

Traditionally they have been called “child prodigies.” Although educators often label them as “gifted and talented.” They are young people blessed with unbelievable intelligence, or amazing artistic talents, or seemingly unnatural physical abilities. We have all heard stories about a twelve-year-old graduating from medical school, or a six-year-old playing concert worthy classical music on the piano. Examples of child prodigies would include Mozart who learned to play the piano at the age of four. He composed his first pieces of music at five and at age eight, he wrote his first symphony. Another example would be Pablo Picasso who had already become an accomplished and renowned painter in his teenage years. In more recent history many of you have probably seen the video of Tiger Woods as a two-year-old on the Tonight Show hitting golf balls. Seven years ago a young man named Michael Kearney received national attention when he earned a \$1,000,000 on the television game show “Who Wants to be a Millionaire?” He too was a “child prodigy.” Michael finished high school at age 6 and earned his first college degree at age 10. He actually began teaching college by the age of 17. He spoke his first words when he was four months old. At the age of six months, he said to his pediatrician, “I have a left ear infection.” He had learned to read at the age of ten months. When Michael was four, he was given diagnostic tests for the Johns Hopkins precocious math program and achieved a perfect score.

Although their stories astound us, such gifted individuals are very rare. They are the exception to the rule as we say. The vast majority of us are astoundingly average. And yet as I look at you today I can say with confidence that each of you is gifted. Before you deny being gifted remember that I am not the one saying you are gifted. God says it of you and God cannot lie. You are Gifted To Serve!

Perhaps I am stating the obvious when I say that any intellectual, artistic, musical, or athletic abilities that a child has are gifts. No child prodigy decided to be born a genius, an artist, or an athletic superstar. Yes, it is true that people like Mozart, Picasso, and Tiger Woods had parents that helped them develop their gifts but clearly they were gifted at birth with abilities above and beyond those of the average person. God blessed them with incredible genes.

In a similar way none of us can take credit for being gifted in the area of spiritual things. Like other people born after the Fall into sin we were born dead in sin, blind to spiritual truth, and enemies of God. But God the Holy Spirit changed all that. Through the Gospel in Word and Sacraments we were led to believe in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Our faith in Jesus is evidence that the Holy Spirit lives in us and that we are gifted people. Our text says, “No man can say Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Spirit.”

If a child is a prodigy, they have certain skills to identify them. They have above average problem solving skills, they have exceptional vocabulary, they learn quickly, they have a vivid imagination, they read a lot. But how do you know if you are gifted spiritually? No series of tests is required. You and I don’t even wonder if we are gifted. Because we believe in Jesus as our Savior, we have been given the gift of faith. And Because the Holy Spirit has created faith in our hearts, we have been also given spiritual gifts for serving others. The Holy Spirit has given each of us at least one gift if not more to use in service to others.

So what are spiritual gifts? They are special abilities given by the Holy Spirit for the upbuilding of Christ’s church. They are not talents. Unbelievers have talents. Let me explain so you can understand. Justin Timberlake is a songwriter and singer. He

lives in Hollywood, California. As far as I know he is still a non-Christian. He has talent in writing and singing. But let's say the Holy Spirit brings him to faith in Christ. Most likely, He has the gift of serving. Serving in the area of singing. You might say the Holy Spirit reprograms that talent from making money off that voice and only furthering his own goals, to using that voice to glorify God. Now Justin Timberlake sings at Open Bible when he is in town with our choir. The lyrics of his songs have a more Christian basis. And Justin gives generously of his income for the work of Christ's church. He has the spiritual gift of serving, in the area of music.

Remember too, that spiritual gifts are different than responsibility. We all have the responsibility to tell others about Jesus, to show concern and mercy to hurting people around us, and to give generously to support the work of the church. But there may indeed be people who have a special knack in those areas, such as evangelism, showing mercy, and giving.

What we need to remember too, is that each gift is just as important as another gift. The Corinthians had elevated the spiritual gift of Tongue-speaking to a point, where if you only had the gift of serving, you were like a 2nd class citizen. The Corinthians felt you had not arrived spiritually. You were not as gifted as another person. Likewise at Open Bible, we need to be careful that if someone has the gift of leadership, and is on the church council at Open Bible, he is no better or more important than someone who has the gift of serving and is fixing snacks for us after the services.

So what are the spiritual gifts I may have right now? Remember, the list here in Corinthians is not the complete list. Spiritual gifts are also found in Romans. How about speaking in tongues. As far as I can tell the tongue speaking mentioned in Acts chapter 2 is a definite foreign language that the person didn't study before in school. This gift was vitally needed in the early church to spread the Gospel. The Bible gives no ending date on this gift, so I can't say its impossible for someone not to have the gift today. However, what is interesting, is that as time went on, in the New Testament, only those with the gift of being an apostle had the gift of tongue speaking. Today, the gift of apostle is no more, since people today, have no physical contact with the visible Christ. Plus, as we mentioned, the Corinthians were chewed out with the tongue speaking they were doing in I Corinthians 14. One of my concerns with the tongue speaking today is that people are taught they must follow a set of conditions to be able to speak in tongues. People are taught that they need to be baptized by immersion, be obedient to Christ for a period of time, have a fervent faith, and pray for the gift of tongues. But what does it say in our text in verse 11: "All these are the work of the one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines." Whatever spiritual gift you have, you just need to figure it out, it does not say that you need to follow a bunch of rules to get the gift.

Let's take a look at these gifts. Figure out as I go along, what gift or gifts you have. The gift of serving: You are someone who works in any supportive role, executing the commands of others. Next is the gift of giving. While we all have the responsibility to support the work of Christ's church, you are someone who is extremely generous to help out others with your finances. If there is some financial need in the church or some other charity, you are ready and willing to contribute. The gift of Leadership: You make sure that a certain task that needs to be done is done correctly by others. You oversee a project. The Gift of Administration. You are someone who organizes a

project, delegates out duties, and motivates others to get a task done. The gift of Showing Mercy. You feel genuine compassion for someone who is suffering and you do deeds of kindness to alleviate that suffering. That may mean, sending cards, taking them to the doctor, getting them groceries, or just being there to help them in whatever way possible. The Gift of Faith. Now we have already talked about justifying faith. We all have that in Jesus. But someone may have the spiritual gift of a faith that moves mountains. This person is an eternal optimist. They are visionaries. They know that with God all things are possible. This person would be great for a planning committee at church. The gift of evangelist. Again, while we are all called to share our faith in Jesus, some people just have a knack to tell people the good news about Jesus. The gift of Pastor-Teacher. This person has the ability to feed, guide and guard the flock of God. The gift of Teaching. To explain clearly and apply effectively the truth of God's Word. This person might be blessed to either teach adults or children. The Gift of Exhortation: This Christian can give you counsel to handle problems in life. They bring words of comfort, consolation and counsel. The Gift of Wisdom. This person can relate and apply Bible truths to everyday problems in life. What a great person to have in Bible class. The Gift of Knowledge. This person can understand the great teachings God has hidden in his Word. The Gift of Intercession. We all are called to pray, but this person has a special love for prayer, and regularly brings petitions and supplications before God. The gift of hospitality. This person really goes out of their way to make you feel welcome and special when you are around them. I usually can tell who has this gift, when I come over for a visit, and the person is asking me if I would like something to drink, and then puts out some little goodies for me to eat as well. The gift of Shepherding: This person is able to watch over a group of people, and make sure that they are being fed spiritually, and if straying able to speak with them in Christian love. A person who leads a small group would be one who this gift would be a real blessing too. There I have mentioned the gifts. Do You know which one or ones you have?

If you do some research on child prodigies or gifted and talented children you will find one common problem that most of them experience. Gifted children are often bored in school or with life in general. Very often they are never challenged to use their gifts and so they waste them. I believe the same thing happens to many Christians. Their gifts go unused because they are never challenged or asked to put their gifts to use. I am asking every one of you right now to look honestly at yourself, find your spiritual gift or gifts, and put it or them to use in service to others.

It is so easy for us to make excuses. I am too busy. I am too old. I've done enough in the church over the years. But wait, Jesus didn't say, I am too busy to serve you. I am too old, been around since eternity. I've already done enough for these people. No Jesus was the example to us all of a humble servant. A servant who keeps on giving to us. Let us then follow in our master's footsteps.

"You are gifted!" Did you ever think someone would say that about you? Perhaps your reactions would be, "Who, me, gifted? I don't think so!" Well, God says it about you. He says you are gifted. You may not be able to play music like Mozart, paint like Picasso, or use a golf club like Jordan Spieth.

But, nonetheless, you are gifted. The Holy Spirit has given you the gift of faith. And since he has given you the gift of faith you can be certain the Holy Spirit has also given you gifts for serving others. Gifted To Serve! Let that be our mantra! Amen.