Sermon Summary

Continuing in our current series, “Your God is Too…”, senior pastor Rich Nathan again approaches a commonly held false view of God. Many people see God like a negotiator who must be bartered with great sacrifice or a perspective employer who wants to see the best you portrayed before offering you a job. God is so often consciously or subconsciously seen as stingy. It is less common to see God as a super generous person who pours out gifts to kids, teens, 20-somethings, 30, 40, 50, 60, and 70+ year olds like the “Make-A-Wish Foundation” does for sick children.

Whether it is with our prayers or our wants and needs, his gifts, his grace, his forgiveness, his salvation, his spiritual gifts, his miracles, and his presence are all evidence that he is an incredibly generous God! Specifically, there are great reasons that God gives the spiritual gifts to the church. He gives them because he is, by nature, generous. He gives them because he loves to serve. And he gives them because it proves the invisible nature of the Kingdom of God.

Background and Context

The church that gathered in the city of Corinth during the time of Paul’s writing was very diverse. It was made up of former Jews, converts from the dominant pagan religions of Rome, rich people, poor people, slaves, free, etc. Converts from the pagan religions found it difficult to break their cultish habits and practices. Converts from Judaism found it difficult to enjoy the new freedom that Christians have in Jesus. This led to turmoil in how believers were caring for and treating one another. Some struggled with obedience, some struggled with passing judgment, some with understanding truth, while still others struggled with submission for the sake of the gospel. For these reasons, divisions began to arise regarding grace, the sacredness of the body, the journey of understanding/frailty of fellow Christians, marriage vows, and who is considered to be in God’s favor based on spiritual gifts.

Paul attempts to answer many of these questions, misunderstandings, and correct destructive behavior in his first letter to the church. One major topic Paul addresses related to misunderstanding involves spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit gives. It is likely that spiritual gifts were being given to believers all along the spectrum of obedience and understanding. Thus, the need for Paul to clarify! What should have led them to patience, purity, service and unity, instead contributed to their division. The Holy Spirit
distributes gifts to grow, edify, and bless the church as it partners with him to heal the world.

Pray

Introduction (Best practices tip: Be sure and let the room answer the questions you ask throughout the lesson. Don’t be afraid of silence while people think. Some of your best answers may come the longer you let the silence go!)

- When you think of people who have been generous to you in your life, who comes to mind? Could some of you share about some of the generosity you have received and maybe even some specific instances that come to mind? (Allow people to share)
- Why do you believe those people or that person was generous toward you? (Allow those same people to respond)
- Has any person ever done something for you that you did not expect or feel you deserved? (Allow people to answer-you may need to press in a bit here. Remind people that this is a safe place to share and that whatever is shared here will not be shared anywhere else.)
- Do any of us slip into thinking that we need to clean ourselves up before we ask God for something? How many of us think that God operates based on a balancing scale where he answers our prayer and gives us gifts by whether or not we do more good than bad? (Allow people to volunteer;) Do you think that most people believe this? Why or why not? (Allow people to answer. Perhaps mention the common belief in karma- what goes around comes around- whether they call it that or not.)
- We tend to think that God’s grace and forgiveness for us is just enough to cover our sins, but instead the salvation we find in Jesus overwhelms our sin, as if it were a single drop in a vast ocean. Have you ever felt as if you were getting close to running out of God’s grace? (Allow people to offer hands or nods of admission.) How does it make you feel to know that God’s grace is infinitely bigger than your sins? (Press again by asking, “How does it make you feel?”)
- Not only do we receive grace for our sins, but Christians get to experience God himself. Christian spirituality involves an experience of the Holy Spirit, where God makes a dynamic in-breaking into your life. Have you had an experience with the Spirit that you’d like to share? Where it felt like God was breaking in to your reality in a special way? (Allow people to share.)
- Today we are going to cover a passage that deals with God’s generosity particularly how God can dynamically break-in to our lives with an outpouring of spiritual gifts.
- Before reading this week’s scripture: What comes to mind when someone talks about spiritual gifts? Is the practice comfortable, uncomfortable, mysterious, wonderful? (Allow people to answer.)
- Does everyone know kind of what I am talking about when I mention “spiritual gifts”? (If no one is that familiar, then say, “Great! We’ll read about some of them right now!”)

This Week’s Bible Study
( Have a volunteer or two read the verses when they come up in the study. It may help to read them twice aloud.)

1 Corinthians 12:1-14

Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. 2 You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. 3 Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. 7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

12 Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. 13 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. 14 Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.”

Study & Discuss

1) Have you ever felt like an unlikely candidate to receive spiritual gifts? Why?
(Allow people to share. Unworthy, uncomfortable with them, unsure of how they all work, etc.)

2) What are the gifts that the Holy Spirit distributes according to this passage?

(Allow people to share. Message of wisdom, message of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues.)

3) Do all these sound “spiritual” to you? What gifts sound “less” spiritual than others?

(Allow people to share. Wisdom, knowledge, and faith/belief don’t necessarily sound ultra spiritual. Perhaps ask the follow up question, “Does that adjust how you feel about being included as a possible recipient of spiritual gifts?”)

4) Why does God give these gifts to the people who follow him?

(Varying answers. Vs 7 says specifically that they are given for the “common good.”)

5) Does it bother you that God may give spiritual gifts to someone who is not as far along in their path of obedience as you believe you are?

(Allow this to sit for awhile. We want people to think about this one.)

6) Do you want to do things that improve the common good like verse 7 says? How much would you risk to do good for the people you live with, rub shoulders with, and run into randomly?

(You may want to park here for a bit and flush out what is the biggest barrier for people asking for many spiritual gifts. Ask questions like: What is your biggest fear if God gave you gifts of prophecy? What is your biggest fear if you spoke in angelic tongues or could heal someone if they asked? — People could fear being successful only some of the time. In other words, the power residing with God gives us less control of the gift.)

7) Would you risk praying for healing for 39 people in a row without seeing healing to see it happen the 40th time?

(Allow people to answer. If the room is silent, say, “This is not a hypothetical question. Would YOU risk that?”)
8) Are there any spiritual gifts that you have experienced that you’d like to share?

(Allow people to share. If you have some, you may want to share first.)

9) Are there any of these gifts that you would like to experience or have?
Read through the list starting in verse 7 and ending in 11. Which ones would you like and why?

(Allow people to share.)

Ministry Time
We have a couple of options for this week:

Do an encouragement circle. This is where you spend time speaking encouragement over each person in your group. You want to focus on gifts and strengths you see in each other. You can even give your group a heads up that you will be doing this and let people take time to write things down. Sometimes this can take a long time if each person in the group encourages every member. You can shorten it by doing it popcorn style where 3-5 people share about each member. Tip: do a voice memo for everyone and send it to them afterwards! It can be really encouraging to go back to.

Pray for spiritual gifts to be released in people. Break down in 2s or 3s and ask each person what gifts they would like to receive. (Some lists in the scriptures are in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12:4-8, Ephesians 4:11-13 & 1 Peter 4:8-11. These lists are not exhaustive – they are just a jumping off point! God gives all kinds of skills and gifts for the furthering of his kingdom!)

A quick word regarding the first question in the study:

If when you asked question 1, “Have you ever felt like an unlikely candidate to receive spiritual gifts? Why?” there was a lot shared, then you may want to be sensitive to this and do the following during ministry time:

• Pray for each of those in your group who may have answered “yes” that they would experience God’s presence and grace and begin to discover their own spiritual giftings.