

introduction

As we continue our church's sermon series on the person and work of the Holy Spirit, this week we are shifting our focus from how the Spirit works *in* us individually to how he works *through* us collectively. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul pulls back the curtain on one of the most powerful and tangible ways the Holy Spirit builds the church: by distributing unique spiritual gifts to every single believer. While the topic of spiritual gifts has often been a source of debate and division throughout church history, Paul's words remind us that the true aim of the Spirit's power is always unity, love, and the common good. Today, we want to look at the practical reality of what it means to be the body of Christ — a community where every single person is intentionally gifted, deeply needed, and completely dependent on one another to make Jesus known.



If our group was a team working together to survive on a deserted island, what specific skill or personality trait do you bring that would keep us alive? Which member of the group would you be most desperate to have with you?

read

1 Corinthians 12:1-7, 18-21, 27 (NIV)

¹ Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ² You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. ³ Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

¹⁸ But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!”

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

Take a few moments to reflect on the Scripture. Share some insights, questions, or points that strike you. Then read what follows.

context

First Corinthians 12 comes in a larger section of Paul’s letter (chapters 8–14) where he addresses issues related to the gathered worship and community life of the Corinthian church. The Corinthians were struggling with division, pride, and confusion about what true spirituality looked like. In particular, some believers were elevating more dramatic spiritual experiences and gifts — especially tongues — as signs of greater spiritual importance. Rather than simply giving abstract teaching about spiritual gifts, Paul writes to correct their misunderstandings and reorient the church around unity, love, and the glory of Jesus. His teaching in chapters 12–14 emphasizes that the Holy Spirit gives a diversity of gifts not for personal status, but for the strengthening of the whole church. This is why chapter 13, the famous chapter on love, sits directly in the middle of Paul’s discussion of spiritual gifts: gifts without love fail to accomplish their true purpose.

the source and purpose of spiritual gifts

The primary issue in Corinth was that spiritual gifts were being treated as badges of personal merit, creating division rather than community. The Corinthians were using their “gifts” as ways to boast about their spiritual “success” and to belittle other expressions of the Spirit that seemed to be less spectacular. Paul confronts this directly by grounding the diversity of gifts within the perfect unity of the triune God, highlighting “different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit... different kinds of service, but the same Lord [Jesus]... different kinds of working, but ... the same God [the Father]” (vv. 4–6). By anchoring human diversity in divine unity, Paul shows that variety is intentional, beautiful, and arising from one and the same source. And because these abilities are explicitly gifts, freely received and not earned, the only proper human response is humble gratitude rather than proud boasting.

Crucially, Paul defines the true aim of any spiritual manifestation in verse 7: "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." A spiritual gift is inherently outward-facing; it is a Spirit-empowered ability meant to make Jesus known and to strengthen the local church. The moment a gift is used for personal indulgence or self-aggrandizement, it misses its true aim. True spirituality is never measured by how spectacular a gift appears, but by how selflessly it serves and profits the collective body.

Furthermore, Paul establishes that every Christian is actively gifted by the Spirit. This gifting is not a fixed, static trophy to be hidden away, but a dynamic empowerment meant for a specific local church, in a specific community, at a particular moment in history. No believer is left out, meaning every single member has a royal and holy assignment to carry out. When we view spiritual gifts through this lens, it changes how we view ourselves and others: every person in the seats on Sunday is uniquely equipped to help the community flourish.

"One implication, then, is that every member of the community is to be respected as one who has been deemed worthy of a particular assignment in the service of the Lord. Another is that in exercising one's gift one is performing a royal and holy service."

—Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner

discuss

- 1. Paul explicitly connects the Holy Spirit's work with the confession "Jesus is Lord" (v. 3). How does keeping the focus on Jesus protect a church from the pride and comparison that the Corinthians fell into?**
- 2. Verse 7 says gifts are given for the "common good" (the profit of all). What are some practical ways a person might accidentally use a spiritual gift for self-indulgence or personal pride rather than the community's benefit?**
- 3. If every believer has been uniquely empowered by the Spirit for their specific local church context, how does that change the way you view your**

regular presence and participation in this community group and our larger church?

needy and needed

To illustrate the beautiful tension between radical unity and deep diversity, Paul introduces his profound analogy of the human body. He demonstrates the foolishness of the Corinthian elitism by showing how absurd it would be if body parts refused to cooperate or envied one another: "If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be?" (v. 17). A healthy body cannot be a single, giant, uniform organ; it requires highly specialized, interdependent differences to survive. In the same way, God has intentionally designed the church so that no one person possesses everything needed for the church to flourish. Diversity is not a problem to overcome; it is part of God's wise design for his people.

This body dynamic confronts both insecurity and comparison and creates a culture where every Christian is simultaneously **needy** and **needed**. We are *needed* because each of us brings a distinct capacity, shaped by the Spirit, without which the local body cannot fully function or complete its mission. Some believers in Corinth may have felt less important because their gifts seemed less visible or dramatic. Paul responds by insisting that every member belongs and is necessary. Even if the foot may not feel itself to be as essential as the hand, the body cannot function as it ought to without it. Some Christians struggle with the same temptation today, especially when they see a polished Sunday service and think, "*They have everything covered; they don't need me.*" But the body imagery teaches us that every believer has a meaningful role in the life and mission of the church. The healthy functioning of our church requires your specific background, gifts, and experiences — and even the unique ways you navigate brokenness. When members hold back from serving, the entire body suffers from a missing part.

At the same time, we are *needy* because no single individual possesses all the gifts of the Spirit; we are structurally incomplete on our own and deeply require the grace, perspectives, and unique giftings of our brothers and sisters to mature. This challenges our sense of self-sufficiency. We cannot let an illusion of self-sufficiency cause us to dismiss others, because God intended for Christians to be dependent on one another. The church is healthiest when people both give and receive care, encouragement, wisdom, service, prayer, and correction. Paul's vision is a radically interdependent community shaped by humility and love.

“Verses 15-20 underline what is demonstrable with respect to a human body: all the parts serve an important function, regardless of any claims to the contrary. Without the diversity that comes from specialization of function, one no longer has an organism, merely one giant organ, unable to do anything.”

—Craig Blomberg

discuss

4. Why do Christians often compare their gifts or roles with others?
5. Think about the phrase "every Christian is both needy and needed." Which side of that reality is harder for you to personally embrace or admit? Why?
6. How does Paul's body analogy confront the temptation to look at a healthy, well-organized church and think, "*They don't really need my help or my involvement*"? And how does it reshape the way we think about church membership?
7. How can our group and our church better help people discover and use their gifts?

upcoming

- Wednesday, May 20 | **The Open Door Appreciation Dinner, 6:30-9:15 pm**
If you have the evening free, come join us in extending a smile, an open heart or just a "Hi, glad you're here tonight!!" to participants of The Open Door ministry. It's a great group service opportunity (Spanish skills not needed).
redeemerws.com/opendoorappreciation