

BETTER TOGETHER: HELP ONE ANOTHER

Sermon written by Martha-Jean Fitch
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TEXT: I Corinthians 12:7; Ephesians 4:11-12

We are better together! When we encourage one another – and when we work together with one spirit and one mind. And we are better together when we help one another.

God has created the world with so many examples to help us see how we need each other – and do better when we are in community.

One perfect example are honeybees – who live in community!

The honeybee has one of the most highly developed social structures in the animal kingdom. A hive may house as many as 60-80,000 bees; and at the heart of the hive, is the queen bee. Without her the colony has no future. But those 80,000 bees don't just sit around, watching their queen. Each bee has a job to do to help the hive survive.

The forager bees go out into the world to collect the nectar from the flowers to take back to the hive, so they can make the honey. The guard bees protect the hive entrance from intruders. The undertakers are responsible for removing dead bodies from the hive. The architects secrete wax to help build the honeycomb. The nurse bees take care of the young bees, and others have the duties of cleaning their sisters in the hives and caring for the foragers who return from their numerous trips outside the hive to collect the nectar. Each and every one of those thousands of bees are all needed to keep the hive alive and functioning well.

In much the same way, God has given special gifts and tasks to all the people in His church. No one has been called to merely sit around. Everyone can do something. The work of the church will not get done unless all of us do what God has called us to do.¹

I believe that each and every one of us are here for a reason. Each of us has been called and gifted to be part of the body of believers here at First Christian. Even those who are here today as guests – I think God has a reason for you being here today – to learn something, to experience something – perhaps even to find something that you have been looking for. It is no accident that you are here today.

I believe that God has a purpose and a plan for each and every one of us – and He has gifted you to be a part of a church family and share those gifts to build up the church and make a difference in the world.

But what is a spiritual gift? Pastor Ray Pritchard defines it as *"a God given ability which enables a believer to effectively serve the body of Christ."*² These gifts represent the work Jesus did while He was on earth that He has now given to the church. Now that Jesus has ascended into heaven Jesus has no hands but our hands and no feet but ours. We have been called - gifted – to do His ministry and build up the church of Jesus Christ and make a difference in this world.

This is a message that the Apostle Paul gave to many of His churches as he wrote letters to them – which are now given to us through many of the books in the New Testament. I Corinthians is one of those books – a book that consists of a letter Paul wrote to the church in Corinth. Get your Bibles out and turn to I Corinthians in the New Testament. Corinth was a cosmopolitan city, full of immorality and idolatry. And the church was struggling, trying to live out their mission and ministry in the midst of a culture that didn't know the gospel of Jesus Christ. Sounds a lot like our day and age, doesn't it?

As we get to the 12th chapter of this first letter to the Corinthians, we discover that Paul wants them to know about spiritual gifts. In fact, you can tell this is a very important topic for him. Look at verse 1: *"Now, dear brothers and sisters, regarding your question about the special abilities the Spirit gives us, I don't want you to misunderstand this."* Paul wants the Corinthians to be completely clear about this topic. There had been a lot of misunderstanding in the Corinthian church about spiritual gifts. They had been tempted to believe that some gifts were better than others. There was a division in the church happening, full of jealousy and rivalries. Which, as Alistair Begg describes it, is Satan's plan. He wants to see churches uninformed, misunderstanding the power and purpose of spiritual gifts. Fighting over which spiritual gift is the best OR just totally ignoring spiritual gifts all together. You see, the gifts God gives to the church are vital to the life of the Christian and to the growth of the church. We are in great need of understanding why God has placed us in His church at this particular time and what gifts He has given us for the purpose of doing His will. If we don't understand this, we will fall prey to false teaching and the church of Jesus Christ will not grow.³

As Alistair Begg says, *"The effectiveness of the church is directly related upon people discovering and implementing our God-given spiritual gifts. Spiritual Gifts are divine enablements for ministry."*⁴ Paul did not want the Corinthians OR US to be ignorant of this very important point: the knowledge of spiritual gifts enables us to grow, witness, worship and serve! Thus, it is vitally important to the ministry of the church and to your own faith journey.

But who receives these spiritual gifts? Does everyone receive a gift or just the elders or the pastor? The quick answer is: Everyone! Everyone that has faith in Jesus Christ! Look at I Corinthians 12:7: *"A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other."* And there are all sorts of gifts that are given – and there is no such thing as a minor gift! The Holy Spirit doesn't give minor gifts! All gifts are important to the health and well-being of the church.

Verses 8-10 list some of those gifts: The ability to give wise advice, a message of special knowledge, great faith, the gift of healing, the power to perform miracles and the ability to prophesy...the ability to discern whether if a message is from the Spirit of God ... the ability to speak in unknown languages and the ability to interpret what is being said. These are just some of the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives His people. All throughout Paul's letters we see different lists. And I really believe that these are just a sampling of gifts. We can't limit the Holy Spirit on the many gifts He gifts. Some may have one or two gifts, and some may have several gifts.

But notice how we get those gifts. Look at verse 11. *"It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have."* When we

become Christians, the Holy Spirit gives us the spiritual gifts we need. We don't have to pray or plead for our gift. We don't get spiritual gift through our own efforts. In fact, it is just the opposite – we receive the gifts without any effort and the gift is always fits us perfectly. When we discover what those gifts are and use them – we will serve with great joy! However, if serve within a ministry for which we are not gifted, there will be discouragement and frustration.

To me this is really exciting! God knows us through and through! He saw us when we were being formed in our mother's womb (Psalm 139). He filled us with many natural abilities and walked beside us through our lives and knows all about our experiences and dreams throughout our lives. And when we became a Christian, He filled us with the spiritual gifts He sees as the right fit for us. And then He leads us to a church where He knows our God-given gift will help the church to function and be effective. Amazing how God knows us so intimately to be able to do that!

As you are trying to discover what your spiritual gifts are and how to use them in the church, you want to make sure you know if they are really God-given gifts and not something that is self-driven. So, there are four questions, based on passages from I Corinthians, that we can ask to evaluate what a God-given spiritual gift is.

First, does it glorify and lift up Jesus Christ? If it doesn't do that, you know it isn't from God. Back in the 10th chapter of I Corinthians, verse 31 that *"whatever you do, do I all for the glory of God."* If you are serving in a particular ministry for people to notice you and praise your good works, then that gift is not God-given. You are serving for your own glory. A true God-given spiritual gift points to God and gives Him the praise and the glory.

Secondly, does it unify the church? Look at chapter 12 verses 14-27. Paul compares the church to the human body. There are a variety of parts of the body – an eye, an ear, a hand...but they are all contained in one body. And each part is important. Just so with the church - we have a variety of gifts in people, and they are all important and together make up the body of Christ. Not one gift is more important than another – all are needed. As it says in verse 27, *"All of you together are Christ's body and each of you is a part of it."* If you are using your gift to divide the church – if your focus is all on what you want, getting your own way, you can be sure that is NOT from God. God-given spiritual gifts bring the people of God together and does not divide or cause groups or cliques to form.

Third, ask yourself, does my gift edify the church? Now edify is not a word we often use – but to edify means to strengthen or build up or enlighten. Looking over to I Corinthians 14:12, Paul tells the Corinthians and us – *"Since you are so eager to have the special abilities the Spirit gives, seek those that will strengthen the whole church."* Your gifts and actions should all be done to build one another up, not tear down. Ask yourself, is what I am doing or *not* doing, helping to build up the church or is it hurting the church and tearing it down?

Discovering your God-given gifts that glorify God, unify, and edify the church is really the only way our church can ever reach maximum effectiveness for Jesus Christ. It is a powerful tool that the Holy Spirit gives us to continue the ministry of Jesus here on earth.

We are better together – when each and everyone works together – to help each other and hold each other up – and be a wonderful witness to the world of the power of God at work in us.

The huge redwood trees of California are truly amazing – and really are a great symbol for the church. They are the largest living things on earth and the tallest trees in the world. Some of them are 300 feet high and over 2,500 years old. One would think that trees so large must have a tremendous root system that reaches down hundreds of feet into the earth. But not so! The redwoods have a very shallow root system. The redwoods root system all intertwine. They are locked to each other. When the storms come, the winds blow, and the lightning flashes, the redwoods still stand. They are locked to each other. They are not alone for all the trees support and protect each other. Each tree is important to all the other trees in the grove.

The other interesting fact about these giant Redwoods is that the living tree has no known killing diseases and insects cause no significant damage. They literally stand firm against any attack.

They are truly better together!

And truly we are better together! The church really is our God-given support system. Just like those trees are locked to each other -- supporting and protecting each other... so the church is intertwined - working together as we share our God-given gifts – helping one another and holding the other up through fellowship and community. Thanks be to God that we have the church, and we don't have to stand alone! Thanks be to God for the fellowship we know in our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are better together!

PRAYER

INVITATION

The Savior is calling out to you today. If you have never confessed your faith in Jesus Christ, He is calling out to you – wanting to come in and be your Lord and Savior. Today can be that day when you answer that call and give your heart to Him.

The Savior is calling out to you today – calling for you to come and make First Christian your church home – a place for you to share those special and unique God- given gifts. Won't you come today and become a member of this part of Christ's body?

The Savior is calling out to you today. It could be that you have been ignoring that call or maybe you didn't quite understand the call. God needs you to find those gifts He's given you and serve in the church. You are invited today to answer that call and rededicate yourself to serving the church.

The Savior is calling. Won't you come and answer His call today?

RESOURCES

¹Our Daily Bread – July 22, odb.org – “Be Like a Bee” and “*Nine Hive Jobs of Honeybees*”, by Samuel Ademola, February 20, 2015 <https://www.hobbyfarms.com/9-hive-jobs-of-honey-bees-2/>

²Pastor Ray Pritchard, “Unwrapping Your Spiritual Gifts”, Keep Believing Ministries, <https://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/unwrapping-your-spiritual-gifts/>

³Alistair Begg, “Now Concerning Spiritual Gifts, Part 1”, <https://www.truthforlife.org/resources/sermon/now-concerning-spiritual-gifts-pt1/>

⁴IBID.