

Forgotten God Week 4. The Common Good  
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Good morning everyone! So I just can't get up here and proceed with the Message w/o noting the incredible irony. We are preaching about the POWER of the Holy Spirit during the two biggest power outages Lower Makefield has had in recent years? Seriously? Who else was w/o power? Anyone still out? How many of you continued to walk in the bathroom or the closet and flick on the switch even though you knew there was no power? Even the Church had no power. Ha – but not the power WE are talking about...

Today we're looking at supernatural powers – spiritual gifts! And of course that got me thinking about SUPER heroes with SUPER powers! All right fess up – if you could have any superpower, what would it be? Think about... Ok – shout it out! Soar through the air? Maybe you'd like to be invisible? Anyone want to “leap tall buildings in a single bound?”

Growing up, my sister and I loved Jaime Sommers, the Bionic Woman – remember the way she would tuck her hair behind her ear so she could use her supersonic hearing to help her and the Bionic Man catch the bad guys? We would do the same sly hair tuck but never caught any bad guys! And who can guess which superpower my husband Warren has always wanted via his favorite Halloween costume ever?

Well Guess what – it's your lucky day! You have a superpower! Everyone here has a supernatural power – a supernatural gift. Yes everyone. In his infinite wisdom and power, God, through the Holy Spirit, uniquely gifts every one of his followers with spiritual gifts. Let's look at Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 12: 8-11:

“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.”

Pretty humbling isn't it? The God of the Universe loves us so much he wants to give us amazing gifts. Wait – what? The God of the Universe thinks that I am worthy of special gifts? He's gifted me with powers I might not even be aware of? Wisdom? Knowledge? Faith? Healing? Geesh. Some days I'm lucky if I get my shoes tied straight! This all actually sounds overwhelming, not empowering.

God knows us; He knows our hearts; Our Fears. He does not leave us alone and powerless. Remember before Jesus departed, he told us he was leaving us with something better -- the Holy Spirit, now inside of us, guiding and leading us. When we are unsure; when we don't know what

God is saying, when we're not sure what our gifts are or how to use them or if we even HAVE gifts, we can go to God in prayer and ask him to reveal this to us through the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes the Spirit speaks to us softly, quietly nudging our hearts.

- The simple peace you feel when your words bring the comfort of Jesus to someone who is hurting.
- Or when your friends tell you “you're a natural at mentoring kids. You really make Rachel feel God's love.”
- Or “Your talent with managing money helped us retire our debt early; now we have more funds to focus on outreach and missions.”

These are all gifts; the talents God has given us. That peace, those affirmations from others -- these are all confirmations of your spiritual gifts.

And when we feel God asking us to step out in faith to use our gifts and this seems way out of our comfort zone, this is exactly where the Spirit comes alongside of us. Our willingness combined with God's Spirit allows our gifts to be maximized in the ways He planned for us - even before we were born! When I spoke in January about how I felt the Holy Spirit nudging me to use my gift of sharing God's Word, it definitely started as a small nudge; quiet voice inside of me raising the question. And then scriptures passages confirmed the nudges – popping up in my daily readings, through messages friends sent me... Take a deep breath, step out and trust that the Holy Spirit will come alongside you and fill you at the right time, with the right words.

So why does God choose to gift us through the Holy Spirit? What is the **purpose** of these gifts? If we think back to those childhood superheroes, why did we want those superpowers? My sister and I really weren't trying to catch bad guys – we probably wanted to overhear a conversation adults were having “away from little children's ears.” But why does Clark Kent turn into superman and fly? He gets no credit – barely anyone even knows he is superman. According to the legend, Superman fights for “truth, justice and the American Way.” He uses his superpowers to fly through air and save others.

Why did God gift **us**? Let's look back at what Paul says in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12: 7:

“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the **common good**.” Or as the New Living Translation puts it “A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other.”

Clearly Superman used his gifts better than Laurie and me!

The need for this reminder of how to use our gifts is found in the original intent of Paul's letter. Paul is writing to the leaders of the church of Corinth, by now one of the largest cities in the Roman empire and an early outpost of the Christian church. Paul is concerned that the leaders of the church in Corinth are using their spiritual gifts for their **own** glory, rather than for the glory of God. They weren't interested in what God was doing in others; in the church. They

weren't using their gifts to build up the **church**, but to build up their egos. They wanted to show off what God was doing in **them**. God did not gift us for this.

A true sign of the Holy Spirit's working is that **Jesus** is magnified, not us. This can be hard - especially because we are often conditioned to respond to the accolades of this world. "Wow you are so giving Jay; you do so much. I always see you and your wife serving in the community. You really are AMAZING." "Geez Karen you are one heck of a preacher. Have you ever thought about doing a podcast? Writing your own book? You could be a superstar!" "Tim, you are an AWESOME worship leader. You should do a solo gig at The Vault. Sing some of your own stuff." Are we living for the praise of this world? **Who is getting the glory here?**

It's **just** not about us. We have to constantly check ourselves - as Jesus teaches in Matthew 5:16:

"Let your light so shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Do we use our gifts to give God glory or to bring us praise? Are our gifts building up the **body of Christ** or our own egos? Do we let ourselves be fooled into thinking we are great by the praise of others? Just like the church in Corinth, we need to make sure we use our gifts for the **common good**.

We might also feel that our gifts aren't important. That we have little to offer. That **we** certainly can't bring God glory. Remember the Spirit gifts us as He sees fit.

"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.

And just like a human parent, God loves to give gifts to his children. He loves to lavish gifts on us. God also knows that each of his children is different and so he gives different gifts to each child - all designed for us to use to help the rest of the body.

In 1st Corinthians 12: 14-25, Paul goes on to describe how critical **all** gifts are to the building up the body of Christ by talking about the amazing way God created us. Our bodies are designed with many individual parts -- arms, limbs, organs, cells -- all important! If our Ear said, "I'm not beautiful like Eye, colorful and expressive; I don't deserve a place on the head," would we want to get rid of it? If our body was all eye, how could we hear? If all ear, how could we see? No matter how significant you are, it is only because of what you are a part of. An enormous eye or a gigantic ear wouldn't be a body, but a monster! In fact, there are cartoon monsters based on that ridiculous premise.

Our God is so crazy amazing that some parts of the body that seem the weakest and least important are actually the **most** necessary. We can live without an eye, but not without a stomach! If you had to choose, wouldn't you prefer good digestion to a full head of hair? I am definitely NOT thinking of anyone in particular here...

The incredible way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives as the Church; as the body of Christ. All of us in the church have gifts/parts that are necessary, important and dependent on each other. There are no lesser gifts in the Kingdom of God. It can be easy to focus on the “flashy” manifestations of the Spirit, what we might incorrectly deem the “important” spiritual gifts. But just like the unflashy kidneys in our body, praying for someone’s heart to be cleansed or showing kindness to a person who is nothing but nasty, or sitting quietly with someone in need, exhibits gifts of the Spirit every bit as necessary and important. Growing up there was an elderly woman in our church. I never met her; at least not that I remember. But she knew me. And all the kids in our church. And every birthday we would all get a card telling us God loved us signed by “Miss Jessie.” Fifty some years later I still remember that love.

Still not quite sure about this whole gift thing? Sounds good on paper – or in our case on Sunday morning – but what does this really mean? What do I do with this? God has gifted me to use **my** talents to build up the body of Christ? So you say. But I still have absolutely NO idea what my gifts are and how I could possibly use them for the glory of God!

Maybe we make it too complicated. In the words of that famous theologian “Nike” - Just Do It! Try stuff. Scott Burgess spoke about this in his Sermon a few weeks ago. Over the years, Scott volunteered in various ways – little bit of youth ministry, hospitality, DR mission trips, black jack ministry (that really was a thing I swear), Code Blue, and prison ministry. In his words, “I enjoyed some, was lukewarm on a couple and found that I didn’t fit right at all in others. The biggest difference is that the more I got involved in the Prison and Recovery Ministry, the more deeply I found my calling. In addition to administration skills and just helping however I’m needed, I found that I enjoy preaching and the guys at the prison seem to appreciate hearing me! I also found an affinity, a gift, for organizing events - Quarterly Recovery Services, a monthly café, church concert, even a Woodside Ping-Pong tournament I put together many years ago! “As Scott tried different things, how to use his gifts/his path became clear to him.

A few years ago, I had the privilege of serving with our youth on the Bahamas Mission Trip and got to know a very young Lexi Bridge. She was struggling a bit like we all do to figure out where she fit in; what God wanted her to do. She didn’t particularly feel special or called. Flash forward three short years and this same Lexi recently gave an AMAZING inspirational Message in youth group about spiritual gifts.

During high school, Lexi figured out that God had gifted her with artistic ability and she was using that gift to make beautiful scripture paintings. She also realized she has this pretty unique gift of being able to talk to anyone at school – doesn’t matter if the person is popular/unpopular, athlete, mathlete – God gave her the ability to strike up a conversation. Realizing this led her to seek out more ways to use her gifts. She volunteered to help at a Dave Pettigrew concert and found it just as easy to talk with some of the folks there who wrestle with addictions; many adults twice her age. So, she thought, What’s next? Now she volunteers with the Recovery Café, continuing to use her gift of being able to talk to anyone to share the love of Jesus with addicts and hope seekers.

Last Friday night she gave away some of her beautiful artwork because she wanted the guests to have “something tangible to remind them of God even when there are no events going on.” Lexi feels that ever since she started using her gifts and volunteering she’s become a more open and happy person. All because she decided to use the way God made her – with the ability to talk to anyone, coupled with her artistic gifts -- to build up the body of God.

My friend Katie summarized this quite nicely from the “Forgotten God” study guide – “The proper use for your spiritual gifts is to love the people God has placed in our lives. The spirit works in us because He loves the people around us and wants them to see God’s glory and goodness.” Lexi does this quite well!

Using our gifts does not have to be scary or hard or complicated. If you would like a bit more insight, we have a spiritual gifts inventory you can fill out on-line and get a quick analysis of how you might be gifted to serve. Some of you may have done this before. If you haven’t and would like to, you can find the link to take the assessment on our website under Serve – link will be live Monday!

- No matter **what** our gifts are, the key here is God’s charge to us. Are we using our gifts to serve? Are we sharing it with the body? Are we following the example of Lexi and taking our talent and finding new ways to use it to expand the kingdom of God?
- Maybe you are gifted to teach; maybe even serving in Sunday School or Adventure Club. Could you take that gift across the river and help kids in Trenton through Urban Promise?
- Do you love to worship; are you gifted with musical ability? Maybe you sing in the choir or the band-- how about joining Lexi on Friday nights leading Worship at the Recovery Cafe.
- Are numbers your thing? Could you lead a Financial Peace workshop, helping others get their finances in order? Or help a student fill out a financial aid application?
- Do you find it easy to set aside time to go to God in prayer? Maybe God is asking you to uplift his kingdom with prayer and support.

At a conference several of us on staff recently attended, we heard that a true superhero is a **Hero MAKER**– one who makes a hero in someone else. Can you be a hero maker – helping someone unleash their gifts? Can you bring someone alongside you to serve with you and help expand your kingdom work?

We are called to use our gifts to shine the light of Jesus for all to see. And our world certainly needs light. We need to show the unconditional love that Jesus showed; the infinite grace he grants day after day; the peace he promises that “passeth all understanding,” the protection and shelter he offers under his “outstretched arm.” The gift of eternal life God freely gives to **all** who believe.

Use the gifts the Spirit’s given you to shine the lights of Jesus wherever you are:

- At home, helping your children learn the love of Jesus
- In the workplace, being such a strong example of integrity and compassion that your co-workers wonder what drives you.

- In the community, offering a hand or a meal to those in need
- With your friends at school, refusing to put others down by joining in gossip.
- And invite someone to serve with you.

Uncover the gifts your father has lavished on you. And then share those gifts, shining the love of Christ for all to see. Will you join me in a word of prayer?

