

“You've Got Talent”

Portions contributed by [Gordon Pike](#).

Psalm 104:24-35

1 Corinthian 12:1-13

I am going to ask you all this once again, on that first Pentecost Sunday, were each disciple given the same gift, the same talent? Or, were each given a different gift? Because, didn't they all speak in tongues? But in Acts, we read a bit about each disciple having slightly varying gifts.

You know, some people just seem to be born with talent, don't they? Take my friend Dave for instance. Dave was born with natural athleticism. There was not a sport that he couldn't play, and play very well. We were always one step behind Dave in any sport our school offered. He was the super star football player, the most talented basketball player, and he was the fastest person on the track team.

Now, I had other friends who were very talented in other positions on those teams as well...which is important, because one superstar athlete cannot play every position. I mean, some, it seemed like they had radar. They had a sixth sense about where the other players were and would be without even looking, or it was like others of them had rubber arms or glue on their fingers...it was absolutely amazing to watch them play ball together.

I had a couple of friends who, I am sure, could have been tested and certified as geniuses...it was like they never took a book home...never studied for a test. But yet, they maxed out their tests...probably including their SAT and ACT, and I am sure they got wooed by many colleges...full scholarship, free dorm room, free books...the works.

I am pretty sure that over the years I've known, or met, many talented people. I've probably worked alongside a Pulitzer-prize winning photographer, or a Pulitzer-prize winning political cartoonist.

I've known writers and artists...musicians who can hear a song once and play it, or who can play just about any instrument they pick up.

As for me...well...let's just say that I wasn't born with any particular talent. I mean, I'm not stupid...but I'm not even close to being a genius. I've had to earn my grades the regular way...through hard work and lots of studying.

I'm not a wimp...but I'm not a super athlete either. I've run and made my way to the finish line of a few, 5k's, 10k's, and a half-marathon. I love riding my bike but I'm pretty sure I won't be invited to compete in the "Tour de France", at least not in my lifetime.

If I have a "talent," I guess you could say I'm a "Jack of all trades." I may not be the best in anything, but I have the ability to blend in and fill in or do any job that needs to be done. I guess you could describe me as an old "milk horse."

You know, rain, sleet, blistering heat, I'm gonna pull my cart, whatever it takes, and finish my route...reach my goal. I may not be the fastest or the strongest but you point me in the right direction and I'll get there...eventually.

Now, I'm not the greatest preacher either...but I'm pretty sure that I am not the worse. I'm not a brilliant administrator...but I'm not the worse one born. I doubt very much that I'll ever pastor a mega-church. But then again, when it comes to God, you never know, right?

Maybe I'll be a Jeff Reese or a Ken Bremer. Anyone ever hear of them? I would consider it an honor to follow in their footsteps...one of a million unknown, unsung pastors who gave their lives to serving God, to be used as an instrument of God to serve His people.

I may not be one of the great pastors, but when it comes to God, you'd be hard-pressed to find one who loves Him more.

When it comes to loving you, His children, like the proverbial milk horse, I'll do all that I can, with all that I have, for as long as I can to serve you, God's people...God's children.

Maybe in the eyes of the world, or in history, I'm a nobody. I certainly won't be one of the handful of privileged few whose name will be immortalized...like William Shakespeare. But in the eyes of the Creator...I'm somebody! The world may not remember me but the One who made me does...and always will.

And the One who formed you, who created you, who picked your eye color, your hair color, your gender, your face, your height, who knows the number of your days, how long you will live down to the very second, who gave you whatever talents and abilities that you have, whatever your hopes and dreams, your passions, your desires...to Him you are a somebody...and will always be.

Some of you are like my wife, Amy...good at just about everything you set your mind to. Others are like me...you have to earn everything through sweat and hard work. Some of you are book smart...good at math or engineering. Some of you are more artistic and abstract.

Some of you are street smart or have a lot of common sense. Some of you are physically strong, agile. Others of you are persistent, or mentally, or emotionally, or spiritually, powerful. Some of you are graceful...and others, well, others of you are like me...milk horses. Some of you are physically beautiful...while others [point to my face]...well, let's just say that we are beautiful inside.

Despite what labels or judgment the world may put on us, in the eyes of God, we are each hand-crafted...lovingly and carefully molded and created...a one-of-a-kind. To God, to Him who made you, you are a somebody, and always will be. And even if I'm forgotten...just a blip on the screen...I have a role to play...a unique part to play in history, in God's plans.

Again, I may not be the best pastor to ever serve this church, but I am the pastor of this church for a reason. I am one of many pastors that God has used or will use to shape and mold this church, to teach and guide this church as it grows and changes and plays its unique part in God's plans and purposes.

The exact same thing applies to all church members, as we are all part of the body of Christ. We all have different talents, different spiritual gifts...and combined, our talents and gifts make this church unique and God has brought each of you here, with your God-given talents and gifts, because He has a specific purpose or plan for this little church...and that purpose or plan, is part of God's overall plan for all of His creation.

Mega-churches are mega-churches because God has a purpose and a need for mega-churches. They have a huge pool of talent and gifts and resources which allow them to do what no church this size could possibly do.

While we may not be a mega-church...now...nor ever...only God knows...we have our God-given gifts and talents and our resources which are unique to us and specifically tailored to God's plans and purposes.

The same goes for storefront churches and home churches...and for this time in our lives...online churches. We all, as individuals and as a church, have our part or role to play.

A well-known conductor was holding a rehearsal one night. It was a full rehearsal with the whole orchestra and a hundred-voice choir. As they rehearsed, all the instruments blended and molded together. The voices weaved in and out with the music. The music was punctuated by the blare of horns and the crashing of cymbals.

Sitting in the back of the orchestra, the lonely piccolo player thought to herself: "With all these loud instruments, it doesn't matter what I do."

So she stopped playing. Suddenly the conductor stopped the music and looked right at the piccolo player and said: “It doesn’t sound right without you. If you don’t play, the concert is off...we need you.”

This is what was going on at Paul’s beloved church in Corinth. It was a church a touch smaller than ours—about 40 or 50 people. Like us, mixed socially, economically, and culturally. Being a fairly new church, it had its share of problems and issues. There were arguments, divisions, lawsuits, and immorality. There was confusion about marriage, food sacrificed to idols, worship, the Lord’s Supper, the resurrection...and spiritual gifts.

Some people thought that their “spiritual” gifts were more important than the gifts that other people had. I mean, before we judge, let’s face it, at first glance it’s easy to fall into the belief that the ability to perform miracles or heal the sick are pretty important and impressive gifts to have...and it might be easy to assume that they were more important to the work of the Lord than, say, the ability to give wise advice, speak in foreign languages, or teach.

So it’s easy to see how those who had certain abilities, or those who have those gifts, might consider themselves, well, more blessed or favored by God. And this confusion, or misunderstanding, was creating a lot tension and division within the church.

So, in this section of his letter to the church, Paul comes up with five directives that he hopes will clear up their confusion about spiritual gifts. And I hope it will clear up any confusion or misunderstandings we may still have...today.

The first thing that Paul does...is he tries to explain, or inform, the Corinthian congregation about spiritual gifts. **“Now, brothers [and sisters],”** Paul starts out in verse 1, **“I want to write about the special abilities that the Holy Spirit gives each of you., for I do not want any misunderstanding about them.”**

Now, I've been using the terms **"talent"** and **"gift"** almost interchangeably this morning, and that's because I believe they are the same...with one exception.

You see, **"Talent"** is something that you are born with. Like my friend who is the complete athlete, or my friends who were certified geniuses. These weren't abilities that they set out to acquire, or that they had to work for. They were born with them...which means that they were a **"gift"**...a gift given to them before they were even born.

Given to them by Whom? Well...By God! Just as our spiritual gifts, as we shall see, are what? **"God given."**

What do you picture when I use the word **"gift"**? You probably picture something like this [show a wrapped gift as a prop...offer to the camera]?

How many of you reached for the gift? Someone...me...someone outside of yourself, just offered you something...and I believe that is what we see, or picture, when we hear the term "spiritual gift." God...or the Holy Spirit...existing outside of ourselves, reaching out and giving something...a gift...and putting that **"gift"** in us. But I propose another way of looking at it. I think a better way of looking at it is the **"fruit"** of the Spirit.

I believe we all have one **"spiritual gift"** in common. Do you know what it is? It's the Holy Spirit itself. Before Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed: **"My prayer for all of them"**...meaning us...**"is that they will be of one heart and mind, just as You and I are, Father – that just as You are in me and I am in You, so they will be with us"**... just as Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. So long as we abide in Jesus and He in us, we will bear much spiritual fruit.

I don't think of the Holy Spirit as something outside of me, but as the very Spirit or Presence of God living in me. When I became a Christian, I accepted the gift of God's grace and salvation, and I also invited the Holy Spirit, the very Spirit and Presence of God, to come dwell within me, and to live in my heart.

And that Spirit, that Presence of God, has all of the gifts of the Spirit because it is the Spirit...the same Spirit in all of us. The Spirit that gives you the gift of healing is the same Spirit that gives me the gift of teaching or preaching.

The Spirit has all the gifts: the gift of wisdom, the gift of studying and teaching, the gift of special faith, the power to heal the sick, to prophesy and preach, to know whether evil spirits or false prophets are speaking, to speak in any language, and the ability to hear and to understand other languages.

As Paul points out: **“Now God gives us many kinds of special abilities, but it is the same Holy Spirit who is the source of them all (v.4)...It is the same and only Holy Spirit who gives all these gifts and powers, deciding which each one of us should have” (v. 11).**

I believe that we have all the gifts when we have the Holy Spirit living in us...that different gifts come to the fore front, and are manifested at different times in our life, as we need them to fulfill God's purposes and plans.

Well how does that work? Let's take a look at Paul's second directive. He calls us to open ourselves and be led by the Spirit, right? When it comes to the topic of spiritual gifts, our focus should be on the Giver and not on the gifts themselves. In verses 2 and 3, the Apostle Paul reminds us that we were led astray by our emotions and false doctrines.

Now that we are believers, now that we have given our lives to Christ and have invited His Holy Spirit to come and dwell in us, the Holy Spirit empowers and energizes us for ministry.

Just as no one can confess the lordship of Christ apart from the Spirit's leading, so, too, it is impossible to serve God or be a part of God's plan without being led by the Spirit.

In Galatians 5:25, Paul tells us: **“Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep step with the Spirit.”** Well, Jesus Himself described the Holy Spirit as a wind blowing through surrendered lives ... key word: **“surrender.”** **“The wind blows wherever it pleases,”** Jesus explained, **“you hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the ... SPIRIT”** (John 3:8).

If I have the Holy Spirit in me and the Holy Spirit has all the gifts of the Spirit...then it is the Holy Spirit, it is God's Presence living in me, that will determine which gifts or abilities I will need when I need them. And in order for that to happen, I must do two things: (1) be open to the Spirit...and (2) be obedient.

I have not had this happen to me yet, but I read a story that a pastor shared about an experience he had, which gives us an idea of how this works. This is what this pastor said; “I was once called to the neonatal intensive care unit to pray for a newborn that wasn't expected to live more than a few hours. When I got there, the poor thing was still, in an incubator, hooked up to a bunch of machines, and her parents were crying and trying to console one another. I started to pray. I prayed for the life of that little child and for her parents who were praying a few feet away as I was praying, I reached into the incubator and held the newborn's foot. All of a sudden alarms went off and the medical staff appeared out of nowhere demanding to know what I was doing there. I thought I was in trouble but they were hopeful and excited. According to the monitors, the child was responding and making a turnaround...and that baby went home a week later.”

Did that pastor have the gift of healing? Yes...but so do all of us. Does that mean we can heal everyone every time that we pray or lay hands on them? No! Our prayers may have healed some people...we don't know.

But for that one time, that pastor was given a gift. He was given the privilege to be the one that the Holy Spirit, the Presence of God, used to heal a little newborn baby. And he...nor we, know why.

Will it ever happen for me? I don't know. But I'm open to the possibility, and I am, or I try very hard to be, open to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Maybe it will be one of you who lays hands on me one day...and the Holy Spirit, working in you and through you will heal me.

I have some persistent gifts...like preaching and teaching. You have persistent gifts, like evangelism or prophecy. But I also believe that God can use His Holy Spirit to do some crazy, amazing things with all of us and through all of us, so long as we are open to the Spirit and stay out of its way.

Whenever I say "I can't," well, I block the power of the Holy Spirit. But as long as I pray "Thy will be done", I open myself to being used by God for His purposes...and His plans.

Boy...how many times have I stepped out in faith and when it was all said and done, breathlessly proclaimed: "I have no idea how I did that or where that came from." But then I realize where it did come from...it came from the Holy Spirit living inside me.

It sounds easy, but in actual practice, staying out of the Spirit's way can be tough. Because our flesh tends to get in the way...our pride wants us to be the best, so it's not interested in spiritual gifts like discernment or hospitality. Our fear tells us we can't do it, so we shy away from healing or prophesy or evangelism. Our laziness tells us that it sounds like a lot of work with no guarantee of success.

Like Paul says, we have to remember who's living in us, Who's presence dwells within us. "**The Holy Spirit**"—who displays God's power through each of us...not because we're special, but because God needs us to help the entire church or body of Christ.

He gives us what we need, when we need it, to accomplish His purposes and His plans. But it doesn't go away or disappear because the Holy Spirit in us never goes away, nor disappears. The gift merely recedes until God needs it again.

When we understand that all our gifts come from the same Source...that it is God who decides which gifts and when...then I have no business lording my spiritual gifts over anyone. Instead of the diversity of our gifts being a source of tension, they can and should, be a source of celebration. We should encourage and appreciate each other's gifts.

Paul's third directive is to understand that our diversity is part of God's divine plan. In verses 4-6, Paul explains: **“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit...there are different kinds of service, but the same Lord...there are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.”**

Look at how totally God is involved in the giving, or use of our gifts. The Spirit...the Lord, Jesus...and God, the Father...these verses help us to see how the entire godhead is involved in the giving of gifts and how God expects us to use those gifts. Paul uses the body in verses 12-26 to explain how our diversity is meant to be a source of strength and unity and not a source of conflict and tension.

The brain is a pretty important organ but without the eyes and the ears to gather information, without a mouth to communicate its thoughts, it's pretty much a useless lump of tissue. Without hands and feet, the brain would starve to death. By the same token, without the brain, the eyes and ears and the body would be helpless.

Even the parts that need to be covered up...such a great way to put it...are important to the life and survival of the body. What would happen if we couldn't eliminate waste or reproduce? The body would die and its genetic legacy with it.

Philippians 2:13 reminds us: **“For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.”**

Because God is at work within us, we can accomplish His purposes. The Corinthians had elevated what they believe to be the more spectacular gifts and were giving more attention to the spiritual stars in the church and failing to see or understand the importance of ALL the gifts and, more importantly, forgetting the Source of all their gifts.

Paul challenged them, and he is challenging us today, to incorporate diversity into our understanding of Spiritual gifts and how God uses that diversity to accomplish His purposes and plans. We have all been gifted differently so we act differently and we serve differently.

Let me give you an example. As United Methodist, we have many beautiful luncheons and/or potlucks. Supposed someone dropped a plate of food on the floor. Well, the person with the gift of prophesy, might have pointed out that that is what happens when you are not careful.

The person with the gift of service would have helped you clean it up. The person with the gift of teaching would have explained that the reason you dropped the plate was that it was too heavy on one side. The person with the gift of exhortation would have told you to let someone else carry it for you the next time. The person with the gift of giving would have given you their plate. The person with the gift of mercy would have reassured you that it could have happened to anyone. And the person with the gift of administration would have immediately organized a cleanup team.

I want you to think about this: Our churches have every gift that is needed in order to function as Biblical communities. In the first chapter of this letter, verse 7, Paul says, **“Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.”**

This verse was written to a church at Corinth, but it applies to us today. This church has just the right amount of gifts, and it makes me wonder, what need is God going to meet by giving you the gifts that He has given you...when He put you in this church. I sure hope that you find that as exciting as I do.

Paul's fourth directive is to get out of the pew and start using your gifts...and with our current situation, I believe that it may also be God's...or better yet, the Holy Spirits, to inspire you to get up out of those pews, or wherever it is that you are currently setting in, and get to work.

Everything we've discussed today is important, but knowing and understanding our spiritual gifts is not enough. Our gifts were given to us by God, not to be admired or put on a shelf like some trophy, but to be used!

Verses 12-30 describe how the church is like a human body with each part playing a critical role in the functioning of the body. It is the same with the body of Christ. You have been given a gift, or gifts, and a key role to play in the church.

Spiritual gifts are given, to make plain the work of the Holy Spirit, in our lives. I believe that everyone who is a born again believer has been given the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, and that everyone who has invited the Holy Spirit into their hearts has at least one spiritual gift for the common good or benefit of God's plans and purposes for this church and for the body of Christ.

The gifts we have, were given, so that they may be used in service to God's purposes and plans...plans which include this church. Until each of us implements our gifts, this church will not mature in faith. If you hoard your gifts and don't use them, the entire body is handicapped.

The last directive Paul gives us, it is to serve with love. Having spiritual gifts does not necessarily make you spiritual. What Paul is trying to tell the church at Corinth is that it is possible for a church to have all the gifts that are needed, and for every believer to know what their gifts are, and still miss the mark.

1st Corinthians 13 is by far the best explanation of love ever written. But we do this great chapter a disservice when we only read it at weddings.

I mean, look at where it comes in Paul's letter...between Chapter 12, which is about spiritual gifts, and Chapter 14, which is about spiritual gifts. Coincidence? I don't think so! What good is service, says Paul, if it is divorced from love?

I believe that ignorance related to our spiritual gifts is not our basic problem. More basic is the problem of not desiring to strengthen other people's faith by being patient and kind, by refusing to boast of our gifts and our service, by not being easily angered, and by keeping no record of wrongs. Human nature is more prone to tear down than it is to build up. We'd rather kick people than labor in love with them and for them.

According to verse 7 of Chapter 13, a servant who loves **“always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres.”**

In other words, as we focus on living out the Great Commandment by intensifying our love for God and for others, we will want to look for ways of using our spiritual assets to serve others. Spiritual gifts, no matter how exciting or wonderful...they are pretty useless if they are not unleashed in love!

So, quickly, let me summarize the five directives that will help us recognize and put our spiritual gifts to work:

1. Be informed about spiritual gifts; as we at some point in time may have the opportunity to use them all.

2. Be influenced by the Holy Spirit; be open to the Holy Spirit's nudges.
3. Understand and appreciate that the diversity of our gifts is part of God's plan
4. Implement your gifts in service; not in service to me, not in service to the church, but in service to God and his plan.
5. Serve out of love

Like the piccolo player, that I mentioned earlier, you are needed in this church! Nobody is a nobody in the body of Christ. No one can do everything...but remember that everybody can do something. **Amen!!!**