

Show Up

Romans 12:1-8

(Discussion guide on last page)

In the context of summarizing a church service, how many of you have heard the phrase, “God showed up?” Based on the perception of a powerful church service, one might say, God showed up. Or when asked how the service went, a Pastor might similarly reply, “God really showed up.”

I want to suggest to you that when we use language like this, although we may be speaking of an actual powerful move of God, what we may be inadvertently conveying to others is a wrong idea of how God’s presence is revealed in the gathering of His people. Under the Old Covenant, God’s presence in the form of a cloud, did “show up” in the temple and filled the atmosphere. But under the New Covenant, believers are the temple of the Spirit of God. When Spirit-filled believers gather for worship, we don’t enter the presence of God, we bring with us the presence of God.

In his book, *Transforming Presence*, Daniel Henderson recounted a time when he heard a pastor say, “God really showed up in our services last week.” Although he knew instinctively what the pastor meant, Daniel Henderson writes: “Apart from my internal reinterpretation of his comment, I wondered, “Where was God before He decided to ‘show up?’ How do you know He showed up?” How do we biblically judge a ‘show up’ service versus a ‘no show’ gathering? Is there any New Testament verse to verify this description?”

The answer to his question is, no. The Holy Spirit isn’t hiding somewhere else in the building or outside the building waiting for someone to invite Him to show up. The Holy Spirit makes Christ known in and through our surrendered lives.

“The question, says Daniel Henderson, is not whether the Holy Spirit works in overwhelming ways at times—He does. The question is how does this happen and why? Our answer must be a clear gospel answer—not one taken exclusively from old covenant incidences, or

traditional phrases we've perpetuated. We must use biblical language to describe a biblical work. This will clear the confusion, align our expectations, and set us on a course for something very powerful according to the New Testament plan of God for our lives and churches."

Main idea: God shows up when Spirit-filled Christians show up to be a blessing to others.

In our message, we are going to see some key principles about the way spiritual gifts function in the church so that Christ is seen, heard, and glorified and believers are edified.

1. Gifts are discerned as we surrender to God

Do you know what your specific spiritual gift is? If you're not sure, do you care to know what it is? I could be wrong, but it seems to me believers today show little interest in knowing and exercising their spiritual gifts. I believe there are several reasons for this, namely individualism, consumerism and extremism.

On the one hand, many view church as a place you visit to gain points with God or to get a good feeling or to receive some spiritual guidance. Many don't come to serve, but only to be served.

On the other hand, in some churches there seems to be an over emphasis on exercising spiritual gifts, especially the more sensational kind. This happened in the Corinthian church, which Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians 12-14.

Many in the church were seeking the gifts of the Spirit, like speaking in an unknown tongue, but were not prioritizing the pursuit of love. And because their priorities were off and love was not governing the exercise of the gifts, things got out of order in the church. Instead of the gifts becoming a way to serve the body of Christ, they became the measure of one's spirituality, which again, was creating disorder.

People were speaking in unknown languages without anyone to interpret. Consequently, the aim of spiritual gifts, namely to edify others, missed the mark, which led to further confusion in the church.

How many of you know, these kinds of unbiblical practices are still taking place today? As a result, not only are many getting the wrong impression of the purpose of spiritual gifts, in some cases, they're being repelled by them. In other words, rather than their gifts displaying the power and presence of God, and compelling others to draw closer to the Lord, they are causing people to think that if "weird" is a mark of being spiritual, than I rather stay the way I am.

To genuinely experience the power and presence of God as a church body, we must avoid individualism, consumerism and extremism. And instead, as Paul exhorted the church in 1 Corinthians 14:1, we must: *"Pursue love, and earnestly desire spiritual gifts..."*

So, with this in mind, how do we discover our specific spiritual gifts? The first principle I want us to consider this morning is that spiritual gifts are discerned as we surrender to the Lord.

As Paul transitioned from teaching extensively on the doctrine of salvation, to putting one's salvation into practice, He writes beginning in Romans 12:1, *"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."*

We will also see in a moment that in verses 4-8 Paul gets into the practice of spiritual gifts. But before he does, notice that he first makes an appeal, in view of the mercies of God, for believers to present their bodies as a living sacrifice. That is, to consecrate their lives to God.

Last week we saw that many today are praying for the Spirit of God to descend upon them or to rain down upon them. I'm all for praying for the Spirit to powerfully work in us and through us. But praying for the

Spirit to rain down may give the impression that what we need in order to display the presence of God is more of the Spirit.

When in actuality, if you're saved, the Spirit is already inside of you. And if He's already inside of you, what you need is not more of the Holy Spirit, but for the Holy Spirit to get more of you. And as we more fully consecrate our lives to God, and are transformed by the renewing of our minds, we will discern, Paul says, "*what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*"

What compels us to consecrate our lives and yield control to the Holy Spirit? Remember, Paul made his appeal to the church to present their bodies as a living sacrifice by the "mercies" of God. That is, because Christ took our sin on the cross, in addition to **not** getting what we deserve, namely eternal judgment, we've been given the privilege to forever give our lives in service to God as an act of worship.

The more we are in awe of the mercies of God bestowed upon us at Christ's expense, the more fully we will give our hearts to the Lord. Our prayer lives, for example, will not be about how God can accommodate our lifestyles, but about giving all of ourselves to accommodate God's purposes and plans.

We will not discern the will of God, including our spiritual gifts, if we're full of ourselves, or our own agendas or the ways of the world. This is why in addition to consecrating our lives to God, Paul also wrote: "*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...*"

Beloved, to have the ability to discern and desire the good and perfect will of God, in addition to consecration, there must be cultivation. That is to say, our hearts and our minds must be continually cleansed and shaped by the Spirit of God as we immerse ourselves in the word. We become what we behold.

When we behold Christ through the Spirit and our being transformed into His likeness, others around us will behold Christ in our lives. Outsiders coming into a gathering of believers should encounter the

presence of God because believers are being transformed into His likeness and serving with His power.

2. Gifts are distributed by the sovereignty of God

Secondly, spiritual gifts are distributed by the sovereignty of God. After exhorting believers not to be conformed to the world, but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds, Paul continues in verse 3, *“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”*

In order for our lives to be transformed so that we might discern the will of God and display the glory of God, we must have an accurate assessment of ourselves. If we are proud and think too highly of ourselves, we will quench the Spirit of God. To think too highly of ourselves is to think that we don't need others to grow in faith.

To think too highly of ourselves is to be self-confident. It's thinking that we know it all or can do it all in our own strength. Again, this prideful view of oneself will quench the Spirit of God who makes the power and presence of God known in and through our lives.

But on the other hand, to think humbly and rightly about ourselves does not mean that we should have no confidence at all. We should never say to ourselves, God could never use me. To think so would be to diminish the transforming power of the Spirit in us.

We all have distinct gifts that God has distributed to us by His Spirit and according to His wisdom. And we are all to use our God-given gifts according to the measure of faith God has also given to each of us. We don't all have the same gifts, nor the same capacity to use those gifts, but we all have something to contribute to make Christ known as we serve the body of Christ.

3. Gifts are displayed as we serve the body

Lastly, spiritual gifts are displayed as we serve the body. After exhorting the believers in Rome to embrace a New Covenant view of themselves, Paul continues: “*For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function,⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*” Romans 12:4-5

Beloved, if we are going to fully experience the presence and power of Christ in this local church, we all have a part to play. God’s word teaches us here that like a physical body has a variety of parts and those parts have different functions, so too does the church, the body of Christ.

Furthermore, verse 5 explains that like the various parts of the body work in conjunction with each other, believers should also function interdependently in the service of Christ. In other words, as we cooperatively exercise our God given gifts through the Spirit, while being governed by the love of Christ, we show the world that we are one body in Christ. We display a unity that show cases the beauty and wonder of Christ’s transforming presence and power in our lives.

Notice that when also teaching on the gifts of the Spirit, Paul writes to the Corinthian church: “*To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7). A spiritual gift is more than a talent someone is born with, like a singing ability. It’s a special grace from God that displays something of the beauty and power of Christ.*

In church circles, we often hear the phrase “manifest presence.” We pray, for example, for the *manifest presence* of God in the church service. Although the concept is found in the New Testament, the phrase *manifest presence* itself is not found in the New Testament. The closest thing to it is found in 1 Corinthians 12:7, which refers to *the manifestation of the Spirit*.

And again, in context, the manifestation of the Spirit is in reference to the gifts of the Spirit operating in the believer.

But how many of us when we hear the phrase *manifest presence* are thinking of the gifts of the Spirit being exercised by all in the body of Christ?

“In the original language, the word *manifest* means to make apparent, present or evident to the experiences or senses.” Daniel Henderson.

According to 1 Corinthians 14:24-25, when the gifts of the Spirit are being exercised in a biblical way, it is evident, even to unbelievers, that God is really among us.

As Daniel Henderson explained: “Regardless of what you believe about certain gifts, one thing is clear here. Manifest presence is not the mystery we have made of it. It is about a commitment to mutual ministry where many parts of the body contribute to the glory of Christ by allowing the Spirit to use them in building up one another. This is new covenant manifest presence.”

Is it possible that the glory of Christ’s presence and power is not being fully known in our midst because we are looking for it in the wrong place? Because we are looking for it in the atmosphere, or in a concert style performance, or in the talents of men, rather than in the cooperative and selfless service of God’s people practiced in dependence upon the Spirit, and for the glory of Christ.

Stephen Um put it this way: “If Christians are not exercising and using their particular gifts, whatever they might be, for the common good, they are depriving the rest of the body. They are withholding and being stingy with their gifts. Every Christian has a responsibility to bless the rest of the community with his or her gift matrix or gift mix. Many tend to think, “I can’t bless anyone,” but Paul says, “Of course you can! Because *to each is given...*”

Now you may be thinking to yourself, “I understand that every believer has a spiritual gift that he/she is to exercise in cooperation with others, but I don’t know what my gifts are.”

Notice that Paul continues in verse 6: *“Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.”* Romans 12:4-8

We see here and in 1 Corinthians 12:7 that Paul exhorts all believers to use their gifts, which are the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. The manifestation of the Spirit becomes evident as we use our spiritual gifts in service and in accordance with our faith.

And just like others will not see the power and presence of God in your life unless you step out in faith and begin to serve, neither will you know His power and presence in your own life apart from serving. Peter knew he could walk on water by the power of God because by faith He stepped off the boat and out of His comfort zone.

We don't discover our gifts sitting on the side lines or by taking a survey. Rather, spiritual gifts are discovered in service.

Concerning the discovering of our gifts, Sam Storms explains, “The next time you're in church or in a small group, or just hanging out with other believers, pause momentarily and ask: Is anyone physically hurt or suffering from chronic pain? If so, take your hands out of your pockets, lay them on your brother or sister and pray for God's healing power. Is anyone you know distraught or discouraged? Are some finding life too frustrating to bear? If so, take them out for a cup of coffee and listen to their story. They just want someone who cares enough to spend a few minutes with them. Just listen to them. Then love them. Is anyone struggling financially with few prospects to get them out of the hole? Do something courageous. Give them your last \$50 and trust God to supply your need. Do you know people who are confused about some verse of scripture they just read in their devotional time? Perhaps you're just as befuddled as they are. Study a bit. Then sit down with your friend(s) and put your heads (and hearts together) and pray for the Spirit to shed light on your thinking.

Is anyone struggling with sin? (Well, of course they are!). Offer to pray for them. But before you do, sit quietly together and ask the Lord to guide your thoughts and speak words of wisdom to your soul. If you sense something, or a thought comes to mind, share it with them. It might be the key that opens the door to their hearts and brings freedom from bondage. Does the person you just prayed for report struggling with paralyzing shame, virtually bombarded on a daily basis by accusing thoughts and self-contempt? If so, speak the Word of God over him or her with authority. In the name of Jesus Christ, [pray that if any demonic spirits are at work, for God to rebuke them and set the person free]. Pray for this person to be filled afresh with the Holy Spirit. Do you know anyone overwhelmed by the clutter in their garage and that ever-increasing mountain of dirty laundry? Offer to spend a Saturday with them, helping out, picking up, washing, drying, folding and putting away clothes.

None of this sounds especially spectacular. (Well, maybe some of it does.) So, what am I getting at with these questions? Simply this: If we spend less time searching to identify our spiritual gift(s) and more time actually praying and giving and helping and teaching and serving and exhorting those around us, the likelihood greatly increases that we will walk headlong into our gifting without ever knowing what happened. God will more likely meet us with His gifts in the midst of trying to help His children than He ever would while we're taking a spiritual gifts analysis test.

So, look for a need and meet it. Find a hurt and heal it. Be alert to the cry for help and answer it. Listen for the voice of God and speak it. Identify someone's weakness and overcome it. Look for what's missing and supply it. When you do, the power of God—the energizing, enabling, [spiritual] activity of the Holy Spirit— will equip you, perhaps only once, but possibly forever, to minister hope and encouragement to those in need. So, if you're still wondering what your gift(s) might be, act first, and ask later.”

Recently, I read an article that recorded what a professional hockey coach said about his team to the press: "Tonight was a close hockey game," said the coach, "but we didn't show up. We didn't play hard

enough. We didn't compete hard enough. All we did was yap at the linesmen for getting thrown out."

Like this hockey coach, I want to suggest to you that rather than wondering if God will show up when we come to a church gathering, we need to focus on whether we are showing up. That is to say, we need to show up with the right heart, motives and expectations. We need to show up with a heart that is surrendered to the Spirit already present within us and prepared to respond to what the Spirit is revealing to the church. Moreover, we need to show up not only ready to respond to what the Spirit is revealing to our hearts, but also seeking for the Spirit to work through us to be a blessing to others.

Conclusion

How many of you want to see the manifest presence of God in your life and in the life of the church? I believe it's right, good, and necessary for us to pray for the manifest presence of God. But let's pray believing that God is not stingy with His presence and power. That the presence of God is not hiding somewhere in the building waiting for us to invite Him into the room. If you're saved, the transforming presence of the Spirit is in you. And His primary aim is to make Christ known in and through our surrendered lives.

God is not holding back on us. He desires for the manifestation of His Spirit to be the consistent experience of believers gathered together under the banner of Christ. God shows up when Spirit-filled Christians show up to serve others by the grace and mercy of Christ and to the glory of His name.

Discussion Guide

Is it important to use biblical language to describe a biblical work of the Spirit in the church? Why or why not?

How is the presence of God experienced in the gathering of His people? (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:7, 14:24-25)

What are some keys to discovering your Spiritual gift? What does faith have to do with it? (Romans 12:1-3)

What is the biblical purpose and motivation for the practice of Spiritual gifts? (Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:7; 1 Corinthians 14:12-13)

What would you consider an unbiblical use of spiritual gifts? (1 Corinthians 14:23)

Do you know what your gift is? How can you know? What's the first step? (Romans 12:1-3)