Sermon Title: God's Gifts for the Common Good
Text: 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Text: **1 Corinthians 12:4-11 -- 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. 8 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, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.**

Introduction: In an article in **THE NEW YORKER** dated **September 17, 2018**, a writer whose name I cannot pronounce (**Amia Srinivasan**) gives us some amazing insight into the world of termites and what they can teach us. She writes, "Termites may be hard to love, but they're easy to admire. Termite mounds can reach as high as thirty feet. Based on their tiny size, that's the equivalent of humans building something twice as tall as the world's tallest structure, the **2,722-foot Burj Khalifa, in Dubai**. The interior of a termite mound is an intricate structure of interweaving tunnels and passageways, radiating chambers, galleries, archways, and spiral staircases. To build a mound, termites move vast quantities of mud and water. **In the course of a year, (just) eleven pounds of termites can move about three hundred and sixty-four pounds of dirt and thirty-three hundred pounds of water**. The point of all this construction is not to have a place to dwell—the colony lives in a nest six to seven feet below the mound—but to be able to breathe. The mound acts as a lung for the colony, managing the exchange of gases, leveraging small changes in wind speed to inhale and exhale. Termites appear to do all this without any centralized planning: there are no architects, engineers, or blueprints. The termite mound (it turns out) isn't just a building. **It's much more like a body, a self-regulating organic process that always reacts to its changing environment**. Scientists claim that individual termites are not very intelligent. They lack memory and the ability to learn. Put a few termites into **a Petri dish** and they wander around aimlessly. **But put enough termites together, in the right conditions, and they will build you a cathedral**."

I hope you don't take this as an insult, but I want to say that what is true of termites (okay -- maybe not so much about their lacking intelligence but certainly when it comes to what they can achieve) **is also true of the body of Christ**. By ourselves, we're limited as to what we're able to accomplish but put a bunch of us together, **and our potential multiplies exponentially**. That's the whole point behind God giving us spiritual gifts. WHEN WE PUT THEM TO GOOD USE FOR HIS GLORY, WE ARE CAPABLE OF SO MUCH GOOD FOR THE BODY OF CHRIST.

As Laurie mentioned earlier, this is SERVE SUNDAY. I'm sure you've noticed that most of the time as we gather to worship our Lord, I mention FOUR THINGS each of us can do to grow into a fully devoted follower of Christ – WORSHIP, GROW, SERVE, AND SHARE. This morning, I want to talk about that third part which involves each of us using our **God-given gifts** for (as the Apostle Paul says) THE COMMON GOOD. **Let's look at the passage I just read and some others and see what God has to say to all of us about this very important topic**.

Here's the context for these verses. The church at Corinth had a problem with what were considered some of the more spectacular sign gifts (**speaking in tongues, prophecy, healings, miracles etc.**). They were given greater value over the less spectacular ones. Some even believed that the use of these gifts demonstrated access to a certain "**wisdom**" which was unobtainable to others. **The practice of these gifts then resulted not in glorifying Christ, but in glorifying the person using them**. **Paul remarks that when it comes to the things of the Spirit, they are ignorant and he wishes they weren't (1 Corinthians 12:1 -- Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed).** That's why he mentions them so much in this letter. NOW, OF COURSE, WE DON'T WANT TO BE IGNORANT ABOUT SPIRITUAL GIFTS EITHER. SO, LET'S SEE WHAT THE BIBLE HAS TO SAY ABOUT THESE SPECIAL SKILLS THAT GOD GIVES TO BELIEVERS TO EDIFY THE CHURCH BY ASKING AND ANSWERING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

What is a spiritual gift? **It is a God-given ability that enables a believer to effectively serve the body of Christ**. **This is different from a natural talent** such as being a good cook or having a nice singing voice. **It is also not a fruit of the Spirit**. These are nine character qualities that describe a person who is filled with the Holy Spirit. They are found in **Galatians 5:22-23** and include **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control**. As you will see, spiritual fruit are not the same as spiritual gifts. And finally, **a spiritual gift is not the same thing as a ministry role**. There is no such thing as the gift of youth ministry or the gift of Women's Ministry Leader or Head Usher. Now that we understand what a spiritual gift is not, here are three observations related to our definition of spiritual gifts.

- **God is the Provider of Spiritual Gifts.** That's what we're told in **verse 11** -- **All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. Did you catch it? The third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, is the giver of spiritual gifts! Now this passage happens to mention a few of the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives, specifically those that the Corinthians ascribed greater value to** (much to Paul's displeasure), **perhaps because they APPEARED to have more of a supernatural element to them -- wisdom, knowledge, healing, miracles, prophecy, the distinguishing of spirits, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues**. **Just so you know, there are four other places in the Bible that mention spiritual gifts -- Romans 12, I Corinthians 14, Ephesians 4,** and **1 Peter 4. The important thing to note is that the Holy Spirit gives these gifts to the children of God.** We do not apply for them or earn them.
- **A spiritual gift is an ability that qualifies you to do something you wouldn't otherwise be able to do**. For example, you might be a gifted speaker, but you wouldn't be effective in teaching God's Word without this God-given ability. Or you might be a talented coach who can inspire a team to get the most out of them, but you wouldn't be able to lead God's people without the gift of leadership.
- **Spiritual gifts are given so that we can bless the body of Christ**. They are not for our own benefit or self-glorification. The gifts that God the Holy Spirit gives are meant to serve other Christians.

Does every believer have a spiritual gift? Unfortunately, there are a lot of Christians who doubt they have one. **They see no place where they can serve the Lord in the body of Christ. But that isn't true**. The Bible teaches that every believer has been gifted by God. The Apostle Paul tells

us in **Romans 12:6**, "**Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them**…". In **1 Corinthians 12:7** he says, "**To each** (meaning every Christian) **is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good**." And again, in **Ephesians 4:7-8** we're told, "**But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore, it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.**" In all, Paul's refers to these God-given abilities as "**gifts**", "**manifestations of the Spirit**" and "**grace**", but each one is talking about the same thing. ***Spiritual gifts are grace gifts that manifest the working of the Holy Spirit in and through the life of any true believer***.

When are these gifts given? Believe it or not, the Bible doesn't say. **This is where an analogy might be of help**. When do we receive our natural talents? Well, most people would argue that we're born with them. For example, our son, Tim, could high jump six foot, four inches as a high school senior and run the forty-yard dash in about 4.5 seconds. Where did he get that kind of ability? **I'm pretty sure it came from Laurie's genes**. Many in her family were very talented athletes. In fact, her father was offered a Big-Ten football scholarship by several schools. This being the case, that we receive our natural talents at the time of our natural birth, it makes sense that we receive our spiritual gifts at the time of our spiritual birth. **So, at the very moment when you were born again by water and the Spirit** (i.e. when God washed away your sin by the blood of Christ and made you alive by the Holy Spirit -- **See John 3:5**), **you received your spiritual gift**.

Why does God give us spiritual gifts? The purpose of spiritual gifts is to enable us to effectively serve the body of Christ for the common good. **That's what we're told in 1 Corinthians 12:7 -- To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good**. **This verse talks about the profit (or benefit) we bring to Christ's body as we minister to our Christian brothers and sisters in the power of the Holy Spirit**. Paul describes the church as a body with Christ as its Head. Believers are like the body parts – the eyes, hands, feet, elbows, ears, lungs and all the rest. **Just as each part of our physical body plays an important role, so each part of the body of Christ does as well**. **God adopted us into His family and gifted each one of us so that we might help the church grow**. This means that no one part is inferior or superior to the rest. ***We are all necessary***. Listen to what Paul says about this in **1 Corinthians 12:15-24** -- **If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body**. These verses address Christians who might feel **INFERIOR** to others because their gifts are not as noticeable to everyone. His response is to say, "**We are all vital and important**." As to those who might feel **SUPERIOR** because their gifts draw the praise of others, Paul goes on to say, "**The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty**." In other words, "**Don't think more highly of yourself than you ought. Remember, you wouldn't have your gift had you not received it from God**."

How many gifts are there? It depends on who you talk to. Part of the problem is that the New Testament doesn't contain a complete list of gifts anywhere. **Instead, what you have is six lists in four different passages** and most of them do not overlap. Some gifts are mentioned in one list and not in others. Depending on how you understand them, the number can be anywhere from **fourteen to nineteen**. Most Bible teachers tend to want to place them in four separate categories: (**1**) **Service-oriented Gifts** – mercy, giving, helps, serving; (**2**) **Leadership Gifts** – Faith, discernment, wisdom, knowledge, evangelism, and administration; (**3**) **Educational Gifts** – teaching, pastoring, exhortation; (**4**) **Foundational Gifts** – apostleship, prophecy, tongues, interpretation, miracles, and healing. **I believe that these lists are not exhaustive**. It's hard for me to imagine that God didn't give gifts to some to lead His people in worship through music or the creative arts (though nothing like this is mentioned).

I think about the hymn writer **Fanny Crosby** who gave us more than **6,000 gospel songs** including **Blessed Assurance, Draw Me Nearer** and **To God Be the Glory**. Although blinded by an illness at the age of six weeks, she never became bitter. As an aside, one time a preacher sympathetically remarked, "***I think it is great pity that the Master did not give you sight when He showered so many other gifts upon you***." She replied quickly, "***Do you know that if at birth I had been able to make one petition, it would have been that I should be born blind?***" "***Why?***" asked the surprised clergyman. "***Because when I get to heaven, the first face that shall ever gladden my sight will be that of my Savior!***" This dear woman gave the church so many wonderful songs to sing in the worship of our Lord. Does it make any sense to you that God did not give her a gift for song to be used for His glory?

Why should you attempt to discover your spiritual gifts? Here are three reasons why you should do this.

- **You will help clarify God's will for your life**. Discovering your spiritual gifts is like understanding the job description that God has given to you. The more you put them to use, the more you'll be fulfilling God's purpose for you.
- **You will bless the whole church**. That's Paul's point in each of these passages. Every Christian who is a part of our church family will benefit as our body functions more in keeping with the rhythm that God has in mind for us. Our children's, youth, adult, and support ministries will be more effective because we step into the role that God has in mind for us.
- **You will glorify God**. Every time a believer steps up to use his or her gifts to serve the Lord here at River Ridge Church, we will be that much more in step with achieving our mission and vision. The opposite is also true. Every time a believer fails to step up to use his or her gifts to serve the Lord here at River Ridge Church, we will be that much less effective in achieving our mission and vision.

What steps should you take today? After this service, I would ask you to take a few minutes and do the following:

- **Talk to a ministry leader about an area of ministry that you might be passionate about**. We're not asking anyone here to serve in five ministries. That's a recipe for burnout. Trust the Lord to help you find one for which you are burdened.

- **Take the spiritual gift inventory to begin to figure out what your gift(s) might be**. You might also want to talk to another believer who knows you well and listen to what he or she has to say.
- **Match your passion and your gifts to serve the Lord here at River Ridge Church and bless those who worship alongside you**.

Closing: WE NEED ALL OF YOU TO SERVE IF WE'RE GOING TO REACH OUR GREATEST POTENTIAL. After **Apollo 11's** incredible feat of three men on the moon in **June of 1969**, astronaut **Michael Collins** said, "***All this is possible only through the blood, sweat, and tears of thousands of people… All you see are the three of us, but underneath the surface are thousands and thousands of others***." According to **author Catherine Thimmesh** there were about 400,000 others who helped with the **Apollo 11 mission**. In her book *Team Moon*, Thimmesh shares stories of these hidden heroes—spacesuit seamstresses, radio telescope operators, parachute designers, and others who made it possible to get men to the moon, get them home, and let the rest of the world watch while it happened. At Kennedy Space Center, some 17,000 engineers, mechanics, soldiers, contractors, and other workers set up the enormous missile for the launch. Then there were the "**Two Bobs**"—the guys in Houston monitoring just how little fuel was left in the lunar module during its descent to the surface. Team Moon also included a 24-year-old "**computer whiz kid Jack Garman**" who helped work through worrisome computer glitches during the *Eagle*'s landing. The computer code that ran all the systems was developed by a team of software engineers at MIT led by **Margaret Hamilton**. Roughly 500 people worked on the space suit, including one seamstress who commented, "**We didn't worry too much until the guys on the moon started jumping up and down. And that gave us a little bit of an eyebrow twitch**." No wonder astronaut Neil Armstrong would later say that as he took his first step on the moon, he immediately thought about all those 400,000 people who had allowed him to take one small step for man, one giant step for mankind.