[Title Slide] In my prior church, but we actually had a taboo about talking about the Holy Spirit. And the main reason was that there was some kind of blow up over the Holy Spirit and I think something to do with spiritual gifts and tongue speaking. That all happened before I arrived. We're going to dive head first into this, because it is important to have a good understanding. And it's my hope that this won't divide us, but it'll actually unite us. Unity is one of the themes we'll be looking at today.

Let's pray. Father we pray that as we consider how your Holy Spirit is active in our church life, we do pray that firstly it would unite us and secondly it would help us to grow as a family of believers. In your name we pray, Amen.

[Slide – Different Churches] I wonder what you think is a spiritual church? I suspect we'd think that a spiritual church is one where the Holy Spirit is active – and it's doing a powerful work in our lives. So much so, that we'd see it, and even outsiders might see it.

So I decided to ask my work colleagues about their experiences at churches. And if I was to categorise it: the positive experiences were when they felt like the church service was relevant to their life. Like it spoke to them, or inspired them. The other positive experience was community. The negative experiences included the experience of people speaking in tongues which felt confusing and a tad offensive. Or when questions were quashed.

So 30 seconds with your neighbour, what do you think a spiritual church looks like? [Slide - Discuss]

Well, the Corinthians church was a church that really wanted to be a spiritual. Paul addresses what it means to be spiritual and he gives three ingredients of a spiritual church: unity, love and prophecy. And they pretty much align with chapters 12, 13 and 14 if you have your bibles.

So he first talks about unity in terms of spiritual gifts. [Slide - Text]

> [4] Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; [5] and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; [6] and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. [7] To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

[Slide - Building] So what are these spiritual gifts? Well they seem to be synonymous with activities and service. In other words, it's how we contribute. And we see, that the gifts have one source which is Triune God, Father, Son and Spirit. And they have the same purpose or goal, which is the common good. It's not an individual good. But it's for the benefit of others. And across these chapters, he'll keep talking about the building up of the church, or as we've seen – pointing us to Christ. And so one quick implication, is that if these gifts, although different have the same source and the same goal – they cannot be at odds with each other.

So what sort of activities or service are these gifts? Well we get a bit of list in verse 8. [Slide - Text]

> [8] For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, [9] to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit…

[Slide – Tug of war] Whatever these gifts are, whether miraculous or ordinary – each person has a gift, and nominally a different gift. And the purpose, as we saw – is that they contribute to the building up of the church. And what Paul's critiquing, is that the Corinthians, I think similarly to how we often think about our gifts – which is it's either for themselves, or is intrinsic to themselves, or even that makes a comment on their spirituality. That is, someone who is able to perform a miracle, it seems pretty impressive. But the spirituality is actually in the use of our gifts to build up the church.

[Slide – Manoj Prabhakar] In 1994 in a cricket game between India and the West Indies. India needed to score 63 runs in 9 overs. Manoj Prabahakar was batting, but he didn't try to win the game. Instead he blocked his way to personal milestone – a century. His selfish play led him to be suspended for the next match because he wasn't playing for the team – he was playing for himself. And it's that kind of attitude that Paul is critiquing here. Our gifts are for the team.

[Slide – Cross] And so let me give a couple of quick implications. Firstly, I hope it's obvious that if you ever hear anyone say that all Christians must have any particular gift. I know there are some churches that say that all Christians must speak in tongues if they have the Holy Spirit. Or sometimes it's framed as when you become a Christian, you can speak in tongues. But what is being a Christian – it's about being recognising Jesus as Lord. It's recognising that Jesus has paid your penalty to reconcile us back to God. But the specific gift of tongues is not part of the deal for every Christian.

And even as Paul is describing tongues, it's there in verse 10. And he emphasises this very point at the end of the chapter. Take a look at verse 29. [Slide - Text]

> [29] Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? [30] Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

[Slide – Building] These are rhetorical questions, with the expected answer no. We're all given gifts – yes. But we will have different gifts. Which is part of why he uses the argument of having different body parts that work together. We can't all be eyes or all be ears and so on. It's not uniformity, it's unity.

Second implication, maybe you think – what is my gift? Do I even have one? If you're a Christian, then you have the Spirit, and if you have the Spirit, you have the gifts to give to the church. Because what is the Spirit empowering us to do – it's building up Jesus' church. And so if you're wondering what is your gift – it's whatever you're doing to build up the church. If you're using your musical skills to build up the church, then that's a gift. If you pray for a brother or sister, that's a spiritual gift.

I was recently talking to a brother who is going through a hard time after being divorced fighting a custody battle. And every time I text him, his faith is sure and strong. And I find that encouraging. And when Paul refers to the gift of faith, he's not talking about saving faith. But I think it's this sort of faith – that builds me up, it encourages me. And I use that example, because our gifts are not limited to what teams we serve on, or a particular role or title we hold. It's whatever we do to build up the church.

The second aspect of our unity, is how we consider each other. Take a look at verse 12. [Slide - Text]

> **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.

[Slide – Puzzle] There is an other-worldly unity that comes from the Spirit. That is in the first century, it was a surprise to see Jews and Gentiles, slaves and masters and so on; people who wouldn't ordinarily be caught dead with each other, gathering together, sharing possessions, and worshipping together.

And the point is that the Spirit is gathering together people into Jesus' kingdom, and it's full of unexpected people. As you read through the gospel accounts of Jesus' life, the people who believe in him are an eclectic mix. Blind, lepers, zealots, pharisees, fisherman prostitutes, rich women and so on. And that is the beauty of what God is doing.

Sometimes we talk about "community" – and I think it's important to highlight, that the way we are united with this mix of people; people we haven't chosen, that makes us a spiritual church. And I think when my colleague talks about community – when we express this, it's a real positive church experience. And so, in Paul's description of the Corinthian church, it's the way we honour those who lack it, and the way we act and feel as one body, rather than individuals.

[Slide - Together] And so, his implication, then is – when one of us is hurting or suffering, do we say – that's sad for them? Or do we suffer alongside them? See, a spiritual church is one where we recognise that we need one another. We're not allowed to say, we'd be better off with out ___ or ___. Because Jesus died for ____. He died for ____. But I hope you can see that the spiritual church is radically different in the way it treats the least and the lowly. It doesn't say your worth only what you can do. Every person isn't just valuable; every person is necessary. We are equal members in God's family.

I tend to notice that when things get hard, we tend to withdraw from church. But if you're going through a hard time, and believe me when I say I know that a number of us are at the moment, we want to suffer alongside you. We want us to help you persevere, to keep hanging in there.

I know many of us do this in our growth groups, but if you look around and you notice someone's missing from your growth group or church, why not check in – just make sure they are going ok. It's an opportunity to show people that they are not just loved, they are necessary to our body – just in being who they are.

Assuming we have the unified body, exercising our gifts, the second essential ingredient is love. [Slide - Text]

> **13** If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a
> clanging cymbal. **2** And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all
> knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am
> nothing. **3** If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love,
> I gain nothing.

[Slide - Baby] Now, Paul starts off in hyperbole. He's saying, essentially – if I was the most spiritually gifted guy. If I could do miraculous things, if I was able to explain new things about God – but don't have love, it's worth nil. It's nothing. Why? Because gifts are for the building up of the church. And if we're building up others, we have to consider what is beneficial for others. That is, we have to exercise love. And so what does loving gift usage look like? [Slide - Text]

> **4** Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant **5** or rude. It does not
> insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; **6** it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but
> rejoices with the truth. **7** Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all
> things.

[Slide - Hand] That is, in the context of the expression of our gifts, we express them with patience and kindness and so on. So let me just apply this with a couple of examples of what love is. In the context of the Corinthian church, it's not saying, that I need to serve in this particular way because I have this gift.

[Slide – Taylor Swift] Imagine if we had Taylor Swift become a Christian and join our church. And she wanted to join the music team. But you know we're flush with singers. It would be arrogant for her to say, that because I'm the best singer, I get to be on the band. Now, I'm sure it would be great – but actually, we've lost sight of how we use our gifts. That sometimes loving others means not exercising a certain gift. And the good news, is that we have been given many gifts.

[Slide - Hand] More on that in the next chapter. But we're going to see that even our speaking gifts mean, we don't' talk over each other. We're not seeking to be rude. It's not even that we need to avoid saying hard things. Actually we say hard things with love, because love does not rejoice in wrongdoing or with falsehoods. We're seeking to build the other up.

And the third ingredient that makes up a spiritual church, is a church that prophesies. [Slide - Text]

> **14** Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.

[Slide - Microphone] So firstly, when he says – earnestly desire the spiritual gifts – that is seek to build up the church. And then he pretty much highlights the most important spiritual gift – which is prophecy. And the rest of the chapter is a contrast between prophecy and tongues.

I suspect for both tongues and prophecy we have questions about what that even is. So let me start with prophecy. Prophecy, is simply speaking or applying God's Word to others, either specifically to one person or to a group. And so it might be someone bringing God's Word to bear – so maybe calling people to repent of sin or encouraging someone to keep trusting God in a time of trouble would fit into the bracket of prophecy. It does overlap a lot with teaching, and even evangelising. You've probably already been doing it in our weekly growth groups, or after church as you speak God's truth to one another.

Tongues then – is simply prophecy in another language. And we get a picture of what tongues is in Acts 2. The brief context, is that Peter is preaching to a crowd shortly after Jesus' resurrection. [Slide - Text]

> **4** And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.
>
> **5** Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. **6** And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language.

[Slide - Flags] You get this picture, where there are these people hearing in their own human language. So if you read on – the nations where all these people are from are able to understand. And that fits with what the Holy Spirit is doing. He's empowering world mission, that is taking the gospel to the nations. And so, the gift of tongues could be ordinary – in that you could learn Mandarin or grown up in China and therefore be able to communicate with other Chinese people. It could also be miraculously given to you – which is the case in Acts 2. That is, no Duo Lingo, you supernaturally are speaking in another language.

And so Paul starts suggesting that maybe it's not good to use their gift of tongues, but rather prophesy. [Slide - Text]

> [2] For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. [3] On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. [4] The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. [5] Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.

[Slide – Speaking/Hearing] So what's the big goal here of our gifts? It's that the church is built up. And Paul's saying that prophecy builds up others – why? Because we can understand. It doesn't need interpretation. If someone speaks in Greek – well they'll build themselves up – but that's not the common good. It needs to be interpreted for it to build up the church. And so , interpretation, understanding is essential for the church to be built up. Part of the reason is, if someone prays or prophesies in a tongue without interpretation, you simply have no idea whether they are spouting heresy or not.

I experienced this when I was younger. We used to go to a Tamil speaking church. Now my Tamil is actually a bit middling. I struggle to understand technical Tamil. And that made it hard to be encouraged – because I couldn't understand. It didn't build me up. If you've travelled overseas and gone to church in another language – you'll have experienced this.

[When Blessy read the bible, we actually did something unbiblical, because the principle, is that church should be understandable.]

[So when Maggie prayed earlier, did you say Amen? If you did, why did you do that? Because did you know what was being prayed for. Without interpretation, it's useless. See, Maggie's praying was unfruitful – why? Because it didn't build us up.]

And so that's why, interpretation is so important. We have the Sunflower AI software available every Sunday. It does the work of interpretation for us so that the church may be built up. It enables others from different cultures to hear and understand. And this idea for interpretation is not just different cultures. In my prior church, we had someone do sign language during the service. That's the gift of interpretation in action.

Now you might ask – is that bad that we don't understand? [Video]

Every Sunday we talk about life and death things – about eternal life. It matters that we're able to understand. And so here's a critical summary: [Slide - Text]

> [19] Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

[Slide - Building] Ten thousand is actually the largest number in Greek. He's saying I'd rather speak five words than an endless babble in another language that I don't understand. So here is love in action – we don't always need to use a particular gift, because it might not actually build up the church.

Now, it's worth saying that for all the flack that we give the Corinthians for their desire to be spiritual and getting it wrong, I want to give them kudos here. Because it seems that when they were gathering for Sunday, each person was super keen to use their gifts. And that is a good desire. [Slide - Text]

> [26] What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. [27] If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. [28] But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God.

[Slide - Microphone] Firstly, it's worth saying, that they've pre-prepared a song or a word or a prophecy. We always seem to think that the Spirit works spontaneously, but here when they gather, they already have a hymn or a lesson and so on. And the point is, they should be shared for the building up.

In one of my prior churches, it used to be a bit of a thing to say that praying without notes, was more spiritual than praying with notes or something like that. But actually, I think that's a false understanding of how the Spirit's working. I'm not saying one is better than the other – I'm just saying that what makes something spiritual or not is not spontaneity.

And so as we gather with other Christians, let's be willing to prophesy to one another. Share what you've been learning from the Scriptures. That will build up the church. I want us to make the gospel relevant in one another's lives.

Secondly, notice the impact on unbelievers. [Slide - Text]

> [24] But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, [25] the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

[Slide - Microphone] That is, as people who aren't Christian hear a prophecy, that is something they can understand, then it will have an impact on outsiders. And so when my colleague says they want it to be relevant to their life – I think, that can happen from the front, but it can be as we prophesy or speak to one another over morning tea or over coffee and so on.

Thirdly, all prophecy, and I just want to say, that's pretty much anything that's said needs to be weighed up. [Slide - Text]

> [29] Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. [30] If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. [31] For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, [32] and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets.

[Slide – Bible Study] Thirdly, when anyone gives a prophecy – it is to be weighed up by everyone. That is, if anyone is to share anything, it should be weighed up as to whether it aligns with Scripture. That is to say, just because someone says they have a prophecy doesn't make it authoritative. And who does the weighing? It's especially the prophets – those who are especially gifted to weigh up Scripture, but it's an everyone task.

About a decade ago, I had a friend pray for me and offer a word of prophecy to me, unprompted. The prophecy was to stay where I am. That's all I got. Now, I tried to do the weighing up of that – but the prophecy, which I feel like was meant to be predictive, was so vague I didn't know what to do with it, so I frankly ignored it. I wasn't built up – but remember the gifts, their purpose is to build up.

Now, I think we often do this in our growth group. As we talk about Scripture – we're weighing up the accuracy of what others say. And so that's why we say have your bible open in order to test – what even I'm saying. See, notice that how the Spirit works is with our rationality and mind – we don't leave our brains at the door. It's a spiritual activity to wrestle over the Scripture.

[Title Slide] Let's draw this to a close. I wonder when I asked you what is a spiritual church, maybe you focused on the type of music, maybe it was on the type of people or the giftedness of the people. And if we start focusing on gifts, we put ourselves at the centre of our lives instead of Christ. That's precisely the heart of sin. And if you've been doing that – the good news, the gospel is Jesus died to forgive you of that. What's the Holy Spirit trying to do – he's pointing us to Christ, because the gifts he's given us – they're to build the church that Jesus died for.

Let's pray. Father we thank you that you've given us this body of believers who seek to build up this church, and also to build up your kingdom. We pray that through the gifts you've given us in the Spirit – that we would seek not to put ourselves first, but to Jesus front and centre. Help us to have the same zeal as the Corinthians to build one another up, so that we would stand firm until you return. In Jesus name, Amen.