

Getting Equipped

We are in a new sermon series for the month of June called “Living Supernaturally”, and we are going to be talking all month about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. I’m especially glad to be doing that on Trinity Sunday here at St. Stephen’s because I think, of all of the persons of the Holy Trinity – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – the Holy Spirit is the hidden member of the Trinity. We often use his name, we know little about him, perhaps experience far too little of him. And so, for the month of June, we’re going to be focusing on the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

You might remember last week, as we got started, we looked at that verse where Jesus said ...

*... it is to **your advantage** that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.*

John 16:7 (NIV)

As we thought about this verse last week, and wondered how it could be to our “advantage” that Jesus would go away, we noticed that the ministry of Jesus while he was on earth was limited in many ways. He was **limited by time and space** because he could only be in one place at a time. He was **limited by his physical nature** because while he had a body he could be alongside us, but he could not yet dwell within us. So Jesus ascended back into heaven to send his Holy Spirit. Jesus said it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to...

*honor me; he will **take from me and deliver it to you.***

John 16:14 (Msg)

Everything the Father has poured into the Son, everything the Son has poured into your life and mine, by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. So, Jesus leaves in order to send the Holy Spirit to us, and the Holy Spirit brings the **power** and the **purposes** and the very **presence** of Jesus to us... no longer bound by time or space or by a body. It is definitely to our advantage that He went home so that He could send the Holy Spirit to us!

What I want to say to you this week, as we turn to your outline this morning is that **The Holy Spirit works** in us and through us by **two means**:

The **gifts** of the Spirit; and the **fruit** of the Spirit. Those are the illustrations the Bible uses to speak of the work of the Holy Spirit.

- gifts refer to **ministry** skills, extending the life of Jesus to others
- fruit refers to **character** traits, reproducing the character of Jesus inside us

We are starting with the gifts of the spirit, the ministry skills, because **today** we **honor our ministry volunteers**... (I hope you will take the time to join us for the **reception** after the service in the back of Grace Commons). So I want to take time today to talk about the gifts that God gives us for ministry...

Paul said these gifts for ministry are important...

“Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.”

1 Co 12:1

He wanted believers to be ready for ministry, prepared for the battle, equipped for the opportunities. If you are ignorant of what the Holy Spirit can do in you and through you, then you’re not ready or prepared or equipped! I want to skim with you through three chapters that Paul wrote about the ministry of the Holy Spirit and share with you **three principles** from those chapters for “Getting Equipped”...

1) Everyone Is A Minister

Look at what Paul wrote to the Ephesians...

It was he (Christ) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service (ministry), so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all...become mature...like Christ."

Eph 4:11-15

God raises up special **leaders**... who evangelize and equip and train all God's **people**... and the people do the work of the **ministry**... and the result is that people become mature and become like Christ. Or as we say it here, the result is "**God-Changed lives.**"

Christ's leaders... equipping **Christ's people**... doing **Christ's ministry**... resulting in **Christ-Like Lives**. That's how it works! It's a great plan. Sure beats the plan of depending on the clergy to do all the ministry! It beats it hands down!

The **Holy Spirit** is right in the middle of this process; he is the primary equipper. The Spirit gives us **special supernatural abilities called spiritual gifts to carry out the ministry tasks.**

*"Now God gives us many kinds of special abilities...and there are different kinds of service (ministry) to God... **All of you** together form the one Body of Christ and **each of you is a separate and necessary part of it.**"*

1 Cor. 12:4-5, 27(LB)

God put you here on purpose because he has a task for you to do. And you are necessary to the task. Every ministry gift is important, every minister is important, every ministry is important. The way I summarize this to our incoming members here is with **three brief statements...**

At St. Stephen's...

Every member is a: MINISTER (not just the clergy! We are your coaches, cheerleaders, trainers and backups, but we're not the ministers. I thank God that he has thinned out the ranks of our clergy here this past year. I was worried when Jeff and David left – a couple of great guys and pastors! But God is showing us something evident in the middle of all of this: that the work of the ministry doesn't depend on us, but depends on you!)

Every task is: IMPORTANT (that's the whole point of Ch 12; what people often view as insignificant, God chooses to use significantly)

Every member is a "10" in: SOME AREA (every member excels in some thing, some skill, some ability, some talent that they can offer for the glory of Jesus)

Today we celebrate those gifts and ministries and teams. At St Stephens we have about **55 ministry teams, not including our student and children's and worship teams.** And that doesn't include our local missions support teams, and it doesn't include our 35 or so small groups, which we are going to ask to undertake a ministry or mission of their choice over the next year or two. Every small group ought to be about something greater than themselves, reaching out to people beyond themselves. Many of you are doing that already. Put it all together and we have well over 100 mission and ministry teams operating out of this congregation. I thank God it's not up to the clergy! How could we ever do something like that? You are the ministers of this church!

We have new ministry teams forming all the time. These are teams that reach **adults** and **20's** and **students** and **children** and **infants**; teams that are passionate and skilled in **worship** and **prayer** and **bible study** and **discipleship**; teams that work to help people find the healing and help of Jesus in **pastoral crises** of every conceivable sort; teams that gather people into **small group circles** of care and spiritual growth; teams that steward our **resources** and **finances** and **offices**; teams that reach out in **evangelism** and **service**; teams that work **within** our parish and **outside** in our communities... it is a huge list, and a growing list of teams.

When I think of these teams, a phrase jumps out that describes them. **“We serve for Jesus.”** In every conceivable way they do this. Often behind the scenes, often out of the spotlight, too often un-thanked and unnoticed and under appreciated - but always at their task, always pressing forward, always changing lives, always for the Lord. These teams are **the backbone of Jesus Christ** at St. Stephen’s.

On behalf of your Vestry and Staff here, on behalf of your clergy... much more importantly on behalf of our Lord Jesus Christ, I want to **thank you** today for serving. This is a place where **everyone is a minister**.

Let’s look at the second principle for getting equipped...

2) Everyone Receives Supernatural Gifts For Ministry

You don’t have to tackle the task of creating God-changed lives by yourself. You couldn’t! So Jesus gives us something quite extraordinary. This is from Ephesians again...

Christ has given each of us special abilities—whatever he wants us to have out of his rich storehouse of gifts.
Eph 4:7 (The Living Bible)

These special abilities are **supernatural ministry skills called “spiritual gifts”**. They are called **gifts** in the New Testament, because Jesus distributes them freely, **just for the asking**, to all of his followers. No one was left out. You can’t buy them (someone got into trouble in the New Testament for trying to buy them once), you can’t earn them, and we don’t deserve them. They are **“grace-gifts”**. They come from him to us because he loves us, and wants to use us.

All these gifts have a common origin, but are handed out one by one by the one Spirit of God. He decides who gets what, and when.

1 Co 12:11 (The Message)

I want to take a few moments this morning to **look at a few of these gifts**. When you look at the lists of spiritual gifts in the NT, you notice some patterns. (By the way, the lists aren’t exclusive. I think the list goes well beyond them, but we’re going to focus on some that are frequently mentioned to give you and introduction to them.) They include...

Supernatural Abilities

- **Gifts of Acting (doing):** (vv 9,10)

Miracles, healing, faith (not like the faith we have when we yield our lives to Jesus and believe in him as our Lord and Savior, but is an extra added measure of faith on top of that some people have to accomplish things for the Lord that otherwise would never get accomplished. They believe God will do it! And they hang tough until he gets it done).

I want to talk to you about the gift of healing for a moment. This is a letter from **Abby Riley (in Cambodia)**, one of our students doing a Discipleship Training School with Youth With a Mission (5 months overseas missions): *The people are building a church there on the island, and they're laying the foundation for it right now. Our guys are going to be helping all afternoon in the 120 degree heat! They're awesome! One of the girls and I were prayer walking through the island [walking through the village and praying for everything they see] the second day here, and we told God that we were ready to [be used by Him to] heal people and for Him to put sick people in our path. So the first house we walk by there was this old grandpa who couldn't walk because his foot was swollen and we started speaking broken Khmer to him. [I promise Abby can't pray in Khmer!] He was so cute. We asked him if we could "atiton Yesu" (pray to Jesus) for him, and he said yes. So we just started praying like crazy, and didn't really see anything happen, so we said bye and kept walking. On our way back, we walked by his house and he was walking around with a smile on his face because his foot had been healed! God is amazing!!!*

He really is amazing and whether you have to go all the way to Cambodia to discover that God is willing to use you, sometimes, in supernatural ways or whether you discover it right here at home, I want you to believe it because that's what the Holy Spirit is often up to.

There are not only gift of acting, but also gifts of knowing.

- **Gifts of Knowing:** (vv 8,9,10)

Wisdom, knowledge, discernment of spirits

Wisdom is a Spirit-given extraordinary ability to apply the teaching of the bible to the real circumstances of life. A **gift of knowledge** is a *God given piece of knowledge about someone that you had no human reason to be able to know, and that piece of knowledge leads to a ministry moment.* Jesus had a gift of knowledge about **the woman at the well**, when he knew that she had been married to five men and was living with another man at the moment. That word of knowledge led to her conversion. I had a **friend who once got on an airplane** and saw a man coming down the aisle with an "A" on his forehead that was not physically there. He hardly knew what to make of it. He walked down the aisle and sat in the seat next to my friend. Later in the flight, after talking with this man, my astonished friend asked him if the word "adultery" meant anything to him. The man was shocked at the question. The man had been in an adulterous relationship, nobody knew anything about it, and the man practically fell into my friend's arms. My friend let him out of his adulterous relationship and into the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. It was a word of knowledge. I'd never had anything like this happen to me, but I know people who have. **This last week** I was riding my bike and praying and a distinct thought came to me as I was praying... a close friend, someone dear to me, had gone over one of God's fences. I knew what the fence was, but I didn't have any right to know that about them. So, I prayed my way home and made a phone call and found them – on the other side of God's fence. They were astounded to know that I knew they were over that fence because they knew I shouldn't have known they were over that fence. It led to a wonderful moment of ministry and restoration and getting back on Jesus' side of the fence. That's how it can happen. God gives us supernatural gifts from time to time for extraordinary times of ministry.

- **Gifts of Speaking:** (vv 10)

Prophecy, tongues, interpretation of tongues

Prophecy in the bible is not usually the foretelling of future events, though it is that sometimes. More often it is *the "forth-telling" of a message from God* into someone's life at a critical moment. Sometimes the most powerful words of prophecy seem to come in the middle of worship. I've experienced that multiple times in my life. By the way, if you ever thing God has given you one, I invite you to write it down and give it to Patrick or me at a moment in the service, and trust us with it. Sometimes we might read it out at the right time. Sometimes we might fold it away for prayer and maybe later action. Please feel free to bring it to us.

- **Gifts of Leading:** (vv 28,29)

Apostle, pastor-teacher

We are more familiar with pastor-teachers, and that gifting and calling is what the Holy Spirit put in my life some 25 years ago. He made me a pastor-teacher and I expect that gift will continue to the end of my life.

Many of these are supernatural giftings. Sometimes they are spectacular. But there is another set of gifts seen in the New Testament as well. These are...

Natural Abilities, Supernaturally Enhanced

(vv 28,29) *Administration, helping, giving*

What these seem to be are *natural abilities that people have yielded to God, and God has supernaturally anointed them with his Holy Spirit and uses them in a powerful way with extraordinary results.*

(Other Lists in the New Testament For More Study: Rom 12.6-8; 1 Peter 4.10,11; Eph 4.11)

Testimonies of Annette Murray and Earl Johns...

Pray with me please. *Father, we thank you for Annette. We thank you for Earl. We thank you, Lord, for how you have worked in so many lives, like you have in theirs, like you do in ours. That you give us a heart to serve you in everything we do, in every place we walk, with every talent, every gift, with talents and gifts we've never even had before that you pour upon us. We ask you to do that, Lord Jesus Christ, to continue to bless these two in their work and their ministry for you, please, Lord. To continue to bless and use every single person who walks into this place, that this would be a place at St. Stephen's, where people discover the power of your Spirit to make a difference for you. Thank you, Father. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.*

I think I would like to just finish it with that. And encourage you to come back to the reception and greet people and welcome people and thank people for using their ministry, using their gifts, to do the work of the Lord. And just remind you of the verse that Earl closed with from 1 Peter 4: "If God has given you a gift, use it!" Or, as I say it in the third point of the outline:

3) Know Your Gift and Use It; If You Need a Gift, Ask For It

God gives. You will be astounded at what God will do through you! It is one of the most exciting things in life – to be doing his work, his ministry, in this world. That's what you're here for! That's why he's got you on this team.