

Living in Power of the Holy Spirit – 3. The Spirit’s Empowering and Equipping Gifts 1 Corinthians 12:27-30; Ephesians 4:11-13; Romans 12:6-8

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From the middle of June to about the middle of July, there is a lot of gift giving that goes on in the Luckhardt family. It starts with Father’s Day and then the following week we celebrate our daughter, Emily’s birthday, followed the next day by Jerry’s birthday, which is also my sister and brother-in-law’s anniversary. My mother’s birthday comes just a week later and then a week later, Jerry and I celebrate our wedding anniversary. That’s a lot of gifts in a short period of time but I love gift giving. It is one of my love languages because I think it reminds people that I care about them, that I love them and that they are important to me. Even the smallest of gifts can be meaningful. One of my favorite gifts is this tube of lip balm that my dad gave me on one of my last visits to see him before he passed. If you know me, you know I have a thing for lip balm. I got that from my dad. He always had a tube of lip balm in his pocket on the golf course, at a Padres game or in his hospital bed. And he passed that love, one might call it an obsession, perhaps, on to me. My dad has been gone 8 years now, and this lip balm has long been gone but I’ve kept the tube because it’s the last gift my dad gave me. One of the biggest gifts I’ve ever received was on my 16th birthday when my folks gave me a professional model trombone as I began studying the trombone more seriously. That was a big gift that I will always remember. No matter how big or how small, there is something very special about giving gifts to our loved ones. And God gave us the best, the biggest, the ultimate gift, the gift of his son so that we could be forgiven, saved, and redeemed. We also receive what are called spiritual gifts that come to us by the power of the Holy Spirit and that is what we are going to talk about today.

Over the past two weeks, we’ve been learning about the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of all believers. In the first week, we talked about who the Holy Spirit is and how to connect to that power that is within us. Last week, Pastor Bethany helped us think about what it means to allow ourselves to be shaped and molded by the Holy Spirit so that the fruits of the Spirit are present in our lives. And today, we’ll wrap up this series by learning more about the spiritual gifts that are given to all followers of Jesus. We’ll learn what these gifts are and what they are not as well as why it’s so important to understand them so to put them to use.

Let’s begin by looking at the words that Jesus spoke at his last, last supper. You remember that on the night before he was crucified, he shared a first last supper in the upper room with his disciples. Then the next day, he was crucified and then 3 days later, he rose from the dead. Then he spent some time here on earth, probably around 6 weeks, making numerous appearances before he ascended back to heaven for the last time. And the night before that, he had his last, last supper and spoke these words: *While they were eating together, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for what the Father had promised. He said, “This is what you heard from me: **John baptized with water, but in only a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.**”* Acts 1:4-5

The Greek word for baptized is **baptiso** which means to be **poured over or immersed in**. So Jesus is saying, you are not just going to get sprinkled or dripped on by the Holy Spirit, you are going to be immersed, covered by the Holy Spirit. Then he continues in verse 8, “...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you....” Acts 1:8. The Greek word for **power is *dunamis*** which is where we get our English word *dynamite*. It is powerful. It is mighty and you will have that power too because you are being immersed and receiving power from the Holy Spirit. But the question is... what is the power for? How are we to use that power? Well, Jesus goes on and tells us that... “*you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and*

Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8 In other words, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to be Christ’s witnesses in this world.

So, what does it mean to be a witness? There are many places in our lives where we are witnesses.

Whenever you wear apparel that bears a brand name, Nike, The North Face, LL Bean, you are bearing witness for that apparel company. You are saying, I like this company and you should too.

Maybe it’s your favorite college or professional sports team. There are bumper stickers, baseball caps, t-shirts, water bottles that bear the name and logo of our favorite team or school. By doing this, you are saying, I love this team. You are witnessing for this team.

You do it whenever you put a political sign in your yard. You are bearing witness saying, I like this candidate. I am going to vote for this candidate, and you should too.

For others, it’s their favorite singer. Just a couple of weeks ago, we saw a lot of Taylor Swift t-shirts around town and on the news. Swifties, Taylor Swift fans, bearing witness to their love for Taylor Swift and her music.

But Jesus said, you need to be my witnesses. More than any clothing apparel, sports team, political candidate, or celebrity figure, you need to be my witness. But we should not do it by being judgmental or excluding people. After all, our faith is built on how we love others. So, to bear witness for Christ, we should show love in all we do.

We need to witness with our voice and our word choices but also by our actions. Do you know this quote that is attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, “**Preach the gospel at all times and if necessary, use words.**” The actions of your life should reflect the teaching of Jesus. Jesus sums it up by saying “... everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other.” *John 13:35*

We are empowered by the Holy Spirit, not to draw attention to ourselves or even to Messiah Church, but to glorify and witness for Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 12, Paul says this: **Brothers and sisters, I don’t want you to be ignorant about spiritual gifts.** I heard a recent survey that said 87% of Christians have no idea what spiritual gifts are. We are uninformed not only about what our gifts are but also how to use them. Let me give you an example.

Maybe you remember my message from two weeks ago when I introduced you to Benjy Spence, a member of Messiah Church and a 15-year triathlete, competing in Ironman Florida this fall. Benjy showed us this bike he uses in these competitions. It was aerodynamic, technologically advanced and cost around \$5,000. Now suppose, as Benjy was competing in one of these races someone came up to him and said, “that bike you’re using is good but it’s not the best.” And they gave him a \$20,000 bike as a gift to use at that very moment, saying, it’s a gift from me to you. It’s all yours. But instead of using the new bike, Benjy just put it in the garage and never used it. Imagine how the gift giver would feel. That’s how we can be when it comes to understanding and using our spiritual gifts.

Paul goes on to say, *there are different spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; and there are different ministries and the same Lord; and there are different activities but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. A demonstration of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good.* 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

If you are a follower of Jesus, you have been given spiritual gifts to use for the common good, the work of the church, the building up the body of Christ and to give witness to Christ in the world.

So let's start with what spiritual gifts are not:

They are not our natural talents and abilities. Perhaps you were born with natural athletic abilities or musical abilities. These are your natural abilities; they are not your spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are given to us when we accept Christ as our savior and are spiritually reborn.

They are not given to select people. God does not look more favorably upon one group of Christians over another. If you are a Christ follower, you have spiritual gifts.

They are not signs of spiritual maturity. It doesn't matter if you have been a Christ follower for 40 years or you began your faith journey last week, everyone who is reborn in Christ receives spiritual gifts.

They are not the fruits of the Spirit. Last week, Pastor Bethany taught us about the 9 fruits of the Spirit that Paul wrote about in Galatians 5, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These are attributes that should be present in our lives, but they are not our spiritual gifts.

Those are some of the things that spiritual gifts are not. So, then, what are they?

There are three passages in Paul's letters where he talks about these spiritual gifts. You heard them read at the beginning of this podcast. just a few minutes ago. Today, we only have time to talk about a few of them to help us understand what they are. So, let's look closer at the passage from Romans 12 where Paul lists seven different gifts.

The first one is **prophecy**. *If your gift is prophecy, you should prophesy in proportion to your faith.* That means speaking on behalf of God. Speaking God's word, as I hopefully, am doing now. The second is **servicing**. *If your gift is service, devote yourself to serving.* If you get excited to do things for other people, then your gift is serving. Number 3 is the gift of **teaching**. *If your gift is teaching, devote yourself to teaching.* Some of you have this amazing ability to teach others what you have learned and so you lead Bible studies and faith groups. Romans 12:8 says, *If your gift is **encouragement**, devote yourself to encouraging.* God has given some of you this wonderful gift of encouragement and when you see someone do something, you just can't wait to send them a note, or email or phone call to lift them up. We have such a need for encouragers in this world. And the church really needs encouragers to encourage people in their faith. The next **gift is giving**. *The one giving gifts should do so with no strings attached.* Whenever we have a financial need or a capital campaign, those of you with this gift are able to take out your checkbook and give a generous gift. You have the spiritual gift of giving. *If your gift is **to lead**, then do so with passion.* Many of you have the gift of leadership and have served as leaders here at Messiah, in your places of work and in your communities. Then he goes on and says, *if it's **mercy**, show mercy.* This is a gift that God has given to those who serve on our Congregational Care Ministry Team. They visit folks who are homebound or in the hospital or going through a tough time of grief or loss. They have this amazing ability to reach out and minister to folks in need.

So, that's just a partial list. There are 20 spiritual gifts listed on the UMC website. (I'll share that web address with you in just a minute.) So how do you discover your spiritual gifts? Here are five ways to do that.

Study what the Bible says about spiritual gifts. Today's scripture passages are a good place to start. 1 Corinthians 12:27-30, Ephesians 4:11-13, Romans 12:6-8

Ask God to show you. Pray about it and ask God for help in your understanding.

Examine what you enjoy doing and what you're good at. Talk to trusted friends and family and ask them to help you reflect and confirm what you think to be true.

Take a spiritual gifts inventory. There is one on the www.umcdiscipleship.org and search **"Spiritual Gifts Inventory."** It'll pop up. There are several multiple-choice questions for you to answer and then it will give you your results at the end.

Follow where the Spirit is nudging you to go. Be aware of what you feel the Spirit is calling you to do and then do it.

Then, once you've discovered what your gifts are, it's important to *use* them. And honestly, that can be the hardest part. If you do the assessment and then wonder, now how can I use these to glorify Christ, we have several folks here at Messiah Church who have led Spiritual Gift discoveries in the past and they are making themselves available to you for one-on-one conversation. If you'd like to be connected with one of these coaches, just let me know and I'll get you connected. When everybody uses their gift together in the Body of Christ, it furthers God's kingdom here on earth. There's some artwork that hangs in the conference room here at church that says, "Better together." As our servant teams meet and our staff meets, we are reminded when we all bring our different gifts to the table, we are better together. And anytime you share that gift, it is never in vain. You have no idea of knowing WHAT hangs in the balance of your decision to share or not to share your gifts. You have no idea WHO hangs in the balance of your decision to serve or not to serve.

In preparing this message, I've been thinking about the apostle Paul and how he dedicated the last half of his adult life, using his spiritual gifts, to further the kingdom of God. He was the greatest missionary ever to have lived and yet, spent his last years of his life in a Roman prison, writing letters of encouragement to new Jesus followers. He had no idea that his letters would one day end up in the Bible. One must wonder what he thought that day when the Roman guards took him from his prison cell for the last time and led him to his execution. Was he thinking, did I waste my time? Was this all in vain? Is there any chance that this movement will even survive? Paul had no way of knowing that one day the all-powerful Roman empire would cease to exist. He had no way of knowing that one day 31% of the world's population would be followers of Jesus. He had no way of knowing that one day, people would flock to Rome, not to learn about Nero but to see where Paul was imprisoned, and his friend Peter was buried. He had no way of knowing that the Roman coliseum that once crucified Christians would today have a cross hanging over the emperor's gate, not representing a crucifixion but THE crucifixion.

Paul had no idea what hung in the balance when he decided to use his spiritual gifts and neither do I and neither do you. So, I leave you with these words from Jesus. *... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*" Acts 1:8

Let's pray: Most holy and merciful God, fill us with the power of your Holy Spirit that we may be your witnesses with our words and our actions. Reveal to each of us the gifts you have given us and the courage to use those gifts to make a difference in the body of Christ and in this world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of July 16, 2023

Weekly Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit, come. As I study your Word this week, give me eyes to see and ears to hear. Help me to understand the way to go and make me more like Jesus. May I connect with the

Holy Spirit so I can experience the joy of walking with you and feeling your presence with me on every step of life's journey. Amen.

Monday, July 17

Scripture: Micah 3:8-12

But me! I am filled with power,
 with the spirit of the LORD,
 with justice and might,
 to declare to Jacob his wrongdoing and to Israel his sin!
Hear this, leaders of the house of Jacob,
 rulers of the house of Israel,
 you who reject justice and make crooked all that is straight,
 who build Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with injustice!
Her officials give justice for a bribe,
 and her priests teach for hire.
Her prophets offer divination for silver,
 yet they rely on the LORD, saying,
 "Isn't the LORD in our midst?
 Evil won't come upon us!"
Therefore, because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field,
 Jerusalem will become piles of rubble,
 and the temple mount will become an overgrown mound.

Observation

The prophet Micah said the power of the Lord's Spirit sent him to warn the people of Judah that their unjust ways were leading to terrible consequences. Other "prophets," he said, claimed the Spirit gave them "windy" messages that all would be well (Micah 2:11). The Hebrew word for wind and spirit is the same word (ruach). These prophets will have gone about claiming to speak with the spirit when their words are wind. Micah really does speak in the power of the wind—Yahweh's wind or spirit.

Application

Later the prophet Jeremiah also preached strong warnings. The officials in Jerusalem wanted to execute him for such an "unpatriotic" message. But "a few of the community elders" told the crowd they should listen, and quoted Micah 3:12 as evidence they shouldn't kill prophets for delivering warnings from God (Jeremiah 26:1-19). What makes it important for you to listen to prophetic voices even when they tell you things you don't want to hear?

Prayer

Lord God, you are a truth teller, so at times you need to warn me. But I thank you that the great ultimate truth you tell me is that, even beyond sad consequences, you always offer hope and restoration. Amen.

Tuesday, July 18

Scripture: Luke 1:28-38

When the angel came to her, he said, "Rejoice, favored one! The Lord is with you!" She was confused by these words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. The angel said, "Don't be afraid, Mary. God is honoring you. Look! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and he will be called the Son of the Most High. The

Lord God will give him the throne of David his father. He will rule over Jacob's house forever, and there will be no end to his kingdom." Then Mary said to the angel, "How will this happen since I haven't had sexual relations with a man?" The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come over you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the one who is to be born will be holy. He will be called God's Son. Look, even in her old age, your relative Elizabeth has conceived a son. This woman who was labeled 'unable to conceive' is now six months pregnant. Nothing is impossible for God." Then Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant. Let it be with me just as you have said." Then the angel left her.

Observation

God's messenger promised that Mary, young and unmarried, would have a baby. Since human biology (Mary was a virgin) ruled pregnancy out, she logically asked, "How will this happen?" We often overlook this as we read the Christmas story, but the heavenly messenger said the Holy Spirit ("the power of the Most High") would come over her. That was the message Mary trusted as she replied, "Let it be with me just as you have said."

Application

Given what we know of her culture, Mary was likely in her mid-teens when the angel Gabriel unfolded a task she couldn't (and we can't) fully understand. Part of the power and mystery of that task was the Holy Spirit's role in bringing her unique child into being. How does Mary's response (verse 38) speak to your heart? Are you willing to surrender to the Holy Spirit's leading, even when that calls for trust that reaches beyond full intellectual understanding?

Prayer

Holy Spirit, Mary's mission was a one-of-a-kind event in history. Give me an openness to whatever more "ordinary" (yet vital) missions you call and direct me to live out for you. Amen.

Wednesday, July 19

Scripture: Acts 1:1-8

Theophilus, the first scroll I wrote concerned everything Jesus did and taught from the beginning, right up to the day when he was taken up into heaven. Before he was taken up, working in the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus instructed the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he showed them that he was alive with many convincing proofs. He appeared to them over a period of forty days, speaking to them about God's kingdom. While they were eating together, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for what the Father had promised. He said, "This is what you heard from me: John baptized with water, but in only a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." As a result, those who had gathered together asked Jesus, "Lord, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now?" Jesus replied, "It isn't for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has set by his own authority. Rather, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Observation

Before leaving earth, Jesus charged his followers to witness to him. But he didn't ask them to trust in their own courage or cleverness. He said they were to wait for the Holy Spirit's power to make them effective in carrying out their mission. Some have even suggested that instead of "Acts of the Apostles" we might better call Luke's second book something like "the Acts of the Holy Spirit (through the apostles)."

Application

Jesus “ordered” (not “requested”) that his followers “...wait for what the Father had promised... in only a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:4-5). Especially when there is a big job to do, most of us want to “get on with it,” not “wait.” (I know that’s hard for me sometimes.) Have you ever had to wait for God to clarify or empower some worthy activity? What spiritual risks does running on ahead of God pose for a Christ-follower?

Prayer

Jesus, I love your audacity, telling 120 people in a small Roman province to reach “to the end of the earth.” I love the Holy Spirit’s power that made that mission a reality. Give me your vision and power today. Amen.

Thursday, July 20

Scripture: Acts 2:4, 4:8-12

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

Then Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, answered, “Leaders of the people and elders, are we being examined today because something good was done for a sick person, a good deed that healed him? If so, then you and all the people of Israel need to know that this man stands healthy before you because of the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is the stone you builders rejected; he has become the cornerstone! Salvation can be found in no one else. Throughout the whole world, no other name has been given among humans through which we must be saved.”

Observation

At times, the Holy Spirit performed “signs and wonders” through the early Christians. (Luke used the phrase about 8 times in the book of Acts.) But the apostles never made healing, speaking in tongues or any other extraordinary happening an end in and of itself. When those things happened, they were vehicles the apostles used to turn people’s attention to Jesus’ power to save. (And in 2 Thessalonians 2:9 the apostle Paul warned that signs and wonders could also be used to deceive.)

Application

How many of today’s avenues of healing were unavailable to the apostles and the people around them? To what extent do you believe God worked through available mechanisms, then and now? Do you believe the same Holy Spirit who healed through the apostles later led Christians to establish hospitals, medical schools and other ways of restoring people to health?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you came - and you sent the Spirit - to offer salvation, not just to put on a show. Whether in an amazing event or in quiet everyday change, work through my life to build your kingdom in human hearts. Amen.

Friday, July 21

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:27-30; Ephesians 4:11-13; Romans 12:6-8

You are the body of Christ and parts of each other. In the church, God has appointed first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, the ability to help others, leadership skills, different kinds of tongues. All aren’t apostles, are they? All aren’t

prophets, are they? All aren't teachers, are they? All don't perform miracles, do they? All don't have gifts of healing, do they? All don't speak in different tongues, do they? All don't interpret, do they?

He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers. His purpose was to equip God's people for the work of serving and building up the body of Christ until we all reach the unity of faith and knowledge of God's Son. God's goal is for us to become mature adults—to be fully grown, measured by the standard of the fullness of Christ.

We have different gifts that are consistent with God's grace that has been given to us. If your gift is prophecy, you should prophesy in proportion to your faith. If your gift is service, devote yourself to serving. If your gift is teaching, devote yourself to teaching. If your gift is encouragement, devote yourself to encouraging. The one giving should do it with no strings attached. The leader should lead with passion. The one showing mercy should be cheerful.

Observation

The apostle Paul wrote the three passages you just read over two thousand years ago, yet they are timeless, applying to each follower of Jesus in 2023. As the body of Christ, each member works together to create the whole. If one person with one gift is missing, the entire body suffers. As the body works together, unity and power come into being. We do not acquire or use these gifts on our own strength, but only through the Holy Spirit at work within us.

Application

Are you clear about which of these gifts the Spirit has given you? If not, ask one or more people who know you well what gifts they see in you. You can also [click here](#) to access a short spiritual gifts inventory. Once you have a sense of what your gifts are, how are you using those gifts to serve and build up the body of Christ? (We have Messiah Church members who are Spiritual Gift Coaches and available to work one-on-one with you to discern how best to use your gifts. If you're interested, just reply to this email and I'll get you connected to one.)

Prayer

Lord Jesus, the Spirit has gifted me in unique ways so that the Kingdom might come to earth. Help me to recognize the joy and responsibility of my giftedness. Amen.

Saturday, July 22

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I didn't come preaching God's secrets to you like I was an expert in speech or wisdom. I had made up my mind not to think about anything while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and to preach him as crucified. I stood in front of you with weakness, fear, and a lot of shaking. My message and my preaching weren't presented with convincing wise words but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power. I did this so that your faith might not depend on the wisdom of people but on the power of God.

Observation

Corinth was a large, wealthy city infamous for its immorality (which took some doing in the Roman Empire!). Preaching Jesus there must have been scary. And preaching Jesus "as crucified" was even harder. Scholar N. T. Wright showed the difficulty for Paul: "Imagine finding yourself standing up to speak...and having nothing to say except some stammering words about a strange thing that happened a few years ago which you know sounds crazy but which you happen to think contains the secret to everything.... Crucifixion was regarded in the ancient

world as so horrible, so revolting, so degrading that you didn't mention it in polite society. Imagine someone at a fashionable dinner party going on loudly about how he'd seen rats eating the body of a dead dog in the street; that's the kind of impression you'd make by standing up in public and talking about someone being crucified.... But Paul believed, and the newfound faith and life of the Corinthian Christians bore this out, that this was the clue to the mystery of life." (Wright, N.T., *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians* (The New Testament for Everyone) (pp. 21-23). Westminster John Knox Press.)

Application

Paul was well educated (Acts 22:3). Paul knew the culture and ideas of the Greco-Roman cities he preached in well enough to quote from their writers (Acts 17:28, Titus 1:12). But he also knew that his message sounded ridiculous to many of them (Acts 17:32). So he didn't rely on glib slogans or catchy marketing, but on the power of the Holy Spirit—and it worked. In Corinth, of all places, he saw the Spirit produce a vibrant, growing community of Christ-followers. They had lots of growing and learning to do (just read 1 and 2 Corinthians if you doubt it), but he trusted the Spirit to stay at work in their hearts and lives all through that process (1 Corinthians 6:11, 19, 2 Corinthians 13:13). How has the Holy Spirit's power shaped your faith and growth in Christ? How have you learned to trust the Spirit's power in your own efforts to share that faith with others?

Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit! Do the wonderful, mysterious work of the kingdom through me, teaching me how to rely on your power to reach beyond anything I could do on my own. Amen.