

Xplore Spiritual Gifts

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 June 2004

Preacher: Tim Patrick

[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 27th of June 2004.

The preacher is Tim Patrick. His sermon is entitled Explore Spiritual Gifts and is based on 1 Corinthians chapter 12 verses 1 to 11.

Let's pray. Our Lord God praise you for your word and that we have it here.

We can read it. We have the freedom to think about it and think about what it means for us. We ask now that you'd help us think carefully about the words we've just heard read and about what they mean for our lives.

Amen. Amen. Please keep your Bibles open. I'll be referring back to the passage you just heard read as I speak and I hope you will too.

[1 : 07] I'll start out by asking a question. The question is, do you have a hero? Do you have someone who you look up to, who you idolise, who you think is great?

A sports person maybe? An actor? What do you call a recording artist these days? A pop star? A singer? You know, someone who makes CDs and is really good looking and all that sort of stuff.

Do you have a hero? Do you have someone like that? I'll tell you one of my heroes. Some of you may have heard of him. Many of you may not. He's a guitarist. His name is Dave Navarro. He is just fantastic.

You've heard of him. He's great. He's my hero, right? I watch him play guitar and I think, I want to be like you. You're great. You're cool. You're amazing at what you do. And he's a great hero for me.

Someone I look up to. I want to ask you another question though. Do you have a Christian hero? Not someone from the Bible.

[2 : 17] Not a Bible character. But someone who you know, maybe from the history of the church or someone who is around today who is a hero of the Christian faith to you. Maybe, you know, an archbishop.

Or maybe a world famous evangelist. Or maybe a great Christian scholar. Someone who's got a great Christian mind. Maybe someone who's served a long time in a mission field.

Maybe a great vicar. Maybe an unsung Christian hero. What about someone who's a great prayer? A member of a local congregation who no one knows that well but who prays a lot.

Someone who perseveres honourably in trial. Someone who's maybe an older Christian who seems to, everything they say seems to be really a word of wisdom. I also have a Christian hero.

My Christian hero is a great scholar. Some of you may know him. His name is Don Carson. He writes many books. He says many good things. He has helped me understand more about my faith and the depths of what the Bible's talking about and all kinds of things that have really broadened and deepened my grasp of the Christian faith.

[3 : 35] He's my Christian hero. And I look up to him and I aspire to be like him. It's great to have these Christian heroes I think because we look up to them because of their greatness in their faithfulness to Jesus.

The way they represent Jesus to us. They're better than secular heroes in some ways because often we like our non-Christian heroes if you like for essentially the wrong reasons.

Because of their skills or their wealth or their looks. Things that I think are ultimately not about honouring God at all but about sort of self-glory.

But whether Christian or not the thing about our heroes is it's great to have those people up there who are closer to where we want to be than we are now and who we can model ourselves on.

They lift us. They inspire us. But the problem of course is the flip side is heroes can also I think bring us down.

[4 : 34] By their very greatness they can make us feel inferior and kind of useless in comparison. So I will never ever play guitar like Dave Navarro. I will never do it.

I'll kind of see that and I think well maybe I'll just give it away. I listen to his CDs and I think I'm hopeless. What's the point? He doesn't lift me up all the time.

Sometimes he brings me low and makes me feel it's beyond me. Similarly with my Christian hero with Don Carson. I think man I love that guy. I want to be like him and write like him and read what he reads.

And then I read his stuff and I think man he's so amazingly smart and gifted. I can never ever do it. I will never be like him. I will never write 45 excellent books that everyone wants to buy.

And so I think maybe I'm not really that significant in the church. Maybe I'm just a kind of big part in God's plan. You know in 200 years you're not going to open a church history book and see my name there.

[5 : 33] I probably won't even be remembered in the churches that I've attended that far into the future. Maybe there'll be a little you know photo in some memorabilia book somewhere and people go oh who's that guy?

Who cares? But it's a bit depressing you know. If I'm not one of the great ones am I anyone important at all? Well this is the kind of issue that Paul is addressing in this part of his letter to the Corinthians that we've heard read.

What was going on in this church was some Christians were regarded as kind of the better Christians and others the kind of the more spiritual, the top notch Christians.

And it was particularly those Christians who had this one special gift. A gift of talking in tongues. Now you don't see that so much explained in our passage but it does come up later in chapter 12 at the beginning of chapter 13 and a lot in chapter 14.

So if you want to know more about that background read through those chapters and you'll see it come out more. But this is the issue that is on the table at Corinth. There are these great Christians and they're the ones who speak in tongues.

[6 : 43] Does anyone know what speaking in tongues is? What it is, as I understand it, it's a kind of people in churches sometimes are taken over by the Holy Spirit and they babble words that you don't actually understand.

But they ramble and babble and babble and babble. And it's understood that this is actually the Holy Spirit speaking through them in an angelic kind of language. Something that's like God talk that no one else can understand.

It happened in Corinth. It actually still happens today in lots of churches. I think it even happens in churches in Melbourne. If you wanted to kind of experience it, it wouldn't be too hard to track down this sort of thing happening. I've never seen it firsthand but it's very real.

And it was happening in Corinth when Paul wrote the letters to this church. And you can understand how people would kind of put those Christians on a pedestal. These guys come into church and they start babbling in this angelic God language.

Wow! They're amazing Christians. They're the spiritual kingpins of our church. They're the really spiritually significant people. But you see, you've got the same issue then arising as when we think about our spiritual heroes, if you like.

[7 : 53] Is that the rest of the church, the rest of the congregation can be left feeling spiritually insignificant. Or, well, you know, I don't do that. I don't have that kind of gift. I can't speak in tongues.

So, I'm obviously not one of the real stars of this church. I'm not one of the spiritual giants. Now, this isn't a particular issue here at Holy Trinity.

I have not seen talking in tongues here. But, I think the underlying issue, this issue of spiritual superiority and spiritual inferiority, might be an issue here.

And, as we look at this passage, I want to kind of bring out the way that I think we see the same sorts of symptoms expressing themselves, that were expressing themselves in the church that Paul was writing to.

So, let's have a look at what he says. The first thing he says is, concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I don't want you to be uninformed. It's actually an important issue. This isn't a kind of, Paul said the important stuff, now there's these kind of peripheral bits and pieces that, well, you know, read it if you like.

[8 : 52] Now, don't be uninformed on this issue of spiritual gifts, on this issue of which gifts, which people with which particular gifts are spiritually significant and which are less significant.

It's a big issue. Who are the spiritual kingpins? Who are the spiritual, you know, insignificant people? Paul wants to address it. And, I think as we read along with him, we'll learn lots. The first thing he does is very interesting.

In verses 2 and 3, Paul doesn't actually address the issue head on. He starts off by saying, You know that when you are pagans, you are enticed and led astray by idols that could not speak.

Therefore, I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says, Let Jesus be cursed. And, no one can say, Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit. The first thing Paul wants to say is, let's wipe the slate clean.

Let's start from scratch. How do we know if people are spiritual or not? Well, the first thing you want to ask is, do they curse Jesus or do they call him Lord? That's our starting point. Let's ask that question.

[9 : 55] That's the litmus test. Are those people who talk in tongues, are they the super Christians? Are they just regular Christians? How do we know where to stick them in the spiritual hierarchy? Well, before we get there, do they call Jesus Lord or do they say Jesus is cursed?

So, the pagan religions that the Corinthians used to belong to, their gods were mute. They didn't speak at all. But, our God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is a God of proclamation.

And, the first way you'll know whether someone has the Holy Spirit is whether they proclaim Jesus. No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Spirit. So, the interesting thing about this is, by setting the ground this way, Paul's actually shifted the goalposts.

If the question is, who are the spiritual kingpins? Paul's actually saying, I don't want to answer that question first. I want to say, who's spiritual? Full stop. You see, those guys who speak in tongues, they may be spiritual.

They may be spiritual kingpins. We haven't got there yet. We'll ask that question in a minute. But, the first question is, who's spiritual? And, it's whoever calls Jesus Lord. You see, the Corinthians were thinking that the criteria you used to assess spiritual superiority was whether you had this one special gift of talking in tongues.

[11 : 13] And, Paul's saying, that's the wrong criteria. That's the wrong place to begin with asking about spirituality. You want to know who's spiritual? Who calls Jesus Lord? Well, having put that down, Paul then moves on to develop this line of thinking and to show that this gift of talking in tongues is not the standout, only one, super special, big deal gift of the church.

Look what he says in verses 4 to 6. There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And, there are varieties of services, but the same Lord. There are varieties of activities, but it's the same God who activates all of them in everyone.

The point Paul is making is there are lots of different gifts, spiritual gifts, in the church. And, by highlighting the variety of gifts, what he's doing is taking the emphasis off any one particular gift over and above the rest.

If you don't talk in tongues, that doesn't mean you're not spiritual. It just means your gift is different. Your spiritual gift is just as God-given, though, as the gift of talking in tongues.

Because, we've seen it again and again in those verses, all gifts come from the same Spirit, the same Lord, the same God. God, the one God, gives different gifts to lots of different people.

[12 : 38] So, no one can say, I've got this one gift, therefore I must be closer to God. No, God gives different gifts to everyone. Look how verse 6 ends. The same God activates all of them in everyone.

Whatever your spiritual gift, it's been activated in you by God. It's, therefore, just as amazing and precious as any other spiritual gift.

No one can feel spiritually superior. No one can feel spiritually inferior. We all have a gift from God, if we call Jesus Lord. And it's just as spiritual as any other gift.

Even those ones that look really spiritual, like talking in tongues. This is a great encouragement for me, personally, because I don't talk in tongues. I might kind of pretend to, but I don't really do it.

But I don't have to feel like a B-grade Christian because of that. I'm not the most intellectual person in the world, but I don't have to feel like a B-grade Christian because of that, either.

[13 : 41] I'm not an important church leader, but I don't have to feel like a B-grade Christian because of that. I have other spiritual gifts from the same God.

Gifts that are just as precious because they're from the same God who gives all the gifts. Well, all of this is summarised for us in the start of verse 7. Please have a look at it.

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit. It's really summarising what we've said so far. Everyone in the church is given the manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

It's stronger language, though, isn't it? He's not just saying everyone's given a gift, but the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. That is, the operation of gifts in the lives of believers is actually a sign of the Holy Spirit dwelling in them.

Every Christian has a gift. Every Christian has an expression of the Holy Spirit. Having summarised, though, having drawn this to a point and helped the Corinthians see that it's not one special gift that's super spiritual and all the others are kind of average, Paul having said everyone's got a gift, all from the same God, he then actually moves beyond this point to make another point.

[15 : 01] And that point you'll find in the other half of verse 7. Very short. For the common good. That's a different twist. You see, everyone has a manifestation of the Spirit.

Okay, we've established that no one's spiritually superior, no one's spiritually inferior, but what's the point of it? So what? Who cares? Well, it's for the common good. It's for the common good. The reason that we have different spiritual gifts is for the good of everyone.

This is really critical. And it'll be picked up in a lot more detail in verse 12 and following, that Steve Brown is going to preach on, I think, at the next Explore service in a month's time.

But I need to make a couple of points on it here. First point I want to say is that if each one, each Christian, has been given a manifestation of the Holy Spirit for the common good, then just as no one in the Church can feel spiritually inferior, neither can anyone be spiritually uninvolved.

Do you get that? As everyone is on the same spiritual level, no one has a reason for being spiritually uninvolved or disconnected from the life of the Church. That is, the Corinthians can't say this.

[16 : 21] They can't say, I don't have the gift of tongues, therefore, it doesn't really matter if I'm involved in this fellowship or not. I just slip into the background. I'll come along from time to time. I don't need to be here every week.

I'll turn up when it suits me, when I feel like it, and do what I want to do. But I'm not one of the key players. I'm not one of the spiritual highlights of this Church. So, it doesn't really matter what I do.

It doesn't really matter how I serve. No, no, no. That's wrong. If there's no spiritual inferiority, then there's no spiritual insignificance. There's no excuse for not serving the Church with your spiritual gift.

Each one of us has the manifestation of the Spirit in order to serve the common good. If the Christians at Corinth decided that because they didn't have the gift of tongues, they weren't going to play a significant part in the community, then they'd be depriving the Church of the gift that God had given them for the good of the Church.

And presumably, if God gave them that gift for the good of all of them, then the rest will suffer without their ministry. I hope you can see where I'm going with this and what the obvious edge to this is for us tonight at Doncaster.

[17 : 39] If you're here tonight and you call Jesus Lord, if you truly call Jesus Lord, you're a Christian, then you must have a spiritual gift. The Holy Spirit must be manifest in your life in some way.

But the gift that the Holy Spirit has given you is not for you. It's for us. It's for the common good. It's for the other members of the Church. If you're a Christian, you have a gift.

But it's not for you. It's for us. So the question is this. How are you exercising your spiritual gift here at Holy Trinity for the common good?

Are you exercising your spiritual gift here at Holy Trinity for the common good? Have you found a way of thinking that you don't need to express your Holy Spirit-given gift for the common good here at Holy Trinity?

Have you said something like, I'm not one of the staff. I feel like I'm not spiritually as significant to this Church. Therefore, it doesn't really matter whether I contribute or not. Or, I'm really busy with school this year or with my study or with sport or work whatever and therefore I don't really have the time to share my gift with this Church.

[18 : 58] Or, it's really hard for me to get to Church regularly because of this, that and the other and so I don't really have the opportunity to share my gift with Church. Well, those things might be true. You know, you might not be on staff. You might be busy with various things.

It might be hard for you to get to Church. But, it just means you've got issues that you're going to need to work through so that you can get to a point where you are serving this Church with your gift from the Holy Spirit for the common good of all of us.

Just don't let any of those reasons for not yet sharing your gift with us become excuses for never sharing your gift with us. God gave everyone here a gift a spiritual gift for the good of all of us.

We need it for this Church to be what God wants it to be so please don't withhold it. Well what is your spiritual gift?

How do you work it out? Maybe you've never thought about this before. Maybe you've never read the first part of 1 Corinthians 12 and realised that you've been given a spiritual gift for the common good. Well that's okay. You've read it now.

[20 : 09] You've heard it. I'm just thinking about what your gift is. You'll have noticed so far in our passage that Paul hasn't actually spoken about any gifts in particular. In fact, I think he's deliberately avoided it because he doesn't want to highlight one gift over the other.

That's the issue, isn't it? Some gifts are more special people are thinking. So Paul's kind of been very grey so far. I said no, let's just talk generally. But that has left us thinking well what are the spiritual gifts? What does the spiritual gift look like?

Well in verses 8 to 10 he gives us a bit of a list. It's a list of spiritual gifts. Gifts that you might expect to find in the congregation at Corinth. Gifts that I think you could expect to find in many Christian congregations.

The gifts are things like the utterance of wisdom, the utterance of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, various kinds of tongues, interpretation of tongues.

Now tonight I'm not going to work through that list one at a time and unpack them and think about what they mean. I don't really have the time to do that with the full attention that would be required to do it well. And I'm not sure that the point of this list is to say here are all the spiritual gifts.

[21 : 20] Go through one at a time and tick them off and see which one's yours. I think the point really is this is a broad list. It's not just one gift and for the Corinthians remember it's not just the gift of talking in tongues.

It's a broad list of things that might be your spiritual gifts such as and Paul throws a few out for us to think about. I'm not saying that this list is not meaningful and these are certainly good gifts for the good of the common good of the church but I'm saying it's not exhaustive or definitive and your gift might not be on that list.

But I think you can still I think it still gives us some way of narrowing down what your gift might be. Before I show you how I think that is I just want you to notice something else again in this list in verses 8 to 10.

It's the same point Paul's making even though he's now moved on to specific examples again he wants to highlight and underline and put in bold the fact that these gifts are given through the Spirit according to the same Spirit by the same Spirit by the one Spirit and then in verse 11 all these are activated by the one and same Spirit who are locked to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

Same point there's a variety and we're now listing off a few of them but again they're all from the one God they all have the same source they're all equally as valuable as the rest because of their source.

[22 : 48] Well if every spiritual gift's not listed how are you going to work out yours if it's not on that list? Well I think there's two hints that our passage has given us as to how you might go about thinking about what your spiritual gift is and I want to tell you what those two things are.

The first thing I think when you're trying to work out your spiritual gift is to realise that it will be something that is particularly Christian. Note that all the gifts on this list in verse 8 to 10 are particularly Christian things.

They're not just something you could do in a church or you could do somewhere else or you could do as a Christian or you could do in a secular capacity. They're all particularly Christian things. So please hear me right things like serving tea or operating a data projector they're great and valuable services for this congregation and we need them but I'm not sure that they're uniquely Christian services.

I think I've just offended the data projector people. They're great things to do they're helpful things we need them but they're not uniquely Christian things. You could do them in other contexts.

They're not necessarily an expression of the Holy Spirit for the common good of the church. So while I don't want you to stop doing these kinds of things because otherwise the church wouldn't run I think you need to think a bit harder about your spiritual gift as something that's particularly Christian.

[24 : 18] Now there's actually lots. We just need to spend some time thinking about them. Things like prayer that's particularly Christian. Prayer to our triune God is particularly Christian.

Things like teaching CRE in a school. Things like Christian hospitality. Not just socialising with friends but hospitality that sacrificially serves and welcomes outsiders in the name of Jesus.

All that can only be a Christian thing. I think these particular Christian gifts are spiritual gifts. And I want to suggest that we all have a gift like that.

Something that will only find expression in the context of our Christian lives. I'm aware that some things might be ambiguous. What about something like music? music?

I've got a friend who leads singing for churches and she is so overflowing with the love of Jesus. She is so passionate about it that that's all music is to her.

[25 : 20] She only listens to worship CDs at home. She doesn't listen to secular music. She only sings Christian praises. She couldn't go to a pub and sing pub rock because when she picks up the microphone she wants to say praise you Lord Jesus.

She wants to get people to lift their voices to God. So even if she went to the pub she'd end up doing the Christian thing. For her music is particularly a Christian witness. It's a particularly Christian expression of service.

Now I know other people who play music in church and I think I'm probably guilty of this who do it sometimes just because they like doing it. It's kind of like playing guitar. If I can play in church that's fine. If I can play at the pub that's fine too.

It's not particularly Christian. Christian. My own playing guitar is not particularly about praising and worshipping the Lord Jesus. So it might be a gift I have in a more general sense.

But it's not a gift I've been given for the common good exclusively. So think about it. Maybe your gift is music. But please be careful not to think that whatever you like doing straight away is your gift.

[26 : 36] So the first thing I want to say is think about your Christian gift something that is particularly Christian. The other thing I want to say is your Christian gift should be something that's done for the good of others.

Christian gifts are for the good of others. That's what verse seven says. So Christian service is not necessarily about doing something you are drawn to or feel particularly good about doing or something you enjoy.

But it's about doing something that the congregation needs for the common good of the church. See you might love playing the electric triangle. You might think that it's something you really take to and God has given you a fantastic skill in playing the electric triangle.

And you can do it like no one else. It must be God given this gift. But does it serve the common good of the church? Does it serve the common good of the church?

Well if it doesn't it's probably not your spiritual gift. There may come a day when the electric triangle helps people raise their voices in praise to God and then you will find that your spiritual gift has come into its own and you will need to express it for our common good.

[27 : 48] But until then you probably need to keep looking. It's interesting as well isn't it because when you think about the Corinthian situation this gift of tongues that everyone was so excited about is the second last gift on the list right down the bottom.

And then it's only you notice it's followed up with the gift of interpretation of tongues. And if you read chapter 14 you'll see that Paul says yeah it's a gift all right but it's got to serve the common good so only do it when there's someone there to interpret so everyone understands.

So even something that's clearly God given the gift of tongues. I call Jesus Lord and I babble away in tongues. That's clearly a God given thing. The second thing to ask is does it serve the common good? And Paul wants to say with respect to tongues yeah yeah it may be it may be something that God has equipped you skilled you to do but it's only a gift for us if it builds us up.

So it's got to have an interpreter. So there might be things you do that are particularly Christian but that we don't really need at the moment. Imagine if everyone was a preacher well you don't need 85 preachers in a congregation.

How does it serve the common good to have 85 preachers and no one else doing anything? The variety remember there's a variety of gifts. Steve Brown again will talk more about the variety and the different expressions of the Holy Spirit amongst the body of believers when he speaks to us.

[29 : 15] If your spiritual gift is something that you might not be the thing you really like doing the flip side of that is your spiritual gift might actually be something you don't enjoy. See you might find it hard.

You might not really enjoy doing something but the point of spiritual gifts isn't that they're easy and you love it. The point of spiritual gifts is that they serve the common good. And if you're a Christian believer here tonight then your gift is here to serve the common good.

Your gift might be praying for overseas missionaries. Now you might find that hard to do. You might not kind of get into it really easily. It might not be what really excites you when you wake up in the morning.

But you know what? It needs doing. It's for the common good. It's particularly Christian. No one other than a Christian is going to pray for a Christian missionary. It might be your spiritual gift.

I think too much, too often we think my gift is something that turns me on. My gift is something I love doing. My gift is about self-expression.

[30 : 22] But that's not what Paul says. Paul says your gift is for the common good. If you're a Christian believer here tonight you have a gift from the Holy Spirit.

You may not have discovered it yet. It might be fun to start thinking about what it is and how you can serve the good of this church. Your service to this church is as important as anyone else's.

It's just as important as Paul Barker's. It's just as important as Paul Dudley's. It's just as important as mine. So, my sisters and brothers, the message that Paul has for us here tonight is that all of us who call Jesus Lord have gifts of equal significance for the common good of the church.

They're different but they're equally as significant and equally useful for the common good of this church. We don't need to aim to be like the Christian greats. We don't need to try and be the preachers.

We don't need to look for the far out flashy gifts that stand up with lights and whistles and that sort of stuff. Because we've got everything we need to be the Christian that God wants us to be today, here, now.

[31 : 31] We have a gift of the Spirit. It's great news. We're all equally valuable in this church. But the flip side, of course, is that we all have an equal responsibility for our gifts, to use them for the common good, not to be selfish with them, but to take our part in the church, take the part that the Holy Spirit has specially shaped each one of us individually in our own particular way for.

Can you imagine how great the church would be if every believer was exercising their particular, their unique Spirit-given gift for the common good?

It would be a great and exciting church to be part of. And so I hope that you'll think about this more and think about what your gift is and how you're going to use it. You might need to talk to someone about it.

It might not kind of just pop into your head. So in that case, I'm well aware that one of Paul Dudley's gifts, is helping other people find their gifts. You might want to make an appointment to see him or Stephen Mel or some of the other staff.

That's why you put people in charge of churches so they can help people find their place in the rest of the church. I've just probably tripled his workload, but that's okay. I'm going on holidays. Please do talk to someone.

[32 : 47] You might even find that you can talk about it in a prayer group, in a Bible study group. Think about it with your Christian brothers and sisters. Talk about it together. Ask each other, what do you think I can do to serve the common good?

That's particularly Christian. It might not be like what everyone else does. And you can pray about it together too. Let's work towards seeing our great variety of Holy Spirit given gifts in full function.

Let's look towards seeing the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in lots of different ways in the life of every believer in this church for the common good. Let me pray about that. Our Lord God, Holy Spirit, thank you that in you we're spiritually equal.

Thank you that you don't have people who are super spiritual Christians, but everyone who calls Jesus Lord does so by the Spirit.

Thanks for the great variety of gifts that there are in the church. Thanks for the so many different ways you call us to serve and to work for the common good. Lord, help us please, we pray, to find our gift, to look in places we might not want to look and to be prepared to find things that we might not have thought were the way you'd cut us out to serve.

[34 : 12] And then help us to commit to using the gift you've given us so generously to serve the common good of this church. And we pray it for the glory of Jesus and through the power of the Spirit. Amen.