

[United] True Service: gifted for the common good

1 Corinthians 12

MPS: God gifts each Christian to serve in unity among the body for the growth and maturity of the whole body.

OBJ: Every Christian should serve to grow and mature the body because of three reasons.

INTRO In our series entitled UNITED: Together in the Gospel, a study of 1 Corinthians, we are laboring for one thing; to live as a people united in the gospel of Jesus Christ. **Unity fuels God's people for kingdom mission in the world.**

TRANS Today we consider "True Service: gifted for the common good" from 1 Corinthians 12. Spiritual gifts. **Are spiritual gifts only for the 'spiritual elite'? Are they only natural strengths, or are they something more from God? "How" are Christians to serve in the church? What benefit or value in serving?** These are the kind of issues we will address today. Exercising your gift to serve the church demonstrates God's grace upon your life in salvation.

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READ 1 Cor 12:1-3

Paul addresses spiritual gifts. In the first century people would often be associated with a plethora of gods. And, those who were especially "spiritual" were considered inhabited by the spirit of that idol and demonstrated a manifestation, often in a seizurish manner. These were known as "spiritual people".

? **What do you look for when you think of "spiritual people"?**

Paul distinguishes between the spirits to identify God's Holy Spirit. People who are inhabited by God's Holy Spirit have a distinct confession, "Jesus is Lord". There are many spirits. But only one testifies to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. When you serve a new Lord, you live under and are led by His Lordship. **People filled with God's Holy Spirit confess "Jesus is Lord" in word and deed.**

There are no spiritual elites in the church. All God's people are given grace and filled with the Spirit. And, each one provides a faithful testimony to Jesus as Lord through service. God designed the church to work by each Christian serving so that everyone can grow and mature. Every person in the church is dependent on the faithful exercise of each person's gifting for the whole. **God gifts every Christian by Holy Spirit for service in ministry in the church.**

TRANS **I want to share three reasons that every Christian should serve to grow and mature the body.**

I. ONE God – many gifts

Paul begins with the unity of the God who gives gifts. There is only one, true God. And He has many gifts that He gives to all His children.

READ 1 Cor 12:4-11

*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit, ⁵and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to 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. ¹¹All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. **1 Cor 12:4-11***

Paul shows the unity of the true God who gifts all His people. He begins by shifting from "spiritual" (.1) to "grace" (.4). Yes, all people are spiritual, as many purport in some sort of classification or status. This merely proves our need for God, that we were created 'by God for God'. And, there are many spirits, but not all are from God. We are commanded to test the

spirits to make sure that they are from God. (1 John 4) God doesn't just make a person spiritual. He created each person that way for a reason. [God demonstrates His grace in the world by filling His people with Holy Spirit to testify to Jesus' Lordship in word and deed.](#)

There are a variety of gifts (grace), service and activities, but one God sources all of them. A gift is a favor of God bestowed upon you. God's gift of grace to you reveals His spirit in you. A service is an assignment given to you. God's assignment to you demonstrates Jesus' Lordship over you. And an activity is an action or operation performed by you. God's work through you reveals His power working in you. The variety of gifts, service and activities all demonstrate God's Oneness, wholeness, and supreme nature over all other false gods. [God gifts His people to demonstrate the supreme glory of His Triune being.](#)

God's gifts serve His purpose, the common good of His people. God's gifts stand in stark contrast to false gods who gave the same gift to only a few people so they can elevate and glorify themselves among the masses. The Spirit of God works in every Christian in many different ways. But the purpose of spiritual gifts is not just for the one to whom the gift is given. Every gift given to each Christian is given for the good of the body. Spiritual gifts are not possessions to hold, but grace from God through which we bestow God's grace to others in serving. Spiritual gifts serve God's purpose when exercised to serve the good of all.

? **What's the difference between a natural ability and a spiritual gift?**

There are many gifts that serve many different purposes and can be applied in many different ways. But there is only one purpose for which they are given. The distinction between any ability and spiritual gift is made by who it serves. [God gifts His people with grace by Holy Spirit to testify in word and deed "Jesus is Lord"](#).

Reason #1: Every Christian should serve to grow and mature the body of Christ because God manifests His presence, power and His purpose among the body through service of spiritual gifts.

God gifts his people to serve His purposes among His people. When a Christian fails to exercise their gift among the body, there's a part of God's manifest presence missing from His people. ALL who confess "Jesus is Lord" are being 'worked in', 'worked over', and 'worked out' by the same God! God doesn't pick and choose favorites and only bless a few. He freely bestows his empowering grace (gift) on all. Gifts are not for the enjoyment or free exercise by the individual to whom they are given. The Spirit doesn't give gifts for one to use as you want in your strength. Gifts are not given for personal edification. "Common" means there must be a body for which the gift serves.

Paul lists some of the gifts. This list is not comprehensive, but identifies some to show what they are and what they are like. The point he makes is that Holy Spirit empowers all, and apportions to each one as he wills. Holy Spirit apportions the gifts because He best knows what the church needs, when and by whom the church needs it. Identifying and exercising your gift is an act of serving Jesus' kingdom work. [When we fail to exercise our gift\(s\), we deny Jesus' Lordship over our life by denying Holy Spirit work in our life.](#)

APPL "What", "how" or "where" you serve almost never remains the same for a lifetime. When you want to discover your gift and role in a church, consider the Lord's leading. Remember, there are a variety of gifts, assignment and activities. **Begin by asking "where am I needed?"** Focus your search on the common good, and your gift and service will work itself out. Serving almost never begins by looking at the church and asking "what can I do?", but by asking "what is needed?" God gives a variety of gifts, service and activities. He may want to give you a new gift, a new service or a new activity. [Serving that doesn't challenge you can't grow and mature you. Serving in the church begins with "what the common good needs."](#)

ILLUS I begin teaching my kids to drive in a parking lot. But, I'm not training them to drive in a parking lot. I'm training them to drive among all the nut-case tourists of Southwest Missouri.

APPL Consulting leadership, identifying needs and committing to the responsibility for that role will prove as one of the best strategies for personal growth and maturity.

One God, purpose and power; the Spirit gifts, the Lord ordains and the Father empowers. The One who gives is the One who empowers for His purpose. Each person of the Trinity is actively involved in one, united work. And Christians join God's united when we faithfully exercise our gifts among the body for the common good of the body. If you want to grow and mature as a Christian, then you need to exercise your gift among the body. **The greatest way for you to experience the whole work of God in the whole of your life is to identify your spiritual gift and put it into service in the church.**

TRANS God's purpose is that the church would reflect His nature in the world through the exercise of spiritual gifts.

II. ONE body – many members READ 1 Cor 12:12-26

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴ For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²² On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, ²⁴ which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, ²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Reason #2: Every Christian should serve to grow and mature the body of Christ because the body needs you and you need the body.

God designed the body to reflect Him. (.12, "so it is with Christ") Just as there is only one God, there is only one body. "One body" places priority on unity in the local church. The way the body works should reveal the One who is working in the body. And, the way the body works should reveal the One for whom the body works. God designed the body to live in the same unity demonstrated by His Triune nature between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **The unity of the one God who gives gifts reveals the unity desired among the members AS the body exercising the gifts.**

Two dangers threaten unity. First, no person can look at the body and say "they don't need me." **God arranges the body as He chooses.** (.18) Each member's "call" from the Lord 'for' the body is 'according to' the body, not 'from' another member of the body. No person should look at others in the body and measure or value themselves or their role for the body. God often brings glory by giving people an assignment of what they did not think they could do, so He can teach them to trust and depend upon Him through that assignment. **We honor God when we acknowledge His arrangement to live in unity among the body.**

? Have you looked at the body to find your place to serve, or are you saying "they don't need me"?

CLOSE Where are you today? Are you spiritual? ...wish you were? Does your life testify in word and deed 'Jesus is Lord'?

? Have you confessed the Lordship of Jesus Christ? THIS makes you a part of the body. THIS means you have recognized His gift, assignment and application among the body. Serving faithfully among the church body is the shortest distance between asking and discovering God's purpose for your life.

? Is your membership IN the body making the body more like Jesus?