



Sermon Growth Guide

February 13, 2022

Missing Pieces - One Big Body



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1 Corinthians 12:1-13

Key Verse: 1 Corinthians 12:7 “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”

Big Idea: We are all unique. God never made two people the same. But God also has other people in mind when He gifts you and makes you.

Foundations

Welcome to the next week of **Missing Pieces**. In Christ, what is missing is found. What is lacking is filled up. The Missing Pieces of our lives become sites of Resurrection.

This week, we dive into the gifts the Spirit gives. God creates us and gives us gifts not for our own benefit but for the benefit of others.

Pastor Jennifer reminds us that Paul does not share our individual and independent way of thinking. He’s not interested in “your gift.” Paul is more interested in showing where God is at work—more interested in revealing the activity of the Spirit.

So even though we are all unique, “... we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”

God’s Spirit is at work in our lives as we get worked into one resurrection body. We are saved into one big body of Christ where there is joy in this Christian fellowship. Praise God! He is at work.

Understanding God’s Word

Together, read 1 Corinthians 12:1–13. Note all the references to what the Spirit does.

Take time to compare and contrast what is “different” and what is “the same” in this passage.

Verse seven describes why gifts are given. Discuss what “the common good” looks like in the place God has you.

Applying God’s Word

How might God be asking you to use how He made you to benefit another?

How has COVID made you get creative when it comes to living into how God made you?

Where can you respond to what God is doing in our lives together?

Witnessing God’s Word

When have you seen God uniting His people by His grace?

Where has Christ worked in you through the gifts of others?

Is it just me, or do you get annoyed too? Why is it that bags of chips, boxes of granola bars, milk cartons, butter containers and ice cream cone boxes get put back in the pantry and fridge when there is nothing in them? Why do empty containers get returned to their places as if they still have something in them? Nothing drives me crazier than pulling out an empty box of something I thought was still there only to find that it's not.

Why is it so hard to throw away empty things?

Our passage today asks the same question. *Why are we so hesitant to get rid of things in our lives that are empty, hollow, give us nothing and lead us nowhere?* As we begin our passage today, the Apostle Paul refers to these things as mute idols (vs. 2), voiceless gods. They are unable to speak or deliver anything of substance. We find ourselves carried away by them to nowhere. They offer nothing. But we are drawn to keeping them, enticed by their empty promises.

The Spirit of God, on the other hand, leads us into places of life and relationship and fullness—into the body of Christ, the church, where, Paul says, the voice of God can be heard in our voices. Our words become rich with the wisdom of the Spirit and the knowledge of God. The Spirit fills us with faith, healing, power and prophecy. This is the place where we confess together “Jesus is Lord.” The contrast is stark. Where are we headed? To empty, mute idols, or to Jesus and the life that He offers? This is a chapter about correcting a misunderstanding about spiritual gifts and deepening the understanding about the One who gives the gifts. This chapter also offers an invitation to go and try something new in the name of Jesus.

Our series is called **Missing Pieces**, and we'll get to that. But first and foremost this is a message about what is not missing. Paul opens this letter with these words to the Corinthian Church: “*for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift...*” (1 Corinthians 1:5, 7). When the people of God gather and grow together, there is no lack. The Spirit provides everything that is needed. This is the church, the body of Christ.

The Context for this Letter

For the newly formed Corinthian church, understanding the difference between the spirits that lead you away into nothingness and the Spirit of God who leads you into all fullness and abundance is a learning process.

Paul is in “teaching” mode, actually corrective mode. “Now about spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed” (12:1). “I don't want you to be uninformed,” Paul writes. I want you to be knowledgeable and clear. Paul is slowly and carefully writing this

letter to the church. He is helping them to understand the work of the Holy Spirit which is very different than the spiritual experiences they have had up to this point. In previous chapters, Paul carefully walks them through several ideas and practices that they have been confused about. Last week we looked at the Lord's Supper. He is correcting their misunderstandings. He says—OK, do this, not that. Now do this, not that.

You see, the Corinthians were already “spiritual people.” Spiritual experiences were part of the norm in the Greek religions of the day. They were accustomed to being moved by the supernatural, or the demonic. They experienced trances, ecstatic utterances, strange actions. In fact, one theologian remarks they were “thoroughly absorbed with the supernatural” (David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians*). What they needed was wise, corrective but encouraging advice from Paul (Prior). So, it's not they are new to spiritual ideas and experiences, just new to the work of the Spirit of God in their lives.

- *How do you tell the real from the false?*
- *The empty from the abundant?*
- *The hollow from the full?*

In all of, this Paul never denies the spiritual powers at work in the world: they are real. But he works to drain them of their hold over these new believers. The Spirit of God is now disrupting their old patterns, their practices, the things they hold close. Paul is teaching them a new way of being together.

The Gifts of the Spirit

The Corinthians had drifted into a place where spiritual gifts had become divisive. They were feeling pride about their gifts, and depending on what gift you had, some felt more pride than others. The Corinthians were battling division and arrogance. Paul writes to correct them. Have you ever opened a gift at Christmas present only to wish you had gotten something else? No, I'm sure that's never happened to you... but it was happening in Corinth. Paul is quick to exhort them: “4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them” (12:4). There is no hierarchy of gifts. There are no gifts that are better or worse than other gifts. Yes, there are a variety of gifts, a diversity of gifts that are given. But the differences have nothing to do with their level of importance. It is the same Spirit which gives all the gifts. There is no division in the Spirit. The Spirit does not fight against Himself. The gifts are given for one divine purpose and one purpose alone—for the common good. They are given for the community, for the building up of the body of Christ.

In December, a lovely little film came out from Disney called *Encanto*. The story of *Encanto* is a story about the giving of gifts. It's the story of Mirabel and her family, and the wondrous gifts

each of her family members is given when they reach a certain age. The gifts they receive are wonderfully different and creative. They involve flowers and weather and shape shifting and talking to animals. Each child receives their gift for the purpose of making their community a better place. Now Encanto takes a strange turn when it is time for Mirabel to receive her gift as a young girl. Her gift ceremony is halted abruptly and shockingly when no gift is given to her. The disorientation and disruption that occurs in her life is the story that unfolds as Mirabel struggles to recover from that moment. *Encanto* is a wonderfully complex film about love of family, the destructive nature of holding family secrets and it's about miracles. Now granted, magical gifts are not the same as spiritual gifts, but it's a beautiful movie. The center of the story moves, however, from a focus on the gifts that are given to the giver of gifts, and can the giver be trusted when no gift is given?

An excellent question: are we more focused on the gifts or the giver of the gifts? For the Corinthians, they were focused on the gifts, and whose gift was better. For us today, the misunderstanding might be a little different. For many of us, when we come to these types of passage where Paul lists the gifts of the Spirit, we read these words through a Western and individualistic frame of mind. Given our experiences, our culture and our formation, we can often read Paul's gift lists and immediately jump to the questions: What is my gift? Which one of these is mine? How do I know what God has given me? We agonize a bit over these questions. We take spiritual gift inventories and quizzes, we try to narrow it down, but do we get too focused on the gifts? We vacillate between thinking that maybe God forgot to give me a gift to getting so specific that we miss opportunities to serve that are right in front of us.

I talked with someone recently who said, "I really thought my gifts were such and such (that's where I see God at work through me) ... but I took the inventory, and it said my gifts were these other things. So, now I'm trying to figure out how to use those." Yikes! No. Not helpful. Go with what you know the Spirit is using in you. Wherever God is using you—that's the right answer.

Full disclosure. We just had a new members class yesterday, and I always give a gift inventory to our new members. Now my hope is that it becomes a tool for seeing where God is using you, not a limiting moment. But the elder I teach the class with would prefer we dispose of the gift inventory all together. Maybe we should think about that, but the point in this passage is that Paul isn't that interested in matching you with a specific gift. It can get too narrow, too divisive or too self-focused. Don't focus too much on the gift. Paul is much more interested in helping us know more about the giver of the

gifts and how a deeper understanding of the Holy Spirit can help us engage as members of Christ's body.

Just let God use you.

I think what Paul is trying to communicate here is simply and exactly what he writes. There are lots of different kinds of gifts. The Spirit of God loves variety and diversity and difference. The Spirit distributes different kinds of gifts, a variety of service, a diversity of work. In Ephesians, Paul uses "gift" and "grace" fairly interchangeably. The Spirit pours out gift and grace in abundance. There is always more than enough, and there is plenty to go around. The same God who created more than 10,000 species of birds, over 60,000 species of trees, 440 species of sharks, and 7.8 billion people around the globe right now—all uniquely made, all vastly different ... is the same God who gives every spiritual gift needed to grow and strengthen the church. That same God is at work right here, right now.

The Spirit distributes and assigns according to the Spirit's pleasure, and it is the Spirit who empowers the body of believers and orchestrates the concert of giftedness in the church. In verse 7, Paul writes that each one is given "a manifestation" of the Spirit, which simply put is an outwardly visible demonstration that the Holy Spirit is alive and kicking in your life.

Let the Spirit use you!

Here's the bottom line: Your gift is not better than someone else's. Your gift is actually not your gift. Every gift is poured out from the same Spirit, the same God, the same Lord. The gifts belong to God! In other words: Don't sweat the gift! But hear this: when you are open to the work of the Spirit of God in your life, watch out! You will be used powerfully to speak wisdom and knowledge into another's life. You will bring healing in the name of Jesus to someone who is broken. Your faith will grow and God will do powerful things through you that will build His body and edify the church in which you serve. The Holy Spirit is likely orchestrating right now an encounter with you and another person right here—maybe the person sitting next to you, someone in the Plaza, or your Sunday School class, kids—someone in your small group who needs to hear something from the Lord—or be prayed for or be encouraged ... and the Spirit wants you to deliver that gift today.

Let God use you!

The Body Of Christ

We are half-way through the 2022 Winter Olympics today. I hope you've been enjoying the competitions. Every time I watch the Olympics, I become aware of a sport I didn't know anything about. Let's hear it for the MONOBOB! One of my favorite events is the biathlon: skiing and shooting. What tremendous discipline it takes

to aim a rifle at a small target when your heart rate is going a million beats a minute because you've been skiing as fast as you can. I don't ski or shoot, but the Norwegians have the corner on this event. And I come from Norwegian heritage. So, I feel very connected to this event. I root for the Norwegians. These are my people.

Here is this worldwide event, under the unity of the Olympic rings. Underneath those rings is a variety of events, a diversity of athletic talent. Each event is so different, takes so much training, and each one is fascinating in how different it is from other events. And underneath that is the participation of nations, of people who come from different cultures, races, ethnicities. They are united by the event they are competing in. What I love about the Olympics, is the global diversity that is on display for all to see.

Perhaps it is a reminder to us that the body of Christ, orchestrated by the unity of the Spirit, brings different people together across global, national, cultural and racial lines to form one body, one church, who is serving the Lord in every corner of the world. We can't all be together in one place to worship as that is physically and geographically impossible. But we join the local expression of the global church where we live. This is where God forms us and uses us and grows us up. It is the Spirit's job to keep us all together in the global bonds of fellowship.

Here are the last two verses of our passage: "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Corinthians 12:12, 13).

The body of Christ has many parts. You are one of them. So am I. In Christ we are bound together in unity by the Spirit to be the church. Paul throws in just another little reminder (as he does throughout this letter)—that Christ has broken down the barriers and divisions between Jew and Gentile, slave and free (vs. 13). The body of Christ crosses all barriers—pulling us together in the name of Jesus.

Dr. MelindaJoy Mingo, pastor and Christian Leader here in our city, writes these words in her book, *The Colors of Culture: The Beauty of Diverse Friendships*:
"Our stories prove that although we are diverse in our perspectives and different from each other in very unique ways, our differences should not keep us from the things we have in common as followers of Christ and as human beings. We all experience joy and laughter, trials and triumphs, fear and trust, pain and disappointment. We ultimately become unified when we are willing to walk together, as uncomfortable as it might be,

and not allow barriers such as race and class to make us forget that we really do have a lot more in common with each other than we believe." In her book, Dr. Mingo encourages us to let the Spirit move us toward people who are different than us: those who have a different ethnicity, different cultural backgrounds, different gender, different economic situations. She exhorts us to follow the leading of Jesus and seek the Lord's work in each other's lives—and learn to listen across the differences, and to love one another with the love of Jesus.

Final Reflections

My husband, Adam, was in his late 20s and single when he started attending a church across town. The pastor noticed that he had started coming regularly and approached him one Sunday asking if he was available to serve in the church. Adam said, "Yes." His pastor told him they had a need for a teacher in the 4th and 5th grade Sunday School class the next semester, and would he be willing to step in. Now Adam had never taught children's Sunday School. He was fairly certain that if there was a gift set given to him by God, this was not in it. But he said "yes." It was hard work unlike anything he had ever done. He said, "I would teach the curriculum the director handed me and do my very best. And then I would spend the remainder of the class trying to keep up with the group. Every kid was in a different place: some were silent, some were talkative, some had no interest in being there. I have no idea how God used me that year, but I trust He did. I'm sure I didn't do a great job, but I said 'yes,' and I showed up each week."

Friends, God has poured out His gift and grace into our church and into your life. According to Paul no spiritual gift is lacking here. The only missing piece might be your "yes." The Spirit is alive and showing up through you—through the unique and beautiful way God has put you together. Nobody else can be you, except you!

Don't worry too much about what your gift might or might not be. Ask God (or Pastor Tim or Abi, our Volunteer Coordinator)—where do you need me to serve? And then give it a shot. Say yes. Dive in and get going.

The picture Paul leaves us with is this picture of baptism (vs. 13). Contemporary Greek scholars spoke of a ship submerged in water as being "baptized." The picture here is of being initiated, overwhelmed, immersed, surrounded. It gives off the image of a vast and deep ocean. In baptism we are submerged in the ocean of God's life and unity and love by the Holy Spirit. With that in mind, I leave you with this image today of a person jumping off a cliff into the ocean. Jump in! Say yes. Don't miss what God is doing through you right here in the body of Christ. Amen.