bring so much good to people he loves?

#### **5. Commanded Pursuit**

- We are commanded to desire and pursue spiritual gifts, including the miraculous ones.
- 1 Corinthians 12:31 – “But earnestly desire the higher gifts.”
- 1 Corinthians 14:1 – “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.”
- 1 Corinthians 14:39 – “So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.”

#### **6. Evidence from Church History**

- The ongoing practice of miraculous gifts is well documented from firsthand accounts and testimonies of the most credible sources and teachers throughout church history. (See chapter 7 of Sam Storm's book, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*)
- From Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Augustine, to Gregory the Great, Bernard of Clairvaux, Francis of Assisi and Thomas Aquinas, all the way to Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross and even Charles Spurgeon, who would have probably considered himself a cessationist, ironically enough!

#### **7. Unconvincing Counterarguments**

- 1 Corinthians 13 says tongues will cease. Answered that.
- The church was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, so these gifts are no longer needed (Eph. 2:20). Answered that.
- “Look at all the abuses and unbiblical practices of the gifts.” The abuse or misuse of a gift doesn't make them nonexistent. We denounce every unbiblical practice of the gifts and charlatans in sheep's clothing.
- If people can heal, why aren't hospitals empty? Healing does not happen “on demand” in the NT, even in the life of Jesus.

- And here's a big one: "I've never experienced it, so it must not be true." God's Word as our ultimate authority, not experience.

But why we aren't seeing these gifts or seeing them more frequently. Three quick thoughts:

- 1) Maybe you have, and you didn't recognize it.
- 2) Maybe God wants to give you those gifts, but you haven't asked.
- 3) Maybe we are not living lives that require the Spirit's power. I'm talking about stepping out in faith, moving toward people in love and actually praying for their healing.

Why is this so important?

If we do not believe these gifts for today, we will not look for them, expect them or pursue. If they are, we must!

T: So what are these diverse gifts God has given to the Corinthians?

**Spiritual Gifts (1 Corinthians 12:8-10)**

These first two gifts, word of wisdom and word of knowledge, are not mentioned explicitly anywhere else in the Bible, which should give us an extra dose of humility in our conclusions.

- The key question is whether they are "prophetic" in nature. In other words, are these revealed by God in the moment or do they refer to a general sense of wisdom or knowledge.
- Because the next seven gifts are more miraculous in nature, I believe words of wisdom and knowledge are "prophetic" or "revelatory." That said, I also believe someone could possess more general gifts of wisdom and knowledge.

**So what is a word of wisdom?**

- **Word of Wisdom: speaking a message from God that provides direction**
  - Words of wisdom communicate timely insight for a specific situation.
  - I've been in meetings where everyone is stumped, no one sees a path forward. Then someone speaks up and the next step is crystal clear!
  - Words of wisdom help us navigate challenges, care for people with insight, and strategically advance God's mission.
- **Word of Knowledge: sharing information given by God otherwise unknown**
  - Do you remember Jesus' convo with the woman at the well. Without ever meeting her Jesus knew she had five husbands and was currently in a promiscuous relationship. That's a word of knowledge.
  - Often times, words of knowledge, help establish a prophetic message. When a man I had never met told me (in so many words) my grandfather was a pastor, my mother had cancer when I was thirteen, that my second child liked to sing songs on our back deck, I was all ears!
- **Faith: believing God will work beyond ordinary expectation**
  - People with the gift of faith get excited about impossible circumstances.
  - They love singing: "I've seen you move, you move the mountain; and I believe, I'll see you do it again."
  - When they pray, they don't want to insult God with small requests!
  - Faith moves forward, and faith perseveres.
  - Faith is not necessarily miraculous, but it compliments the next two gifts. Most people won't step out to perform healings or miracles apart from sizable faith.
- **Gifts of Healing: restoring health apart from natural means**
  - These are times when God uses us to supernaturally heal someone else from a bad cough to cancer.

- Notice Paul calls these “gifts fo healing,” not just here, but also in also in v. 28 & 29. This may point to different gifts to heal specific ailments or could refer to each instance of healing being a gift.
- In any case, healings display God’s compassion and point to the day when sickness, pain and death will be no more(!), which reminds us that all healing in this life, before Christ returns, is temporal.
- **Miracles: an extraordinary event unexplainable by natural causes**
  - The word “miracles” here comes from two two Greek words that would be translated literally as “workings of powers.”
  - These are phenomenal displays of God’s extraordinary power that cannot be explained any other way.
  - Healings are a type of miracle, but other workings of power could include deliverances, nature miracles, and raising the dead.
- **Prophecy: speaking a message given spontaneously from God**
  - Because I covered prophecy in my sermons on Ephesians 4 & Romans 12 and because we will cover it further as we dive into the rest of 1 Corinthians, I’m simply going to invite you back the next 3 weeks!
- **Distinguishing spirits: discerning between the demonic and divine**
  - While all Christians are commanded to “test the spirits” (1 John 4:1) by evaluating what we hear, some people can sense whether the origin of a particular statement or action is from God or the evil one with a heightened ability.
  - People with the gift of distinguishing spirits can discern truth from false, right from wrong, and good from evil.
  - We see Jesus discerning demonic activity, Peter sensing the evil in Simon the Magician’s heart in Acts 8, and Paul discerning the lame man had faith to be healed in Acts 14:9.
- **Tongues: speaking a language unknown to the speaker**
  - This is usually the most controversial and divisive of the gifts, because some churches wrongly believe that if you do not speak in tongues you lack spiritual maturity or salvation altogether. That is patently false and found no where in Scripture. In fact, Paul goes on to say clearly at the end of the chapter that NOT everyone speaks in tongues. We will talk much more about tongues in the coming weeks. For now, you should know...
  - Tongues can be an actual foreign language (like in Acts 2) or an angelic or heavenly language, not intelligible to any human being (1 Corinthians 13:1).
  - The tongue may be spoken directly to God in prayer and praise or toward others for their instruction and edification. If it is directed to others, there should be someone with the next gift...
- **Interpretation of Tongues: explaining an unknown language**
  - When someone interprets a tongue, they reveal the meaning to everyone else who did not understand.

T: That was a lot. How should we respond?

*Conclusion:*

With openness. Open your heart! Expect the unexpected from God! Pray: “God whatever you want to do, whenever you want to do it, my life and our church is in your hands.”

Leonard Allen writes: “We need more of the Spirit’s power in order to be disciples, to be God’s “royal priesthood” in the mending of a broken and still groaning creation. But openness to the Spirit is risky, for the Spirit is no shy or tame Spirit. Roger Olson asks, “Does this make you nervous? It should. The Holy Spirit is not predictable or safe. The Holy Spirit shatters the status quo, breaking us out of complacency and lifting us up to new heights of spiritual fullness and blessing—if we are open to that.”

Pray: “God whatever you want to do, whenever you want to do it, my life and our church is in your hands.”