

1 Corinthians 12:1-11 **Led By The Spirit**

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro
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We've been looking at the ministry of the Holy Spirit lately and we've noticed that God wants to pour out His Holy Spirit in our lives. He wants to do an abundant work in your in life – that was the word we saw in Scripture – God said He wanted to do this abundantly - washing and renewing you with a constant stream of grace. He wants to transform you on the inside, but then He wants to flow out of your life too.

And the reason why that is so important is because it's true for each and every Christian, not just the pastors or missionaries. So, are you asking Him to do that? Are you asking God to fill you with strength to serve Him and others in your home or at work? Do you have this eager expectation that God will use you in some way, even in the everyday? Do you realize that you have been created for a purpose and God wants to help you accomplish it? And that's not just some daily talk show self-help, feel-good, mumbo-jumbo. The Scripture says God is giving every single Christian some gift for the benefit of others. You really do have a part to play.

You could have been born at any time in history, in any place, but you're here, now. What does that mean? What does God want to do in and through you? I hope, that as we've been going through these studies on the ministry of the Holy Spirit that you've been growing in a sense of holy discontent – that you're starting to ask, "yeah, what about me God?" and that hopefully, you're starting to hear some answers, because when you do and you allow God to flow out of your life, He's going to be glorified, you're going to be amazed, and all the rest of us are going to be blessed.

So let's keep going with our study and begin to dig back into 1 Corinthians 12:

1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant:

That's why we've spent so much time on this topic, right? When the Bible expressly says "don't be ignorant about this" that's something we ought to give extra attention to.

2 You know that you were Gentiles,

The Jews referred to anyone who was not born a Jew, anyone who was not ethnically Jewish, as Gentiles – and Paul is writing all of this to the church in Corinth, a city in Greece – so the Greeks were Gentiles and so are all of us Haitians and Americans and Mexicans and everyone else – it's anyone who is not a Jew.

[and as Gentiles you were] carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led.
3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls
Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

Paul is showing us that there are different forces at work in the spiritual world. Something used to lead these people to pagan temples and now the Holy Spirit is leading them toward God through Christ. We're all being led, the critical question is: what are we being led toward?

The Bible says these people who are now Christians used to be spiritual people – but they were worshipping dumb idols. Now that's not a commentary on their intelligence, it's an old way of saying something that doesn't talk – we used to say that if someone couldn't hear or speak they were 'deaf and dumb.' Some of your Bibles may have translated it as mute, or speechless. That's worth noting, isn't it? That you could be led to serve a so-called 'god' which has no voice, nothing to say to you. I think there are still plenty of people like that today. Worshipping an idea of 'god' that they have made up in their own head and who has nothing real to say to them.

And yet the Bible is full of exhortations for us to hear the voice of God – as we said in another sermon recently, the book of Revelation opens with letters being dictated to seven churches and each letter repeats the refrain, "Let him who has an ear, hear what the Spirit says to the churches." In the Old Testament we read time and again about God growing angry at the nation of Israel because they would not listen to Him or to His prophets.

God wants to speak into your life – He is not mute, He is not speechless, He has something to say to you. And it's always good. It's either a warning of how to avoid something sinful and harmful, or it's guidance on where to go and what to do, or it's reassurance regarding what's happening and what is happening next, but you'll never regret hearing God speak to you unless you're not willing to change or you're trying to hide something.

So how do we hear God when He speaks? Well, first and foremost, we hear through His Word – it's unchanging and sure – it's not subject to our emotions or feelings or situation – the Word of the Lord stands forever and it speaks truth to us. Spend time in it, read it, love it, learn it. And if you have questions about it ask someone for help. Ask one of the pastors – email us, our email addresses are in your bulletin, or write them and bring them in on Sunday morning – but don't go on without an answer to your question, no matter how simple or stupid or even blasphemous or heretical it feels. If you have a legitimate question that you want a real answer to, then ask it, we'll do whatever we can to help you find an answer because God really does want to speak to you.

But how else does God speak? Well, for one, He speaks through friends, family, and loved ones who say just the right thing to you at just the right time – and maybe they weren't even thinking about it before, the thought never entered their mind, but as they're talking with you it just rolls out of their mouth – something that fits your situation perfectly or suddenly and powerfully shines a helpful light on the situation - that might be God giving

them a word of wisdom or a word of knowledge for you. We'll talk about that even more later when we look at each of those gifts.

God can also speak to you and lead you through circumstances – like we saw last week with Paul trying to go into modern Turkey and God redirecting Him over to Greece. Sometimes you put in for a certain job or a certain assignment and the doors don't open, or they do in a surprising way – there are all kinds of ways God can speak to us through circumstances – making things happen or not happen in a way that smells a little supernatural – too coincidental to have just 'happened.'

And then, of course there is His still small voice – that little voice you hear inside sometimes whispering direction to you, telling you to do or not to do certain things – big things and little things. And the more you know Scripture the more that voice speaks to you from Scripture. I'll give you an example.

Two years ago, we were looking for a building for the church and we found a great place – the lease was affordable, it was easy to get to, plenty of space, the only problem was – it was down in Alexandria, off of Eisenhower near the Van Dorn metro stop and if we had gone ahead with it, it would have been too far away for those of you who make the drive from Maryland.

As we looked at it and prayed about it, a verse just kept ringing through my ears – 1 Peter 5:8 where Peter exhorts the pastors to "Shepherd the flock of God that is among you." And the way I kept hearing that in my head was, "Shepherd the flock of God that IS among you." And that includes all of you from Maryland who show your love and commitment by making that drive each week – there's no way we could ask you to drive any farther. So, it was clear that although everything else seemed to make sense, God was saying don't do it right now.

So, there are many ways that God can lead us – but the surest of all is when He speaks to us clearly from His Word. If the testimony of others, or the evidence of circumstances, or the sense that you're hearing His still small voice is all you have – that's OK, but be cautious and make sure you're not just reading into things.

And also remember that nothing will ever contradict what God has clearly spoken in His Word – so if you're in a rough spot in your marriage and your friends are saying walk out, and circumstances pop up to give you a place to stay, and you feel like some voice in your head is saying yeah, you've put up with enough – don't think that somehow God is contradicting His commands to be reconciled with people who sin against us, and His clear command against divorce. Remember, God is always leading you closer to Himself and His ways.

Which kind of leads into our next issue – Paul says,

3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

What's that all about? Well, Paul is saying that the best way to know whether you're being led by God, whether it's His voice you're hearing or not, is to assess – is this leading me in a direction that glorifies God? Am I being compelled to ignore Him or minimize or explain away His commands in Scripture, or am I being compelled to follow Christ as my Lord even though I might suffer in the process?

No one who is following Jesus and being led by the Holy Spirit is going to do anything that would intentionally cause Jesus to look bad without grieving about it deeply. And no one who is doing their own thing in life, being led by the flesh, is going to say that Jesus is Lord.

“No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.” They can say a lot of other things. They can say He was a great man. They can say He was a great moral teacher. They might even utter something like the quote attributed to Gandhi “I like your *Christ*, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your *Christ*.” – it sounds so spiritually mature, so elevated and enlightened. But listen, *liking* Christ, liking the idea of Jesus and some of His teaching, is worthless *if you don't accept Him as Lord*.

Jesus didn't offer Himself up as a salad bar where you pick the stuff you like. He didn't come for our acceptance, for our approval, He isn't looking for us to 'like' Him or 'friend' Him or 'follow' Him, He's looking for us to submit to Him. He is Lord and we are servants. He is commander and we are soldiers. He is Father and we are children. That's who Jesus is. And that's how the Holy Spirit helps us to see Him.

Remember, it is the Holy Spirit who first comes to us and convicts us of sin, and righteousness, and judgment. It is the Holy Spirit who calls us to Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who baptizes us into Christ, washing us, renewing us, regenerating us, and then it is the Holy Spirit who seals us for our salvation. If the Holy Spirit has not done any of those things in your life, if you're not calling Jesus Lord, then you need to seriously consider whether or not you're saved.

If instead you're clinging tightly to the old ways, if you're persisting in sin, if you lack evidence in your life – things you can point to and say, “I do this or I don't do that because Jesus is my Lord,” then I want to take away any sense of safety and security you might think you have this morning.

Yes, we are saved by grace. No you don't have to do anything to earn your salvation. But there is also transformation. You can come to Jesus in any condition, but don't expect Him to allow you to stay there. He wants to be Lord of your life and that means He's going to start leading you toward change as you respond to the Holy Spirit's prompting in your life.

But remember, not only is God calling you to change, He's offering you the power to do so. God wants to do things in this world, and He wants to use you to be a part of it. Look at what we see next:

4 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. 6 And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.

The big thing we need to take away from this is the idea of unity. God is working in each of our lives, but He's working in different ways and yet, the ultimate outcome is always the same – He is glorified.

Now let me also take a moment and talk about that word – I use it a lot and I was recently reminded that maybe we don't fully understand what it means to glorify God. Basically, it means to give Him the highest place of honor in our lives, think of the idea of putting someone up on a pedestal. We typically think of that in a bad way, like don't put him or her up on a pedestal – but when they're put there for the right reason, it's very appropriate. When an athlete wins the competition, we glorify them – we put them up on the platform, hand them a trophy or a medal, put flowers around their neck or in their hands and say to everyone – look at them!

Parents glorify their kids – they talk all the time about their achievements and the progress and the cuteness or cleverness of their children – they're telling you – listen to how great my son or daughter or grandson or granddaughter is. They're glorifying them, lifting them up above the crowd to draw attention to them.

That's what we should be doing with God – we should be making Him the most important thing in our lives – with the choices we make, the things we say, the things we do – we should be telling the world how great God is. We should be glorifying Him.

And that's pretty easy to do when we're letting the Holy Spirit have His way in us because we'll be led to do things that show God's greatness as He involves us in various ministries and activities, using different spiritual gifts all of which give Him honor.

So let's talk about how this works out in our lives. One of the problems that you run into sometimes in serving the Lord is what I call 'gift envy.' We see someone else serving God in a particular capacity and instead of just being inspired by their example or glorifying God for what He is doing in them, we slide into a spiritual jealousy and say, "Hey, I should be doing that too." Or, "Why did God let them go and not me? Or, "Why didn't they ask me to do that?" And suddenly, we find ourselves completely consumed with our own interests all in the name of 'ministry.'

It's frighteningly easy for us to forget that ministry is not about us. Ministry is not a chance for me to show off how funny my jokes are, or how much I know about the Bible, or my chance to stand behind the pulpit and tell everyone how messed up their life is and how much they need to get things together. It's not my chance to do a little volunteer work or earn some community service hours. It's not a time for me to feel like I'm giving back. It's not a time for me to show off my vocal talents or demonstrate how well I can play an instrument. It's not about me – it's about God and about others.

Read with me:

7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*: 8 for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another *different* kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

Did you notice? The ability to serve in ministry comes to us from God and in almost every instance is then pointed back out toward others. We are empowered in ministry *by* God *for* others. Whatever gifts He has given you, whatever ministry or activity He is calling you to, it's not to elevate or glorify you, it's to glorify Him and affect others.

Someone once said, "There are no small parts, only small actors." Well, so too, there are no small ministries, only small ministers. Only people who think of themselves as small or people who think too much of themselves and think themselves too big because we have this terrible tendency to compete with each other and compare ourselves with one another all the time, even in spiritual things like ministry.

I had the chance to speak with someone in a very large ministry recently – a ministry that has gone through a lot of changes and challenges recently and several times this person, who is at the center of it all, said "I hate competition." And each time they said it, it was just like an aside, like an after thought – like this was the lesson they had learned from all that they had been through – to hate competition because it manifests itself in the worst times and places, even in ministry. We all want to be recognized, we all want to have a part, we're all selfish and self-centered and it taints our motives and desires.

We need to understand that God has given us all different gifts and be OK with that. We need to understand that God has called us to different ministries and be OK with that. And we need to make sure no one is missing out on the ministry we're supposed to be providing because we're busy thinking about something else.

Some of you have been called to a ministry in your home – God wants to do amazing things through your marriage or through your parenting, and He wants to give you a supernatural ability to affect the lives of your spouse or children. If that's you, own it. Call it your ministry, and pour yourself into it asking God to empower you for it.

Some of you have been called to serve God in the workforce – He's using you in the lives of your co-workers or to affect the lives of the people you serve and the policies you make or enforce. If so, go for it. And ask God to empower you to do it well.

God is present and empowering us for the everyday. But don't forget that He's also concerned about the eternal and so God is also calling many of you to serve Him in and through the church in various ministries and activities.

Someone served God and you this morning by stopping at the store on their way in and buying all the goodies in the back. Someone else showed up and made the coffee and will stick around after you've gone to make sure it's all emptied and cleaned and put away. Others show up early and put your chair in it's place or set up the worship team. Others are upstairs checking our children in, leading them in worship and teaching them. They all use different gifts, in different activities, different ministries, but it's all for the glory of God and your benefit.

So our question once again is, what does God want to do with you? What gifts does He want to give you? How and when and where does He want to use you? Because I guarantee you this – He hasn't overlooked you – this isn't for other people and not for you. Keep asking these questions, grow in a sense of holy discontent – don't rest until you have heard God speak, until you have sensed Him lead, until you are calling Him Lord and serving Him in the ministry or activity He has gifted you for. And come back next week when we'll dig back into all of this some more.