

Themes for a Growing Church

“Spiritual Gifts “

1 Cor 12: 1-11, 28-31

As I mentioned a moment ago, I'm going to be preaching, six final sermons, my final sermon. So you never know. I may come back in 2028, but, more or less my final sermons on themes that I think will help a church be healthy looking into the future.

And the first of these is on spiritual gifts, which the Lord gives the church, so that everyone participates in the growth of the church. That is to say, we aren't just looking for a next lead pastor or pastors or elders or well known teachers, but everyone here has gifts given by God to build up the church. So that's our theme.

I'm going to read to you from I Corinthians, chapter 12, verses 1 to 11. The themes are in your little handout. All spiritual gifts start with a confession that Jesus is Lord. That's number one. And then we see a diversity of gifts that the Lord gives, because God Himself is one. He builds one church, but also leads a diverse world, including diverse gifts. And we all use them for the common good. And we can even seek we can ask for more gifts that we have. We can seek higher gifts. That's what the Apostle has to say. Listen to God's word.

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to mute idols. However, you were led. 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. Now there are a variety of gifts but the same spirit. There are varieties of service but the same Lord. There are varieties of activities or work things, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the spirit for the common good, for to one is given through the spirit, the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same spirit, to another by the same spirit, faith to another, gifts of healing by the one spirit, to another, the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another, the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues. To another, the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same spirit, who apportioned to each one individually as he wills.

Let's pray for a moment.

Lord, we pray that you would give us ears to hear all that you by your spirit are saying to us. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.

There is an elder in, sister church of ours, a church named Mike. That's his actual name. He seems to have the gift of faith. And the gift of faith manifests itself in powerful prayers. I mean

by that that Mike prays for himself and his family. Mike and I pray about things together. But when there's a real need in a church I'm trying to serve, I call Mike up.

I call him up because if I ask him to pray for something, he's going to pray hard until I ask him to stop. He's going to pray and pray and pray and not only so, but also I ask him to pray for problems that seem intractable and insoluble in time and again within 24 hours or 48 hours, the problem just melts away and is solved.

When Mike prays, I tell him, Mike, you know I don't call on you often, but when I call on you. Not that all of Mike's prayers are answered in the affirmative, but he prays. We kind of got started when I was preaching in his church for almost two years, as I've been here as between pastors, and he said to me one day, Dan, would you like me to pray with you before the service?

As I said, of course, by all means. He said, okay, tell me what passage you're going to preach from so I can prepare. And we would pray. And almost every time he prayed over the passage that I was going to preach on, I ended up taking notes that enhanced my sermon, a question he asked in the prayer, Lord, reveal this mystery or some application he'd gotten out of the passage that I had seen.

Not at all. Or dimly. There's a man who believes, because he has to get the faith, that his prayers make a difference in the world, and they do. Now that's an illustration of a spiritual gift, one we might not readily recognize. First Corinthians is a letter we studied maybe ten months ago at night. The first 6 or 7 chapters.

And you may remember, if you were there at night, that asks a lot of questions. And Paul answers them one by one. And when Paul talks about spiritual gifts in chapters 12, 13 and 14, he actually harks back to some themes from chapters 1 to 4, specifically the theme of pride and vanity in the church, because in that church, chapters 1 to 4 explain when people like to have their favorite hero.

Some love. Paul thought he was the best. Others it was Apollos, a man of great oratory skill. For others, it was Peter, foundational to the church, one of the inner three. And they didn't just like these men, they boasted in them. And Paul says to them, you should boast in the Lord. Your boasting is not good. And when he describes spiritual gifts in chapters 12, 13, and 14, you might know that he lists them.

And chapter 12-14 he tells us how to use them in the middle. He says, I want to show you really how to use them, and that's the love chapter. You love one another were the gifts I'm describing in chapters 12 and 14. You love each other by exercising your gifts given by the spirit for each other. And in the middle of that chapter he says, love does not boast.

Don't boast about your heroes. Don't boast about your gifts. Use your gifts to serve one another. Now it's a word they needed. I think it's a word we need. I will tell you personally, when I was a new Christian, I heard about spiritual gifts. I thought, oh, this is awesome. I'm going to find out what gift I have.

And there was a bit of egotism in it. And there's a lot of egotism in many of the ways we think about our gifts. I have the gift of in those days, some of the Corinthians were very enamored with the spectacular gifts. The gifts of miracles are speaking in tongues. What a thing to do, Paul said, seek the higher gifts.

Use your gifts to build the church, not to give yourself credit. Now the Apostle Paul describes gifts in many ways. We use the phrase spiritual gifts, spiritual gifts over and over again. But actually, Paul never quite did. Our translation to say so. He never actually uses those two words together. He talks about spiritual things, spiritual people, manifestations of the spirit, gifts, gracious gifts, graces, ministries, services.

He uses a lot of terms to make it clear that the big idea is the spirit gives them, and we use them for each other. The spirit graciously grants capacities that minister his manifold grace. So we think less about my gifts and much more about serving the church as God has enabled us to do so. Now, a gift does usually start with a talent, and somebody once defined a talent as the ability to us acquire skills quickly.

That is to say, you just notice that somebody is good at something. But the gift is not simply talent. A gift is a talent given by God to present an advance God's grace in God's church among his people. Let me put it this way. There are people who can speak very well, but they draw attention to themselves instead of God.

There are people who sing very well, and in some churches, not ours, not this church. In some churches they'll put anybody up in front. Believer, unbeliever, just sing very well and you'll say the notes are wonderful, but there's a way of singing to make sure the glory goes to God, and there's a way of singing that draws attention to oneself.

We give glory to God. Another way to look at it is to say, there are many things in life that have a triple ownership. So there have been some babies born in this church family this month and this week. And if you think about little children, there are three owners of a little child, right? When a mother and father give birth, we say, that's my baby, the Lord.

This is my son, my daughter. I own my child in a way, of course, don't push that too hard, especially when they're 13 years old, because they're going to start saying things like, look, I've got my own life, I own my own life. The child owns their own life and that child is out in the wider world.

And all the people who bump into that child have some ownership. And of course, the child is also God's. So a child has a triple ownership. Our funds have a triple ownership as well. There's a story Jesus told a Luke chapter 12 about a farmer who was so wealthy, blessed by God with enormous crops or so abundant that he didn't have anywhere to store his goods, and he came up with a grandiose plan.

I'm going to tear my barns apart. I'm going to use what I've taken to pieces and reassemble it with additional materials. And there I'm going to store all my grain and all my goods, and I will eat and drink and be merry. Now, if you know a little bit of philosophy, you know how that line ends, don't you?

Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we will die. And Jesus tells a little theological joke he's going to eat, drink, and be merry. And Jesus says, yeah, tomorrow you're going to die. And when you die in the parable, you're going to appear before God, who gave you all of that as a loan. So let's see who owns the money.

Well, on the way you do, who owns the crops? The farmer owns it. But God bequeathed it to the farmer and the farmer is accountable to use as wealth, as we all are for God. And also one of the problems of that farmer is he thought about consuming it all himself and didn't give any thought to the needs, the poverty that was so widespread in the ancient world.

To whom does your wealth belong? It belongs to you and to God and to your neighbors. Spiritual gifts are pretty much the same. If you have the kind of teaching, it's your gift. If you have the gift of faith, it's your gift, no doubt about it. But it's also God's gift. He bequeathed it to you. He bestowed upon you, and it belongs to the church.

It belongs to the world. Triple ownership seen in the Bible. Now, Paul is very interested in the idea that we will use our spiritual gifts for others and not for ourselves, for the common good, to edify the body of Christ. And he does it in a way that's a little bit subtle, and you might not see if you don't read the whole book of First Corinthians.

And it's his interest in what's spiritual in in chapter one, two, three and four. Those people who are praising Paul or Paul's or Peter, think they're spiritual. If they follow the best hero, if they have the man. But Paul says those who are spiritual need to be corrected spiritual if they think true spirituality is following, following Peter or Paul or Apollos with all this beautiful rhetoric, he says, here's what's really spiritual.

In chapter two, he says it is spiritual to receive God's teaching and to obtain the mind of Christ by yielding your mind to God. That spiritual. It is unspiritual. He says in chapter three, to quarrel about your favorite Christian leader. In chapter ten he says it is spiritual to be nourished by Christ and to go forward in his strength.

In chapter 14, he says it's spiritual to recognize. Sounds a little bit self-promoting, I suppose, but Paul was an apostle. He said, those are spiritual. Recognize the authority I have over this church. That's what it means to be spiritual. The question the Corinthians were asked, we're asking was who's spiritual? And they were answering those who have spectacular gifts.

And Paul says, no, that's unspiritual, is unspiritual. To boast in what you have. It is spiritual to receive from the spirit and then to give to the church for the common good, to the glory of God. Now in chapter 12, Paul names some representative gifts, 11 of them actually, in chapter 13 he says, here's how you use them.

In chapter 14, he says, spiritual people use spirit given capacities for the confession of Christ as Lord. Now I want you to look. That's an overview. If we can slow it down, I'll look at a few verses. I'm going to say we already covered verse one, and now we're to look at verse two in verse two, Paul says, you know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to mute idols.

However you were led. It could be translated like this. However you were led, you were led astray. Wherever you were led by mute idols, they were leading you into trouble. Now, one of the themes of the Bible is that the Lord is the one who speaks, and the false gods of this world do not speak. You pray to them.

They don't talk back the gods like the bell gods. Remember? Elijah called out to them, come on, once you're one of your gods, going to answer, come on! They cut themselves. They gassed themselves trying to get the attention of their gods. They don't exist. The reason why they don't answer is because they don't have mouths. They can't speak.

And so if you follow a mute god, a non God, you're following a religion that was not created by a deity, but a religion was made by man. And wherever people lead you, they will lead you astray. In Paul's day, as he wrote, one of the main religions was hedonism eat, drink and be merry, but tomorrow you're going to die.

Then there were two sort of protests against that stoicism, and Epicureanism said, you know, don't live for pleasure. It's there's just not enough pleasure in the world to live for pleasure, modify your disappointments and enjoy modest pleasures. And that'll be a better approach. That was a religion. And then some people followed a religion called myth realism, which was all about experience.

Go into a cave, don't eat food for two days. have rituals, have blood poured on yourself, have dirt poured on yourself. Go silent and what a thrill it will be. And many people were following that religion. If you wanted to follow the traditional religions of Greco-Roman polytheism, Zeus and so forth. One person said there were 265 main deities.

Each had their own rules, each had their own benefits, each had their own rituals, and whatever their rules and benefits were, however you were led, you were led astray because the Lord is the only true God. Now in verse three, Paul says, here's the essence of religiosity or spirituality. That is true, and that is the confession that Jesus is Lord.

Here's what he says in verse three. I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says Jesus is accursed. And by contrast, no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. Now, we don't know who it was that was saying Jesus is cursed. Maybe it was pagans who'd seen Christianity rising a little bit and were concerned about it.

Didn't like this frightening new religion. Maybe it was Jews who remembered that passage in the Old Testament that says anyone who is hung on a tree is accursed, so they said, how can you worship Jesus? He's cursed. No one who says that is spiritual. The one who's spiritual is moved by the spirit to confess Jesus is Lord. Now those words are familiar.

You might remember Thomas after the resurrection of Jesus met Jesus the Lord risen and said to him, my Lord and my God, you are Lord, and my Lord. You are God and my God. You are my Savior, my deliverer, my protector. You are my God. And no one testifies to Christ in that way unless His Spirit is at work.

Because to testify to Christ as Savior and Lord is to say, I'm not my own Lord, which runs against ordinary human nature. We have our own ways. We have our plans for life. And only when people despair on many occasions do they ever say this isn't working. I'm going to try Jesus, but don't say it as a lark, they said.

They said they really mean it when they say it, and they come to faith in Christ. Now. All spiritual gifts, true spiritual gifts, then, are Christ centered, and they're for the good of the church. To revisit the question of people looking at the gifts for themselves, I'm going to create a man who doesn't exist. If I've never met a man with this name.

If you're a visitor today and you have this name, I apologize. His name is Charles Arrow. And Charles Arrow has four gifts. Gift number one is public teaching. He's good at it. People like to listen. He's also good at speaking to groups of five, six, seven, eight people. Little discipleship. People like that too. And he takes his gifts of teaching, and he's very patient.

He's a good listener. And he will also encourage people. That's another spiritual gift and counsel people shares for gifts. And Charles could think, I've got four gifts. I gotta find a church that allows me to use all of my gifts. I've got to find a church, and if the church I'm in right now doesn't let me do that, I'm going to go to a church that will let me use my gifts.

Or Charles could say God has given me certain gifts. How can I deploy my gifts for the good of my church, God's church, the Church of Christ? That's what Paul's saying. It's God centered,

Christ centered, spirit centered. Now the gifts are diverse. And if you want to think, which we do need to do about your gifts, our gifts, the gifts we have together, the biggest idea that Paul says to us in the second half of the passage is that God, who is one and Triune, one, God, three persons, father, son, Holy Spirit, one God, one character, one essence.

But God does different things within the Trinity. The father plans and ordains redemption and sends Jesus Christ to the world. Jesus came. The father did not die on the cross. The son lived, died, rose as an atonement for sin. Our life is his and the Holy Spirit applies the work of Christ. He testifies to Christ. There is one God and there's diversity within the Godhead.

So in this world there is oneness and diversity everywhere. If you like to study the sciences, which I do, one thing that even totally secular scientists say is it's amazing that wherever we find God, the universe working, it always works the same way. The laws of math are always the same, the laws of physics are always the same.

The chemical elements always have the same traits from hydrogen to zinc. It's all the same. How does it how do we have such unity in this universe? The answer is one God unified made a universe. But the universe is also diverse. As we look around, we see the various skills. That's what verses four, five and six say. We're going to put this on the screen for a moment, and this is a literal translation, the way the words show up almost poetically in the original Greek language it says this varieties of gifts.

There are but the same spirit varieties of service. There are, I feel like Yoda here for a second varieties of service there are but the same Lord varieties of workings. There are but the same God who works all things for all people variety, variety, variety, but working all that he intends for all of his people. Now, the words that he uses, gifts, services and workings or energies are interesting.

They imply that, you know, first of all, it's a gift. It's received by God. But it's also a service as a gift for service. And we work it out. We use energy. What does that mean? Well, let me illustrate from the world of sports. If you've ever been around baseball or basketball, you know that on every team there's a kid.

If it's a youth group, a youth team, or, you know, Major League Baseball, there's always somebody who can hit the ball farther than anybody else, not a little farther, maybe 20, 30, 40ft farther. And on every basketball team, there's somebody who can jump higher than anybody else. And we may be wowed by this, but everybody on the team can get back on defense in basketball, and everyone on the baseball team can pay attention to the shape that we need to catch the balls that are hitting our hit our way.

And if you're in the world of work, there's always somebody who's got just marvelous skills of engineering and design, and everybody tries to solve the problem. And and you just know who's

going to come up, most likely with the best solution, because they're just so gifted and they can organize things like nobody else so they can present in public like nobody else.

But a work team needs everybody. Everybody can serve. Everybody can show up on time and put in their effort for the task that is before them. Varieties of gifts, varieties of service, varieties of workings. All for the common good. Now the Bible describes this in Matthew chapter 25. If you know your Bible well, you know that Jesus is talking about last things and about his return and facing him one day.

And in the process, he tells a story about a king, a prominent man, who goes away and gives five, two, and one talents to the people under him. Now, a talent is kind of like \$1 million in value, so he gives 5 million, \$2,000,001 million. I'm not going to talk about the one who got one. That's a different point.

But the one who had five talents, \$5 million, made five more and said, here, master, this is what I did with the talent you gave me and the one who had two talents, \$2 million made two more, and he presents it to the master, and the master gives absolutely identical commendation to the man who had five and made five more, and the man who had two and made two more.

Now, this is good news for everybody who thinks I don't have as many gifts as many talents. I'm the guy on the basketball team who can't jump. I'm the guy on the baseball team who's happy if he gets a single or a double. I'm the lesser partner in my engineering firm or my design firm. Jesus says exactly the same thing.

If you do what you can with what he gave you, he says these words to both identical words. Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful for us with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness. Identical. Let me say it in different terms. If you go out to the parking lot and just look around the church after the service, you will notice lots and lots of white SUV keys.

But other than that, there's a variety to the cars out there. There are sports cars, there are little red, low-slung sports cars, and there might even be a Toyota Prius that gets 472 miles per gallon. And there might be a Ford 250, and it's taller than you are, and it can carry three elephants on the back without even really trying very hard.

There's a variety of cars and trucks, vehicles. Let's make God the manufacturer of vehicles, shall we? God is not upset with the elephant carrying truck. If it only gets 11 miles per gallon, it's not supposed to get 100 miles per gallon. It's supposed to haul elephants. And if that little Prius or even more economical electric car can't go 140 miles an hour, the manufacturer is not upset.

That's not the goal. To go 140 miles an hour each car, each truck has a purpose. It's made. It's gifted for a purpose. And if it fulfills its purpose, the maker is pleased. God's the maker. Now, a

man named Chris Ostrom, who was one of the great pastors preachers of the fourth century, said, said it this way even if there is a difference in the gift, there remains no difference in the giver.

Whatever you have, the giver is the same. Therefore, we thank God for his manifold gifts, for the talents he has given to us. Many faceted verse seven tells us for the common good. And then Paul names some of the gifts, and we don't need an explanation of most of them. We know what wisdom and faith and knowledge are.

I may explain a couple of them before this end. So I want to say a few general things about the gifts as the Bible describes them. First of all, there are five gift lists in the New Testament Romans 12, first Corinthians 12, first Corinthians 14, Ephesians four, and first Peter chapter four. Those are the five lists. No two of them are identical.

That aren't even all that similar. The idea is, look, here's a representation. I'm going to mention 20 or 21. There are others. Use your gifts. They're diverse. Seek first the kingdom of God with your gifts. Don't think about my gifts. Think about how we can make God's grace shine, how we can advance God's work in the world. But there are in our passage first Corinthians 12 and 14 15 gifts mentioned in the passage you read earlier.

Confession of truth. First Peter four. If you're wondering what your gifts are, gives us a little bit of a hint as to how to see them. We're to pop it on the screen again for a moment. I'm not going to read the whole thing. not that first Peter chapter four. There we go. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace.

Okay, we covered that. Whoever speaks is one who speaks the oracles of God. Whoever serves is one who serves by the strength of God. Supplies. Now, what he just did was divide spiritual gifts into two categories speaking and serving. We could say speaking and doing. So if you wonder what your gift is, the first question you could ask is, am I primarily a speaker of words or a doer of deeds?

Now, false dichotomy. Everybody speaks. Everybody does things. But overall, what do you think God's asked you to do the most? Most people are people of action, but Christianity is a deeply philosophical, ideological religion. There's a lot of ideas. We need teachers. So are you fundamentally a speaker or a doer? That's the first question that another question we can ask when we look at the gifts is, are you more a public person or a private person?

Because several of the gifts are very public teaching leadership, prophesying. Those are things people do in public, whereas deeds of mercy and encouragement. Those are lists, those appear in the list. Those are more private or you more private or public. Another question is, are you a planner or are you spontaneous? Because the gifts in Romans 12 are mostly planning type gifts, teaching and leading administration?

The ones in first Corinthians 12 are more spontaneous miracles, speaking in tongues, discerning spirits. Those are more spontaneous. Are you more spontaneous person or more a planning person? That'll give you some idea of how the gifts work and where you might fit overall. But I want to tell you something even more important, and that is that most of the gifts about 80% of the gifts the Bible mentions, although there is such a thing as a gift, that is to say, a very high level of talent in a certain area.

In about 80% of the cases, the Bible also says everyone should exercise this to some degree. And now we have it on screen. Some examples, for example, wisdom is a gift. It's on the gift list. But the Bible tells every believer that they should seek the wisdom of God. James one says, if you lack wisdom, pray for it.

The whole book of Proverbs teaches people how to gain wisdom. It says, he who walks with the wise grows wise. A companion of fools suffers sorrow. You want to get wise, have wise friends. So there's a gift of wisdom, which we would call something like the ability to apply knowledge to the world, the ability to fit into the world well, everyone.

Everyone should seek wisdom, even if some have the rare gift discernment, which I believe candidly, pastor reader had. The distinguishing of spirits is still something everybody should seek. Everyone should test ideas to see if they're right or wrong. The apostle Paul says in chapter five of First Thessalonians, test all things. Hold fast to what is good. But some people have.

Most people have a sense that doesn't sound right, there's something wrong or what I just heard, but I don't know what it is. But some people say yes, what you think is wrong is wrong, and I'll tell you what it is. I'll tell you what the problem is. That's the gift of the sermon. Faith is a gift. We should all believe in Christ.

Teaching is a gift, but everybody should be willing to share what they know. When somebody needs a little bit of enlightenment, evangelism is a gift. Pastor Barker certainly had the gift of evangelism. From what I could tell, he could strike up a conversation about faith and life and Jesus with anybody, just anybody. And on hundreds, maybe even thousands of occasions, people made a profession of faith that had fruit for the rest of their lives, fruit for all eternity.

But we should all be able, the Apostle Peter says, to give a reason for the faith that is within us. We should all be able to get on a plane and have a Bible on our phone or in our hands, and somebody says, hey, what are you reading? And why are you reading it? We should be able to give an answer, which is kind of evangelistic.

Some people have more. Some people have more, but anyone can share their faith. Anyone can pursue wisdom. Anyone can wash dishes. No one should ever say in the church, that's not my

gift. Anybody can wash dishes, anyone can cook. Anyone. Almost anyone can hold a baby. Almost anyone can change a diaper. Don't say not my gift. So how can I serve on this occasion?

Anybody can momentarily function as an encourager. The crusty, grumpy person in this congregation can find a way to say an encouraging word when someone's low. Now, some people are really good at it, and they we lean on them. We expect them to do that. And some people are excellent leaders and administrators and teachers and some people are even ordained to those positions.

But anyone can cook, anyone can serve. Anyone can help in some small way.

Faith, I want to tell you a story about someone in this church who I believe has the gift of faith, and it goes together with another gift. Most people have multiple gifts, I think, and the gift of discernment. Now, I'm not going to name his name, but it starts with Benny Youngblood. And in my opinion, Benny has the ability to see how people are doing.

He can tell when someone's sad, upset, lonely, distressed, and one day, one day, I talked to one of my daughters who had a stomach ailment that was completely mysterious, had kept her double over in pain, barely able to take care of her children. Going to the doctor. Nobody has any idea what's going on. And she's not a crier.

But she was crying on the phone with me, and I said, it must be bad when she's crying. And that was at night. And the next morning I bumped into Benny. We were both here in the building at 715 or something for some reason. How are you doing? How are you doing? Hi. And Benny said to me, hey, Dan, it looks like you're troubled by something.

And I said, well, I am my daughter. My daughter is really sick. Nobody knows what's going on. He said, I'll pray for her and a little bit later. I messed up the timeline, actually. We spoke at night and then 715 in the morning Benny said to me, hey Dan, I've been praying for your daughter for the last day.

And I prayed for her from 5 to 6 this morning. And I said, you know, I'm going to call her up and see how she's doing. And I called her up. I said, how are you doing, sweetie? And she said, I can't explain it. I'm so much better. The pain is gone now. What do you call that? You call that discernment to see just for my face, just for a moment that I was upset.

And then you call it the gift of faith. Lord, I'm going to pray for this woman whom I've never met for an hour, that God would make her better. And he did. That's a gift to faith. It's a gift of discernment. We need each other. Now. Sometimes you look at these lists and say, oh, this is passé, and I'm not going to care about tongues and speaking in tongues and interpreting tongues.

Let's just do one for a minute or a duo. We look at miracles. We say, well, that's over. That's, that's, that's from the past. I'm going to throw a definition of a miracle up here for a moment. A miracle is a direct act of God, unmediated, a direct act of God. No medicine, no anything, a direct act of God in the external world, visible to all visible believers and unbelievers alike.

It's not something that I get peace in my mind. That's great. A miracles in the external world. Everybody sees it happen. There is a person is crippled. They stand up there leaping and dancing. That's a miracle in which God works outside, not against the common course of events, to reveal himself. Power of God, power of Christ, to authenticate his servants like prophets and apostles and manifest his redemptive purposes.

Now, I'm going to tell you that full blown definition of a miracle. There are none of those anymore. Not that we're not in the business of authenticating apostles anymore. That's done. But that doesn't mean healing is over. Healing continues. How does healing continue? Well, it continues in part by Christians in the healing arts, doctors and nurses and massage therapists and whoever else you can think of. Physiotherapists. And it occurs through prayer. I believe God still heals people, sometimes radically through prayer. Son, a miracle doesn't show this person is an apostle. It just shows that God is still at work in the world today. I saw a remarkable example this one time when I was pastor of a church like this, and we were taking in new elders, and the elders are walking in, and I happened to look at one of them.

And I realized that five years earlier we had prayed over and he'd been told he would never walk again. Period. You will never walk again. And a couple minutes later, another guy walked in. They told him, you will probably never walk again, but you may walk bent over like this. And they both strolled right in, and we had prayed over both of those men.

I believe God does that. And so we don't want to. We don't want to deny that God did unique things thousands of years ago, but we still want to affirm that God does remarkable things in the world today, and we should seek these gifts. And we shouldn't simply say, oh, I have this gift. We're told by the apostle at the end of chapter 12 that we can seek higher gifts.

That is to say, you can say, Lord, thank you for the gift. I have, but I would like more. Please. That is a legitimate prayer if you're doing it for the sake of God, the church, the gospel to glorify him. What you have to do when you think about your gifts is ask certain questions of yourself like, do I have a talent or an ability given by God that meets concrete needs?

What are those needs? What deficit can I remedy? What burden can I bear? How can I advance God's cause in this world? What problem does God want me to solve? I have so many stories about this. I'm going to share one more. The year 2009 I was in Korea speaking in Seoul, 20 million people, and down in Busan, at the other end of the country, 3 million people and basically three conferences in seven days.

And the first two were in Seoul, because that's where most of the Christians are and taught, taught, taught and, you know, ate food and, and met with leaders and learned about the work of the church in Korea, the joys and the sorrows of the work in Korea. And then we're done in Seoul and we go down to Busan.

So, you know, Korea is a long way from here. It's ten, I think it's usually ten time zones away. And so, you know, you're meeting people and that's exciting and you're traveling, but you can't sleep right? It's a gigantic city and travel isn't easy. And so we're kind of tired after two conferences. And then we have to go to Busan.

And for reasons I can no longer recall, we had to get up at four in the morning. And the previous night we were out in ministry with people till close to 11, try to go to sleep at midnight, get up at four to catch the train, the speed train to Busan that's going to get there, you know, at 8:00 or something in the morning.

And then you have the morning's activities. You meet with people, you talk to people you survey, you have lunch, you teach with a little group, you have a Q&A session. And then the main teaching begins at about 1:00. And that goes till maybe 4:30. And then you go out for dinner and meet more leaders. And then the last session begins at 7:30 and goes till 9:30.

Is anybody feeling tired right now? And the leader of this church, a large church, you know, kind of ask the translator. Mia, how are you doing? Question. And we said, we're tired. We are we aren't quite sure how we're going to make it till 9:30, to be honest. And so he said, okay. And then, service begins and the pastor stands up and says, our speaker and his translator are tired.

We must pray for them. And he begins to pray this booming prayer. Lord God, this man is a, you know, man of God. He's come all the way from America. We might run and he's praying. And then the entire congregation joins in in Korean loudly, and the place roars for five, six, seven minutes. I gotta tell you, the hair was standing up on the back of my neck, my feet are bouncing up and down and we, you know, we soared through to 9:30 with an energy that I have rarely felt was a no breaks, just straight through till 9:30 at night.

What happened? I think it was a gift of discernment. The pastor looked at us and said, you look tired, just want to verify. Yep, we're tired. We need to pray for you. You know Coke isn't going to do it right now. We need spiritual help. And about 700 people prayed loudly for a while and God heard the prayer for the good of His church and his kingdom.

And so some are teachers and some are prayers. And you have the gift of faith, the gift of discernment, a gift of leadership. Spend some time thinking over the question, who am I? What did God equip me to do in this world? What burden did God ask me to bear and praise him for it, and ask him to build his kingdom?

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for sending your son and sending your Spirit to testify to him, to Jesus and His work, to inculcate in us humility and repentance and faith and Lord, I do pray that we would be grateful for the gifts you give. You're the giver. Whatever you give is from your hand and we thank you for that.

We do ask for the discernment to see what role you have for us in this your world, your church, your Kingdom. May you be praised by it. We ask in your name.

Amen.