

Uniquely Gifted (what's your gift?)

Week 3 — August 16

Can you think of something that you are good at and it's so natural to you that you assume that everyone is good at it and it's no big deal? Can you think of something you do that energizes you and makes you come alive?

Maybe you are like my husband who shines when someone runs into a crisis and needs help with something. Perhaps you love being organized and helping others get organized because it's fun and energizing for you. Maybe you naturally encourage others with words that are so genuine and they roll effortlessly off your tongue. Or perhaps you love to create and bring art and beauty to the world.

Today we are in the third week of a series we're calling *Gifted* - all about how the church works and how church work happens. On week one, Jenn Surtees kicked off our series by teaching us that the work of the church is meant to be done by *all* members of the church, not *some*. That according to the Bible, every follower of Jesus is considered a saint, minister, and priest intended to play a critical part in the work of the church together. And last week, Jeff Martens built on this by helping us see that if the work of the church is meant to be done by all of us, that only happens when all the many parts of the church are working together. And today, we want to ask the question - if we are a body of unique and beautiful parts – *which part are you?*

Because here's the thing. It's one thing to nod along and say, "Yes, I believe we're all part of one body." It's another thing to actually be able to name what my part is and what your part is. And I think for a lot of us, understanding the part we're invited to play isn't always easy. Not because we don't have a gift. But because of something about the way gifts work.

Here's what I notice when it comes to our gifts and our strengths and I want to name this in case you are like me and feeling it too: sometimes we don't see our own gifts, *because* they come so naturally to us. The very thing that makes something a gift - that it flows out of you without much effort - is the same thing that can make it invisible to you. You assume everyone can do what you do. You assume it's not that special.

Today we want to begin to consider what unique gifts each of us have and what meaningful role and contribution each one of us can make, because all our gifts are needed.

So, if you have a Bible or Bible app, let's turn to our text for today. The apostle Paul writes this in his first letter to the church in Corinth - 1 Corinthians 12:7:

"Each believer is given a gift by the Spirit that they may make the most of it."

Or I like how another translation says that we are each given a gift for **"the benefit of all"**

(Point One: Every believer — not just some — is made with a unique gift to bring to the world)

First, I can't help but notice the word "each." Not "some." Not "the especially talented." Not "the ones who went to seminary" or "the ones who are naturally good on stage" or "the ones who always seem to know what to say." *Each*. Every single believer - has been given a gift by the Spirit of God. Can we just pause and take that in for a moment?

A gift, given specifically, given uniquely, given to each of us. Given to you.

Now here's where I want to slow down, because I think this is where some of us might quietly check out. When we hear the word "gift," a lot of us (myself included!) immediately start comparing. We think of the people we know who seem obviously gifted - the worship leader whose voice stops you in your tracks, the person who can walk into a room of strangers and somehow have five new friends by the end of the night, the teacher who makes complicated things simple. And then we look at ourselves and think, "Well, I don't have anything like that."

But I want to explore something with you this morning: your gift probably doesn't feel like a gift to you. It probably feels completely ordinary. It probably feels like something anyone could do. And that feeling - that sense of "this is nothing special" - is often the surest sign that you're standing right on top of it.

Last month I spent a few days in Victoria, British Columbia. On the day I arrived I had a little bit of free time before I needed to get to the event for which I was there for. After exploring the city of Victoria, I made a spontaneous decision to do something that I have always wanted to do and as author Kate Bowler would say, "*I put myself in the path of joy*". I signed up for an afternoon of whale watching and honestly, it was an experience of awe. During the excursion, the guide taught us that Orca's - killer whales each have a distinct marking on their dorsal fin (photo). Every single orca's fin is different and the marine mammal experts who have studied these pods of whales can identify which orca they are seeing in the Salish Sea simply by their fin. To me, looking from a distance, they all look more or less the same: black and white, same basic shape. But researchers who study orca pods can identify individual whales by their fin alone, the same way that no two human fingerprints are the same. The orca doesn't know its fin is unique. It's not swimming around thinking, "Look how distinctive I am." It's just being who it naturally is. The uniqueness is real whether the orca notices it or not.

That's you. That's your gift. It's not diminished by feeling unremarkable to you. In a sense, it's actually confirmed by it.

How many of you have spent time at an overnight summer camp? As a camper? As a counsellor? Maybe your kids have gone to a camp.

Summer camp holds a special place in my heart. I began going to youth camp in high school as my faith journey was emerging, then I participated in a leadership development camp, and then spent high school summers working as a camp counsellor at camp, I directed that summer camp a few years later, and then as a parent I have seen the beauty of camp ministry for my girls.

As I have reflected, there are few times and places in life where I have experienced the kingdom of God more than at camp - and honestly I think that a big part of that is because of the way that there is something about camp ministry that activates the spiritual gifts of *all* who serve - every role is necessary and something about that all contributes to experiencing God in profound and transformative ways - ways that embody and exemplify the kingdom of God.

We saw this at Activate Camp this summer ([photo here](#)) as so many volunteers had their gifts on display in roles such as registration, baking snacks, praying over the kids and leaders, leading kids in worship, leading small groups, just to name a few.

Now, perhaps some of you are already forming an objection in your mind. Maybe it sounds like this: "I really don't think I have anything special to offer. I've looked. I've thought about it.

Here's what I want to gently push back on. Often the reason we come up empty is that we're looking for something impressive. Or you're scanning for the thing that would make people say, "Wow." But that's not usually how gifts work. More often, your gift is the thing you do so easily, so instinctively, that it doesn't even occur to you it could be valuable to someone else.

You have a gift. It is very likely hiding in plain sight, disguised as something too natural to name.

So, if that's true - if we all have a gift - the next question is the practical one: how do we actually know what it is? How do we develop it? How do we put it to use?

(Point Two: What's *your* gift? How do you know it, develop it, and deploy it?)

To that end, let's look further at Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians to explore what these gifts actually look like.

1 Corinthians 12:4-11 says this:

Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are different ministries, but the same Lord. And there are different results, but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the benefit of all. For one person is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, and another the message of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,¹⁰ to another performance of miracles, to another prophecy, and to another discernment of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. It is one and the same Spirit, distributing as he decides to each person, who produces all these things.

So here we have a list of 9 unique spiritual gifts in the church. However, this list isn't exhaustive. Scripture gives us more of these lists in Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4 - which include additional gifts like teaching, serving, generosity, leadership, mercy, encouragement, and hospitality.

Other gifts show up in scripture too. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul even describes marriage and singleness as gifts - he uses the Greek word “charisma”, which is translated “gift or spiritual gift” – seeing our unique context or stage of life as a gift. I think about Ezra and Nehemiah, gifted in craftsmanship, rebuilding the wall and the temple stone by stone - their skill with their hands was every bit as much a gift from God as prophecy or teaching. Or I think about Dorcas, also called Tabitha, in Acts 9 - a woman whose gift was simply this: she made clothes for people in need, and she was so loved for it that when she died, the whole community wept and begged for her to be brought back. Her gift wasn't flashy. It was needles and thread and attentiveness to who was cold and who needed covering. And Scripture treats it as significant enough to record her name.

That's the range we're talking about. Wisdom and craftsmanship. Prophecy and sewing. Leadership and faithful singleness. All of it and everything in between counts. *All* of it is gift.

We're meant to contribute what we've been given, not keep it to ourselves. It's how we play our role in the body of Christ and it's an essential part of our spiritual growth journey too.

As I think about applying this truth, I can't help but think of a teaching model that my friend Ellen Duffield created. It's called the “Thriving model”. You can check out her book (photo) entitled “A Theology of Thriving: Belonging, Being, and Contributing to dig deeper if you're curious. The essence of this model is based on Genesis 1:26-28 and how each of us are created. Ellen explains that we are created by God to Belong, to Be, and to Contribute (photo). Created to BELONG to God, others, and ourselves. Created to BE - meaning our true identity is as beloved children of God, and we are created to CONTRIBUTE - meaning that God has made us to use our gifts to contribute and live a life of meaning. Ellen describes in her work that when we are living in belonging, being, and contributing – we are *thriving*.

Taken together these three pieces create a picture of what God wants for us and what it means for us to live and thrive as the beloved children that we are.

Personally, I need to tell you that there have been times in life where I've wanted gifts that other people have or even tried to be like other people who have gifts that I admire and here's the thing – it doesn't work. It's not authentic and I can't be them and I shouldn't be!

One of my spiritual gifts is discernment, which is described this way:

The gift of discernment is the divine strength or ability to spiritually identify falsehood, to distinguish between right and wrong motives and the spiritual forces at work in situations.

As a teenager and new in my faith journey, I didn't really give my thought to this because I assumed this gift was true in everyone. Once I began to understand spiritual gifts as an adult and as others began to notice this gift in me, I paid attention. I began to appreciate this gift of discernment, lean into it and then began to deploy it - through adulthood, as a parent, in the years I spent serving on our board of elders here at Southridge, in pastoral work, and now through my clinical work as a therapist. It's really been a lifelong journey - not a single "aha" moment, but a

gift that gets refined season by season, for the rest of my life. And when I am living in my giftedness, there is something that feels light and natural and there is an ease to it.

Now, maybe some are already forming the objection: "But what if what I have isn't much?"

I don't know what your unique gift is, but I do know this. It's needed. And is significant.

Scripture doesn't shy away from this. Remember the widow in Luke 21 - she gave two small coins, worth almost nothing, and Jesus said she gave more than all the wealthy people combined, because she gave out of what little she had, not out of her abundance. Remember the loaves and fishes - a boy's small lunch, offered without hesitation, became more than enough for a crowd of thousands, once it was placed in Jesus' hands.

It was never about the size of the offering. It's about the posture of the heart and the trust to give what you've got. Bring what you have. Let God do what God only God can do.

So, here's where we are. Every believer has a gift, in many shapes and forms. Every believer is meant to contribute that gift to the life of the church - not once we feel polished or qualified, but now, with whatever we currently have. And this isn't a side project of discipleship - taking responsibility for our gifts, discerning them, developing them, deploying them, is part of what it means to grow as a follower of Jesus, and part of what it means to live in a lifestyle of thriving.

And here's something important: we often can't see our gifts clearly on our own. We need other people to hold up a mirror for us - to say, "Have you noticed how naturally you do *that*?" or "I've watched you do *this*, and it's remarkable." That's part of why we're a community and not a collection of individuals figuring it out in isolation. You might be the mirror someone else needs this week. Someone else might be the mirror you need. (Also, can I just say that to name and reflect the gifts and the beauty in another costs us absolutely nothing and can mean everything to them.)

Closing: As we take a closer look at the unique gifts God has given to each one of us, as we consider our unique wirings and passions, strengths and abilities, talents and skillsets, as we consider the part that we are called to play...

I want to leave you with a question...knowing that we're a body made of unique and beautiful parts - **which part are you? Where can your gift shine?**

And as you think about what it looks like to take responsibility for the gift that you've been given. I want to leave you with three action steps:

Discern. What gifts has God given you? If you're not sure, start paying attention - what do others notice in you? Is there something that others thank you for? What do you do that doesn't feel like effort to you but clearly helps someone else? What would you miss doing if you couldn't do it anymore?

And to help us with this discernment, in a few moments we'll have the opportunity to try a simple tool called a Spiritual Gifts Assessment as a part of today's service.

Develop. Once you have a sense of your gifts, what's the next step to grow it? Gifts, like anything else, tend to grow when they're tended to and nurtured. What's one small step you could take this month to develop what God has placed in you?

Deploy. And finally - use it. Not someday. Not once you feel ready or qualified or polished. Now, even in small ways. This week. How can you be brave and begin contributing the gifts that God has entrusted you with?

Before we take some time to explore a Spiritual Gifts Assessment together, I want to invite you to check out Paul Kamps story. Paul and his family are a part of our Vineland community and I have had a front row seat to watching Paul discern and develop his spiritual gifts.

(video)

We want to provide a few moments right now to participate in what's called a Spiritual Gifts Assessment to help us discern and identify our unique spiritual gifts.

There's no pressure to do this, but our hope is that it could help you better understand the unique gifts God has given you and how they can be used as a gift to those around you.

If you have a smartphone, we invite you to take it out right now and scan this QR code or go directly to the link on the screen.

If you don't have a device to use, we do have a paper version of a gifts assessment available at the Welcome Centre after the service, which you could pick up. And for now, feel free to use these minutes to reflect on what we heard in this morning's message.

For now though, we encourage as many of us as possible to try the assessment and we'll give the next 4-5 minutes to take the assessment as the band plays a song. When you go to the link you'll be asked to provide your name and email so that you can receive an email summary of your top 5 spiritual gifts.

For those who are interested, we've also created a page where you can share your spiritual gifts with us so that we can better support and equip you in using your gifts throughout our community. So we invite you to do that if you're interested.