Summary of Rev. Jonathan Murray's Sermon: "The Gift Inside You"

Part of the series **Cultivating a Life in Christ.**

Rev. Jonathan Murray focused on the idea that stewardship is about more than money or possessions. It also includes the spiritual gifts, abilities, and qualities that God has placed within each person. These gifts are not meant for personal recognition or status but are entrusted to believers so that God's grace can be made visible in the lives of others.

Drawing from **1 Corinthians 12 and 13**, Paul's response to the church in Corinth addressed a congregation divided by competition and pride over spiritual gifts. Rather than elevating certain gifts above others, Paul taught that all gifts come from the same Spirit and are given for the benefit of the whole community. Everyone has a role to play, and every gift matters.

A central theme of the sermon was that many of God's most important gifts appear ordinary. Rev. Murray highlighted examples such as:

- Making a newcomer feel welcome.
- Calling someone who has been absent.
- Writing a note of encouragement.
- Sitting with someone who is grieving.
- Using practical skills to meet a neighbor's need.

He explained that the Greek word *charismata* (gifts) is rooted in *charis* (grace), emphasizing that spiritual gifts are expressions of God's grace rather than rewards, achievements, or signs of spiritual superiority. God works through different people in different ways, often through simple acts of kindness and service.

Rev. Murray illustrated this with stories of:

- A woman whose gift of hospitality and attentiveness helped a grieving visitor feel a sense of belonging and ultimately remain connected to the church community.
- A retired man whose ability to repair a broken handrail became ministry when he used that skill to help an elderly neighbor safely reconnect with her community.

The sermon challenged the congregation to focus less on filling church positions and more on cultivating the gifts God has already planted within people. Like seeds, gifts often begin unnoticed but contain remarkable potential when recognized, encouraged, and given opportunities to grow.

Finally, Rev. Murray emphasized that Paul’s famous teaching on love in 1 Corinthians 13 is inseparable from the discussion of spiritual gifts. No matter how extraordinary a gift may seem, without love it misses its purpose. Conversely, ordinary actions become extraordinary expressions of God's grace when offered in love.

Key Takeaways

- Every person has gifts from God.
- Gifts are given for the common good, not personal importance.
- Many spiritual gifts appear in everyday acts of kindness, service, welcome, and encouragement.
- The church has a responsibility to help people discover and cultivate their gifts.
- Love gives meaning and purpose to every gift.
- When individuals use their gifts in service to others, God's grace becomes visible and the whole community benefits.

Core message: God has placed unique gifts inside every person. The call of Christian discipleship is to recognize those gifts, cultivate them, encourage them in others, and use them in love so that God's grace can be experienced by the wider community.

Transcript

Sermon Series: Cultivating a Life Rooted in Christ - Gift Inside You

Our second scripture reading follows our first in First Corinthians chapter 12. We'll pick up at verse 27.

You are Christ's body. That's who you are. You must never forget this. Only as you accept your part of that body does your part mean anything. You're familiar with some of the parts that God has formed in his church, which is his body: apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, healers, helpers, organizers, those who pray in tongues. But it's obvious by now, isn't it, that Christ's church is a complete body and not a gigantic unidimensional part. It's not all apostle, not all prophet, not all miracle worker, not all healer, not all prayer in tongues, not all interpreter of tongues. And yet some of you keep competing for so-called important parts. But now I want to lay out a far better way for you. If I speak with human eloquence, an angelic ecstasy, but don't love, I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate. If I speak God's Word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain jump, and it jumps, but I don't love, I'm nothing. If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere.

This is the Word of the Lord. God is still speaking.

So we're in this sermon series entitled Cultivate a Life in Christ. And in a word, this series is about stewardship. Stewardship is really about how we use everything that God has made and entrusted to us. It's how we use our bodies, our relationships, our money, how we care for the world around us, every aspect of living. And today we turn our attention to something that we don't always recognize as part of stewardship, the gifts that God has placed inside each of us.

Paul's letter to the church at Corinth was prompted by internal struggles and conflicts threatening the body of Christ. Now Paul was about 150 miles away in Ephesus when he learned of the Corinthian splintered factions within the church. Now as best we can tell, First Presbyterian Church of Corinth was not a large congregation. Some scholars suggest that they had as few as 30 members. But it was like no church you've ever heard of in terms of the problems they were having. Or it was like every church you've ever heard of.

And for starters, they were fighting over who had the most important spiritual gifts. Some had the gift of speaking in tongues, but to prove that they had it, and others didn't, they turned Sunday morning worship into something like a talent show. People would get up and perform, and other, ooh, ah, holy spirits really got all the gold of that one. They were arguing over who baptized them. Some apparently got this idea that if they were baptized by

someone really important, it kind of raised their baptism up a notch. I can almost imagine them walking around with their baptismal certificates saying, see who signed mine? Peter, the disciple who was given the keys to the kingdom, had to see if I could then see someone else respond in, well, so what? I was baptized by Paul, founder of this congregation, the one who taught Peter theology. And then another would say, well, I was baptized by Apollos, greatest preacher ever. They were fighting about communion. They were fighting about marriage. They were fighting about food, offered to idols. They were even fighting whether Jesus had been raised from the dead. But other than that, things were going just fine at First Presbyterian Church of Corinth.

Now, Paul couldn't immediately return to address these problems, so fortunately for us, he wrote a letter. And we get to hear Paul's words speaking to us today. And in Chapter 12, Paul confronts their spiritual superiority complex. He reminds them that God's various gifts, ministries, and expressions of power all originate in the same spirit. And Eugene Peterson translates the Greek as each person is giving something to do that shows who God is. Everyone gets in on it. Everyone benefits. Everyone gets in on it. Everyone benefits. That is the heart of what Paul wants to church to understand. We often think of gifts as extraordinary ability, something that sets a person apart. We think of musicians who can make an instrument sing. We think of teachers who can make a classroom come alive, or leaders who inspire people to accomplish something they never imagined possible. And yes, those are gifts.

But what about the person who notices when someone was missing from worship and makes a phone call? What about the person who makes a newcomer feel like they've been part of the church family for years? What about the person who quietly repairs something broken, prepares a meal, writes a card, or simply sits beside someone who is grieving? What do you think? Are those gifts? Absolutely. And Paul agrees. The Greek word Paul uses for gifts is charismata, especially like that word, because the root of that word is charis. Which means grace. Our gifts are expressions of God's grace. They aren't rewards for being faithful. They aren't evidence that God loves one person more than another. They certainly aren't badges of spiritual superiority. They are gifts of grace freely given. And Paul isn't talking only about what gift people possess. Paul's talking about what God is doing through them.

Another Greek word that Paul uses is energibmata, meaning activities or workings. It's where we get our word energy. And Paul's point is that God is actively at work through different people in different ways, accomplishing different things. Sometimes through remarkable abilities, sometimes through ordinary acts of kindness. And even sometimes through something we don't even recognize as a gift.

Imagine a woman within a congregation who has attended worship faithfully for years. She doesn't sing in the choir. She doesn't teach Sunday school. She doesn't serve as an elder. And she doesn't lead a committee. But every Sunday, she arrives a little bit early. She notices who is sitting alone. She remembers people's names. She asks about someone's surgery or how a grandchild is doing in school. And one Sunday, a man who recently lost his wife visits for the first time. He sits toward the back. The woman notices him, introduces herself, asks if he'd like someone to sit with him. They talk for a few minutes after worship. The next Sunday, he's back. And the Sunday after that, months later, he tells someone I didn't think I would keep coming. But that first Sunday, somebody noticed me. Somebody made me feel like I belong. Now, the woman who welcomed him still insists she doesn't have any special gifts. What would you call it? I would call it the grace of God becoming visible through an ordinary human interaction. That's ministry. She didn't need a title. She didn't need a position. She didn't even have an awareness of her spiritual gift. She simply allowed something that God cultivated within her to become a blessing to someone else. What if the very thing that we consider ordinary about ourselves is exactly what God uses to make God's grace visible and bless someone else?

Now, Paul describes this variety of gifts, wisdom and knowledge and faith and healing and prophecy and discernment. But his larger point is that the spirit distributes different gifts to different people. And that's intentional because he talks about it in terms of for the common good. God doesn't give us gifts to swell our sense of self. God doesn't give us gifts to make us feel superior. God gives us gifts because someone else needs what God has placed within us. Your gift is exactly what someone else needs to experience God's grace.

Consider a retired man who spent much of his life fixing things. He's good with his hands. He can repair a leaking faucet. He can replace a broken hinge. He can correct a door that doesn't close properly. He doesn't consider it a spiritual gift. It's just what I know how to do, he says. But one day he learns that an older neighbor has a broken handrail on the steps leading to her front door. She's afraid to leave her house. Why? Because she may fall. So he goes over with fuel tools and he repairs it. It takes him an afternoon. Simple repair for him. But for her, it means she can safely leave her house. She can go to the grocery store. She can visit friends. She can remain connected to her community. Was that carpentry? Yes. Was it ministry? Yes. Because the gift wasn't simply the ability to repair the handrail. It's the willingness to use that ability for someone else's benefit. That's what Paul means by for the common good.

The Bible says reads beyond the walls of the church. It reminds us that ministry doesn't always begin with program or a budget or a committee meeting. Thank God. Ministry can begin when someone notices a need and says, I can help with that.

Often in a church we get focused on bringing this group or that group into the congregation. We ask what positions need to be filled, what programs need volunteers, what needs to be done. But I wonder, what would happen if we began with a different question? How might we cultivate the gifts God has already given us for ministry? Instead of fulfilling positions, what if we focused on cultivating people? Cultivate a life in Christ. Cultivation is about recognition, recognizing that potential and creating conditions in which something can grow. A seed doesn't look like much. Many seeds you can hold in your hand and you barely even notice that they're there. But in every seed is the potential for something remarkable. And I wonder how many gifts sitting quietly within this congregation, waiting for someone to recognize them, encourage them, give them an opportunity to grow.

But here's the real kicker because Paul doesn't stop with spiritual gifts. He moves directly into what we know as Chapter 13, one of the most familiar passages in the New Testament, mostly because we hear it at weddings. And it's beautiful talk of love, But Paul wasn't writing for marriage. He was writing about what life looks like together as the body of Christ. He says you can speak with extraordinary eloquence, possess remarkable knowledge, have faith that moves mountains and even give away everything you own. But if love isn't behind the reason you're doing it, you've missed the point. Without love, our most impressive gifts lose their purpose. The reverse is also true. Something that seems ordinary, a conversation, a meal, a repaired handrail, a word of encouragement, can become an extraordinary expression of God's grace when it's offered in love.

What gifts do you have? Some of them I guarantee you could name immediately, but I'll bet someone else could name those gifts within you that you don't even consider as a gift. Maybe you don't think you're a particularly gifted person, but someone remembers the time you sat beside them in the hospital, how you encouraged them when they were struggling. Someone remembers that you were the first person to welcome them. Someone remembers that you showed up when nobody else did. You might have forgotten that moment, but they didn't. Those moments reveal something about the gifts that God has entrusted to you. Sometimes we're blind to what we see within ourselves, but that's what it means to be part of the body of Christ, because we don't simply bring our gifts together, we help one another discover them.

What might happen if we became intentional about telling one another what we see? I'm not talking about empty compliments. I'm talking about genuine recognition. You have a wonderful way of helping people feel comfortable. You ask questions that help us think more deeply. You have a gift for noticing when someone needs encouragement. You have a way of bringing people together. What might happen if we begin naming the gifts that we see in one another? Perhaps someone who has spent years believing they have nothing to

offer would begin to recognize that God's spirit has been at work in them all along. Perhaps that recognition would open the door to a ministry they never imagined.

Friends, God has placed a gift, usually more than one, inside each of us. Not to make us more important, but to make God's grace visible for one another. Our calling is to recognize the gifts, cultivate them within one another, and offer them in love for the common good. Because as Paul reminds us, everyone gets in on it. Everyone benefits, and God has glorified. Amen.