

Following Jesus
Kenwood Baptist Church Sermon Series
Pastor David Palmer
June 1, 2025

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11



Good morning, Beloved. We continue this morning in our series “Why We Need the Holy Spirit.” We have seen so far from God's Word that the Holy Spirit is the fulfillment of God's end-time promise, that He would fill His people with His presence. We have seen that the Holy Spirit creates new spiritual life in us, motivates us for holy living. This morning, we look at the topic of spiritual gifts.

Francis Chan's book *Forgotten God*, which I encourage you to read, is a wonderful, accessible study on how we sometimes neglect the Holy Spirit. Francis Chan says this:

“As members of God's kingdom community, each of us is given a manifestation of the Spirit in our lives for the purpose of the common good. We all have something to offer because of what the Spirit gives to us.”



That is a comment that is based on the passage before us this morning: 1 Corinthians 12: 1-11. In 1 Corinthians 12:1, Paul begins by saying:

“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.”

I love 1 Corinthians because it is the only letter of the New Testament where Paul is responding

to questions that he himself was asked. These are great questions. There are many people in disciple-making relationships in our church, and it's in the context of those real relationships that it's safe to ask questions about our faith in different areas. If you are not in a disciple-making relationship, you should get in one. If you are thinking about whether you can disciple someone, the answer to that is "yes" if you are a follower of Jesus.

In 1 Corinthians, there is a set of questions beginning in chapter 7. In 1 Corinthians 7:1, Paul says, *"Now concerning the matters about which you wrote...."* This young church had written a letter to Paul with a set of questions. The first question is a great question: Does the gospel say anything about marriage, singleness, relationships, and intimacy? It does; it says a lot about that, and Paul spends a whole chapter on this.

What about this question: Does the gospel or our faith in Christ help us know how to navigate our culture? Where can we participate? Where can we reject? Where does the culture get transformed? How do I function as an evangelist in my culture? Does the gospel speak to that? It does. In fact, Paul spends four chapters answering that question.

The next question is our question this morning: What about spiritual gifts? This is followed by a question about the resurrection and then the last gospel question of all: Does faith in Jesus inspire in me financial generosity? It does. Martin Luther said the last part of a man to be converted is his wallet, and that's true. It is fitting that it's the last question in 1 Corinthians 16.

This morning, we have the question about spiritual gifts, and Paul will answer this question in three chapters. We label these as three chapters, following the medieval custom of labeling with chapter numbers, but in reality this is about half of a sermon. It's about 15 minutes of an answer to a really important question. The first thing he wants them to know is that when they were pagans, when they were non-Christians, they were led to idols who cannot speak. But the living God speaks; He is a communicator. In 1 Corinthians 12:3, Paul says:

"Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus is accursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit."

"No one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus is accursed!'" I can hardly get those words out of my mouth even though he is making an example. The Holy Spirit never denigrates or minimizes Jesus. It's one of the ways that you can tell if someone is speaking by the Spirit. On the other hand, "no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' without the Holy Spirit."

Some of you this morning are thinking, "Spiritual gifts—I'm already uncomfortable." Some of you are thinking, "I've been waiting for this Sunday." I want you to know, and Paul wants us all

to know, that every believer in Jesus Christ has the Holy Spirit. We cannot say “Jesus is Lord” without the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. So right now you might be thinking, “I’m a little bit more spiritual than I thought.” Praise God, that’s just the beginning. All believers experience the Holy Spirit when they call Jesus “Lord.”

Now there’s more to say, and that takes us through these next three chapters. Paul gives a three-chapter answer to the question about gifts of the Holy Spirit and how they are used, and I want to summarize his answer in this way. Paul’s answer can be understood like this:

God is the source (1 Corinthians 12),
Love is the way (1 Corinthians 13),
Building up the church is the goal (1 Corinthians 14).

As we look at these chapters, we see that these are the headings of the three chapters. Let’s look at these together:

God is the source. The gifts of the Spirit come from God. He is their source. In 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, we read:

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.”

I had not noticed before what a beautiful Trinitarian formulation that is. Do you see it? He says that it’s the same Spirit, the same Lord (meaning Jesus), and the same God (the Father) who empowers them all. God is the source, with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit working together. It’s an outline for Chapter 12:

Gifts of the Spirit (verses 7-11)
Service to the Son within the body of Christ (verses 12-27)
Activities that God empowers in all (verses 28-30)

God is the source of spiritual gifts in all their variety.

There is a passage in Hebrews 2 that I love. When my wife and I were courting, we met regularly for breakfast. We were memorizing the book of Hebrews, which makes a great date because it’s a subtle way to extend the time. In Hebrews 2:1-4, we read:

“Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to

us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to His will."

I love this little statement that *"we have to pay close attention to what we heard [the gospel] lest we drift away from it."* The gospel was declared by the Lord. It was attested to us. Then in Hebrews 2:4, *"God bore witness to the truth of the gospel by signs and wonders and miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to His will."* God Almighty attested the truth of the gospel by these gifts. It's His witness.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:7:

"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

Each one of us who believes in Christ is given the manifestation of the Spirit. The word "manifestation" is a word that may seem a little intimidating or unclear. The word "manifestation" just means a disclosure or an announcement, a revelation. It's related to the word "appearance." The point is that every single one of us is given some way that the Holy Spirit becomes visible and present through us, and this is amazing. It's the same Spirit who is seen, observed, felt, through each and every one in the body of Christ. This is not for us to accumulate rewards or prestige or to compete for honor. Each one of us is given a manifestation, or an appearance, of the Spirit for the common good, for the building up of the community.

The word that Paul uses for the common good, literally, means "toward that which is beneficial." The Latin translation of the term is *"utilitas"* (for common utility), meaning it's for the use of all. It's for our collective benefit. It's not just for you or me; it's for us. It's a way that we experience the Spirit together. It's a community benefit. Most often, Paul calls the gifts of the Spirit *"charismata,"* and that means that all of us are charismatics. That's where the word "charismatic" comes from. *"Charisma"* is the neuter form of the noun *"charis"* which is the word for "grace." So what am I saying? What is Paul saying? He is saying that grace, which is one of our most important words as Christians, is receiving what we do not deserve. People who have received *charis* have charisma. We get the word "charisma" from that, which is not necessarily related to spiritual gifts. The word "charisma" means that we have a manifestation of God's grace in our lives, and we all need that. Who wouldn't want that?

Paul then describes several of these gifts. It's not an exhaustive list—it's a selective list. He describes nine of these gifts. Through the Spirit, some people have an *"utterance of wisdom."* Have you ever been around someone who speaks words that are wise? One of the heroes of Kenwood Baptist Church was Mama T, Thelma Matthews, who lost a young child and then dedicated her life to caring for the children of this church for decades. Her husband was Paul

Matthews. Paul was a lawyer and a wise man, and everyone went to him for advice. I once asked him, "Paul, why does everyone come to you for advice?" He said, "All I actually do is quote Scripture." That's what the Holy Spirit can do.

Some of you may experience this and have this gift but do not know that this is a spiritual gift. The Holy Spirit's job is to recall the words of Jesus. You may be with someone who needs light from God's Word, and a Scripture just comes to your mind. Where does that come from? It comes from the Holy Spirit, and you speak that. The other person thinks you're so wise, but you're just quoting Scripture. Other times, people have a word of knowledge, where the Holy Spirit tells them something about someone for their good. The Holy Spirit is never a gossip. He never tells you about something so you can whisper it to someone else. Sometimes the Holy Spirit will give you insight into a brother or sister's life.

For others there is a gift of faith, where someone in a place of darkness is struggling to believe or going through a hard time, and by the Holy Spirit you stand next to him and say, "I will believe God and trust Him with you or on your behalf." I have known men who have lost their jobs and gone through an identity crisis: "Where am I? Who am I? What's happening? Is God going to come through?" And I have seen other men come alongside and say, "I will believe God with you until He provides." And He does. That's a gift of faith.

Others have a gift of healing. We have experienced miracles of healing in our church. This is not something that happens every day, but it happens, and it's a gift.

Others have what the ESV says is "*working of miracles*." It may seem intimidating to imagine that someone can come and work miracles. The Greek text calls this "energetic activities of power." Maybe that's a little less intimidating. Have you ever been around someone where the power of the Lord just moves through him, and you experience it, and you are blessed by it and strengthened and encouraged?

Some have a word of prophecy. Prophecy in the Bible is not just about predicting the future. Seventy percent of Israel's prophets bring God's Word to bear on the contemporary moment. Prophecy is about having God's Word shine light on the moment that we are in, and that is so helpful. Many of the prophets were preachers as well. Many of their sermons were preached in the temple courts.

Others have the ability to distinguish between spirits. I once met with a friend, and we were talking about a book. I wondered whether it was of the Lord, and I felt deep inside of me that it was not and that I should turn away from it. It had a different spirit to it. Some of you know this

gift and have been blessed by it.

Others have a gift of different types—notice that Paul says “various kinds”—of tongues. We have seen “tongues” before. Remember that the word “tongue” in Greek is *“glossa,”* meaning “language.” We saw in Acts 2 that this can be a supernatural ability to speak in another known language for the purposes of evangelism. There is another category of language that Paul seems to refer to as the language of angels, where one speaks in an intercessory language given by God. It is not a known human language, and it needs to be interpreted but cannot be interpreted by the person to whom the language was given, which is interesting. God builds a mutuality into this. Some have the language, while others have the interpretation.

Paul makes the point in 1 Corinthians 12:11 that all these gifts are from the same source:

“All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apports to each one individually as He wills.”

There is no survey that we complete to say what gift we would like, as in, “I’m really drawn to those energetic manifestations of power.” There is no form to fill out. These are God’s decisions. But notice that they function together as a variety of services to the Lord. This is where Paul develops the analogy of the human body. In 1 Corinthians 12:12, we read:

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.”

The human body has many members, and yet it is one. In the same way, we are members of one body, the body of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 12:18, we read:

“But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as He chose.”

God is the one who composes the body, and notice that God is the one who gives greater honor to parts that lack it. This shows us the character of God. You and I are inclined to give certain parts of the human body more honor than others, but that’s not how God thinks. God thinks that every part of the body is honorable, and He gives greater honor to parts that lack it, so there is no division in the body. Members of the church body, in their active service to Jesus Christ, care for one another. We are to function in this active service to the Lord, using our gifts and functioning together. If one suffers, all suffer. If one is honored, all rejoice together.

I remember as a young pastor going to the hospital to visit someone in our church who had tragically attempted to take her own life. Praise God, she did not succeed. I sat with her and wept with her, and then I left the hospital and went directly to a church party. It was a great party, a fun party with lawn games. For me, those two events happened with one immediately after the other. I remember being at the party, and this passage came to my mind. I thought,

"I'm part of the body of Christ, so I can suffer with one who is suffering, and I can rejoice together with those who are rejoicing, one after the other, and not lose my mind." Those are both meaningful parts of being in the body together.

Paul says we are the body of Christ, members of it, and this is the outworking of the Spirit. God is the one who is the source. In 1 Corinthians 12:28, Paul says:

"And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues."

He appointed apostles, who are like the missionaries, then prophets, who are like pastors or preachers, then teachers of all kinds, then miracles. I love the next two. There are gifts of helping. How can I help? What a powerful, deeply spiritual question. And there are gifts of administrating. Have you ever seen someone who just looks at a situation, sees it, and instantaneously thinks, "Here are the 15 steps we need to do in this order." I never think like that. I do not have that gift. It's not the default mode of my mind, but I really respect it and praise God for that gift. You might not think that you are good at administrative tasks or good at helping other people. You might undervalue those gifts. You might think you are not as spiritual as the power-working person, but notice that the Lord describes all these gifts as coming from Him. We all need to use our gifts, and the body needs us to use them. God is the source of all spiritual gifts.

Let's look at the second part. Paul says that **love is the way**. We need this word, and we need 1 Corinthians 13. Paul says, "Let me show you a more excellent way, and the excellent way is the way of love." First Corinthians 13 is one of the most famous passages read at weddings, but it's not like Paul suddenly has weddings on his mind in the middle of a scriptural discussion about gifts of the Spirit. Most people do not remember that 1 Corinthians 13 is the middle chapter of a discussion on spiritual gifts. So next time you are at a wedding and you are hearing a reading of that passage, remember that it is about spiritual gifts.

Love is the the greatest manifestation of the Holy Spirit among us. Paul says that if we speak in tongues and we do not have love, we are noisy. That's not a compliment. If we have prophetic powers and we do not have love, we are nothing. If we give away all that we have and we are the most generous givers in the body of Christ and we do not have love, we gain nothing. Love is the greatest manifestation of the Spirit, and Paul describes the working of the Spirit and love in a very beautiful way. In 1 Corinthians 13:4-5, he says:

"Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing,

but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends."

There will be a time when the exercise of our spiritual gifts will not seem that necessary. That time will come after Jesus' return in glory and when evil is banished and there is no need for world evangelism because it has already happened. At that time, we are to be talking about other things, but it seems that we will not be talking about our spiritual gifts. We will just be living in God's new world.

This emphasis on love prevents us from making spiritual gifts about us. It also prevents us from thinking of spiritual gifts as the ultimate thing. In my experience as a Christian and as a pastor and in being in different churches around the world, visiting 35 countries, I have seen a full range of views on spiritual gifts. I have seen some people who say, "These things make me uneasy, and isn't it the case that these things stop at the New Testament?" I do not think that's the case. We see this throughout the books of the New Testament, and there is nothing in the New Testament that would say God's end-time promise of the Holy Spirit is here and then it is not. God's presence is here, and the building up of the body is something we need, not just through the first century or until the Bible is published, but until Christ's return. On the other side, I have been in situations where it's almost as though the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit become more important than Jesus. And that makes me uncomfortable. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are to be used to point us to Jesus and to have the life of Jesus seen in our life together.

What is the goal? First Corinthians 14 says the **goal of the gifts is to build up the church**. Paul contrasts the gift of speaking in other languages from the gift of prophecy. I have been in some churches where speaking in tongues is "the thing," and if you do not speak in tongues, they are not sure you are Christian. That's not true. If you say, "Jesus Christ is Lord," you are a Christian, and you say that by the Holy Spirit.

At the same time, Paul contrasts these two modes in a way that is instructive. In 1 Corinthians 14:4, he says:

"The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church."

That's the goal—the building up of the church. Continuing in 1 Corinthians 14:5, Paul says:

"Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up."

The one who prophesies is greater because the church is built up. In 1 Corinthians 14:12, Paul says to the church:

“So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.”

He is saying it's a good thing to seek the power of the Spirit, the presence of the Spirit, but *“strive to excel in building up the church.”* What does this look like in church life? Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:26:

“What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.”

There is a vision of the church, assembled and gathered in a way that signals to us the active participation of many. This is so necessary and beautiful. It's so important that we all together follow the leading of the worship team. They do not just prepare the technical execution of the songs, but they prepare their hearts. They choose the songs with intentionality, and they are sowing God's truth into us as we sing. I often find myself on Monday or Tuesday, wandering around singing the songs that we just sang on Sunday, and I'm grateful for that. I'm grateful that we have a worship pastor who is thoughtful and intentional in what the truth is that is going to be sown into our hearts. Others have a lesson they may be teaching. Others have a tongue that could be spoken either in prayer or in the congregation and to be interpreted to build up the church.

Everything should be done to strengthen and build up the body. Paul's great conclusion is found in 1 Corinthians 14:39-40:

“So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But all things should be done decently and in order.”

If you are intimidated by the word “prophecy,” I want to reclaim that word for you in its larger biblical usage. To prophesy can mean simply to speak a word of Scripture into someone's life. It can mean to bring a Sunday School lesson from Scripture to bear on the lives of children or adults. It can mean to follow a prompting of the Holy Spirit to speak into a brother or sister's life. This is a great gift of God in our life together. *“All things should be done decently and in order.”* The Holy Spirit is not a god of chaos.

What about the gifts? How are they used? Remember our key line: God is the source, love is the way, and building up the church is the goal. What does this mean for us this morning? “God is the source” means that the gifts of the Holy Spirit should be welcomed, sought, and received. They are from God in all of their variety. They express our dedicated service to Jesus within the church, the body of Christ. God has given them to us. The greatest manifestation of the Holy

Spirit in our life together is a love that reflects the love of Jesus Christ. Do not underestimate how powerful this is. It's amazing to experience the love of Christ. I mean really experience it, not just hear about it, but feel it. There is a variety of ways that the love of Jesus Christ can come into your life. You can pray to receive Him as Savior and Lord, and He will fill you and flood you with His love. You can experience His love through a brother or sister in Christ.

I had a great privilege this week of visiting one of our beloved saints in the hospital. She is getting ready to go into hospice care. We had a great conversation. Her eyes were on Jesus. Her husband is a bit of a character, and he's had his ups and downs in walking with Jesus. I had known him for a long time, but I learned something about him and about our church this week that really blessed me. I asked him, "When did you really get back on track with the Lord?" He said, "Well, I was at Kroger," so I asked what happened. He said, "This guy that I knew was at Kroger with a Bible, and he was walking down the aisle and saw me. The friend said, 'Hey man, when are you going to get back to church? When are you going to get right with God?'" He panicked and started going to another aisle to avoid this guy, but his friend chased him down. He said, "It was my time at Kroger that put me back in church." He came back to church, and the preacher at that time was calling everybody at the end of the service to come back to Jesus. The preacher said, "Jesus is looking at you." At that time, there were lights on the side soffits of the sanctuary that lit up the walls. He said, "I looked up at the walls and saw in the shadows the face of Jesus looking directly at me. As the preacher was saying, 'Jesus is looking at you; come back to Him,' I saw Jesus' face on the wall, and I gave my life to Him." Why would we ever want to say something like that cannot happen? It must be exercised in love.

The gifts are used to build up the church. This is their ultimate goal. Speaking in tongues can be a sign, Paul says, to unbelievers. This was true in my own conversion. My best friend in high school had said he had a real relationship with God in Jesus Christ. I said, "Wow! Really? How do you know that?" He said that one way he knows it's real is that God has given him a language of prayer, and he prayed in the Spirit for about 10 seconds. It was a sign to me that God was real. I praise God for that.

The gifts are given to speak God's will and Word in our lives. I remember being a young Christian and going to a praise and prayer service. I had been a Christian for just a few months, and a woman in the church prayed for me and spoke a prophetic word in my life. It was just a word about how much God loved me. I was undone, and I knew she was speaking by the Holy Spirit. That has been with me for decades as a foundation stone in my soul, and I praise God for that.

I praise God for gifts like help and administration. This is a generous church, and I praise God for

that. Sometimes opportunities come to us where generosity just appears. That happened to us in an instance when a house next to the church became available. We had a church meeting, and we thought by the Holy Spirit that we were supposed to buy the house. We took up an offering and collected all the money for the house—a couple hundred thousand dollars.

I was just kicking myself regarding another nearby house because I thought I had failed the Lord. A godly man who was a regular participant in the men's Bible study used to live there. I remember thinking I should talk to him about the house because he was getting older and might consider making it available for the church to buy. But I didn't know how to bring that up, and I never did. I thought I had failed the church by not bringing that up. He went to be with the Lord, and then a couple of weeks later, his son came into the church office and said, "You know, my dad really wanted the church to have his house. Would you want the house?" The Holy Spirit had that all worked out. We wanted to use that house to host missionary families, and we announced this to the church at a business meeting. I was getting ready to go on vacation, and I didn't know how we were going to get this house ready. I don't know what was on my face as I made the announcement that said, "I need help," but one of our saints walked up to me after the business meeting and said, "Would you like for me to organize work crews of people for several weeks and get the house ready for the missionaries?" I teared up. That's the gift of help.

I like charts, and the kind of charts I like are linguistic charts of Greek and Hebrew words and semantic domains and things like that. There is a chart master in our midst. One of our other saints makes these things called Gantt charts. I had never seen one before. We can prepare to do a huge project, and he will chart out in color code the 167 steps in time sequence of how this will happen. It's like a work of art. That's a gift of administration, and it's no less spiritual than a word of prophecy or a word of wisdom in someone else.

Remember, God is the source, love is the way, and building up the church is the goal. I praise God for times where the Holy Spirit has come and been present among us. We want to allow Him room to do and to be that. We have designated fourth Sundays as a time when elders are available to pray with you. We will have times that we schedule for unhurried times of worship and prayer. I want to encourage you this morning that if you call Jesus "Lord," you have the Holy Spirit. If you have the Holy Spirit, then you are part of the body of Christ. All parts of the body and all gifts share an equal honor in God's sight. These gifts are meant to be used to build up the body. I want to end this morning with a declaration. I want us, together by the Holy Spirit, to declare, "Jesus is Lord." Jesus is Lord. I want us together to affirm, "We are the body of Christ." We are the body of Christ, and together we proclaim the gospel.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.