

Isa. 62:1–5
Ps. 36:5–10
1 Cor. 12:1–11
John 2:1–11

A Gift of Diversity

Goal for the Session Youth will feel freed to explore their diverse spiritual gifts in unity with Christian community.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on 1 Corinthians 12:1–11

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Troy Miller

The idea that governs the remainder of the passage (vv. 4–11) is the need for and value of a diversity of spiritual gifts, though still within a unity. Prior to moving into a more detailed explication of this diversity and unity, though, Paul establishes the theological context in which his teaching is grounded. For Paul both the *unity* of source and purpose and the *diversity* of expression for spiritual gifts come from the Godhead, which he distinctly articulates in Trinitarian form. God is diverse and the diversity of the “gifts” (*charismata*, v. 4) given by the Spirit testify to that.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Lee C. Barrett

Those who truly are in the Spirit will speak and act in ways congruent with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Paul suggests that the Holy Spirit is not some generic mystical principle. The reference to the phrase “Jesus is Lord” points to Paul’s reliance on the simple and most essential confession of the early church. Because Jesus alone is worthy of trust and obedience, no other political, cultural, or religious lords can be the focus of the Christian’s spiritual interest. All who can confess that Jesus is Lord do indeed share this indwelling of the Spirit. Because the persons of the Trinity always act together, where the second person is so too is the third person.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Karen Stokes

All of this discernment, all of these gifts, services, and activities are activated by God for a purpose. Each person, Paul says, is given a manifestation of the Spirit to be used for the *common good*. In the culture that surrounds the church today, and often even within the church, individualism has been exalted to such high status that the phrase “common good” has nearly vanished from the lexicon. Paul’s words offer a refreshing, even shocking reminder that faith, while personal, is never private, and that the gift each person has been given is meant to be shared.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Raewynne J. Whiteley

Many of our churches struggle with issues of unity and diversity. This text addresses one aspect of diversity, that of the gifts exhibited in a community. Such gifts can be a source of disunity when they become the criteria for determining different ranks in the church, leading to a hierarchy of holiness. Here we are reminded that because the gifts have a single source, they are meant to be things that unite the community of faith. Gifts are used for the common good.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians
12:1–11

Focus on Your Teaching

Teens' gifts, talents, and personalities are still being formed. Yet, their personalities are often intensely scrutinized by peers, teachers, and parents. In contrast, Paul's message to the Corinthians assumes that our deepest gifts are *not our own*. Rather, they are of the Holy Spirit. In this way teens are freed from feeling inadequate or pressured, but are also held to new responsibility to use their gifts for others. The comfort is that these gifts are from God. God dwells in us through the Holy Spirit, as close as the breath in our own lungs.

God of all, give me the gift of a clear voice to name the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us all. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- markers
- newsprint
- index cards
- pens
- Bibles
- three copies of Resource Sheet 1
- Christ candle (white pillar candle)
- battery-powered votive or tea light candles
- lighter

For Responding:

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2, pens
- option 2: paper, markers
- option 3: index cards, pens

For Media Connection:

- Internet-connected device

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, write the following instructions on a posted sheet of newsprint:

Card 1: Three things you love to do. (Interests)

Card 2: Three things you are good at doing. (Skills)

Card 3: Three words to describe your personality. (Traits)

As participants arrive, give each person three index cards and a pen. Have participants write information about themselves on the cards according to the instructions on the newsprint, but make sure that they do not put their names on their cards. Make sure the participants understand that the information on the cards will be read by others. When all are finished, collect the cards.

Shuffle and give each person three random cards. Have participants read the cards in their possession and then write on each card the name of the person they suspect wrote the card. When all are finished, have participants check to see if they guessed the person correctly.

Explain that today's Scripture passage is about a group of Christians living in Corinth, who were confused about the meaning and value of their interests, skills, and traits.

Pray:

God who is revealed through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, we come seeking your wisdom, the voices of one another, and the peace that comes only from you. In Jesus we pray. Amen.

EXPLORING

Have participants find 1 Corinthians 12:1–11 in their Bibles. Explain that 1 Corinthians is a letter from the apostle Paul to the early Christian community in Corinth, which was a busy and diverse city. Have youth look in the backs of their Bibles for a map of Paul's journeys and locate Corinth.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:1 together. Explain that the term spiritual gifts was Paul's way of talking about the God-given way a person is able to use his or her skills, personality, and interests to be a blessing to others. The Holy Spirit bestows these gifts on each child of God.

Have three volunteers bring 1 Corinthians 12:2–11 to life using Resource Sheet 1 (Script). Tell the participants to listen to Paul's letter as if they were members of the church of Corinth. Have one volunteer read aloud the indicated Scripture verses and the other two volunteers read the roles of the two voices.

Discuss:

- ✠ What does it sound like has been happening in the Corinthian community?
- ✠ If people are judging and pressuring one another, how does it help to know that the Holy Spirit is the one and only source of all their talents, ministries, and spiritual gifts?
- ✠ How does it help for them to know that there are many diverse forms of these spiritual gifts, ministries, and talents?
- ✠ In the diversity of Corinth, what might Paul have meant by the "common good" that spiritual gifts serve?

Dig deeper: Read what Paul writes to Christians in Galatia about the work of the Spirit: Galatians 5:22–26.

On a sheet of newsprint, list the spiritual gifts that Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 12. Then, have the group brainstorm a list of spiritual gifts that Paul does not mention, such as thoughtfulness, social justice, peacemaking, ecological awareness, welcoming, organization, and administration.

Discuss:

- ✠ Why does the body of Christ need such a diversity of gifts?
- ✠ If fewer gifts existed in our faith communities, how would our faith communities be different?
- ✠ How could the Holy Spirit help someone with one of these spiritual gifts make an impact on God's world?

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of the following learning activities:

- 1. Personal Reflection** Give each participant a copy of Resource Sheet 2 (Reflection) and a pen. Have participants silently write responses to each question on the page.

EASY
PREP

2. **“Super” Gifts** Participants will turn a spiritual gift into a superhero and explore how that gift can have risks if not kept in the Spirit. Give each person a sheet of paper and markers. Have participants choose a spiritual gift that they have and turn that spiritual gift into a superhero. (For example, the spiritual gift of listening could become “Captain Listening.”) Have groups design a costume for their superhero and list the special abilities their hero might have. Give groups an opportunity to present their superheroes to the rest of the participants. Ask: How can you use this spiritual gift in the coming week?
3. **Putting Gifts into Action** Give each person an index card and a pen. Have each person write a spiritual gift on the index card. Collect the cards and redistribute so that no one has his or her own card. As a group, choose an issue facing your congregation or community. (For example, hunger and homelessness are issues in many communities.) Then, have participants read aloud the spiritual gift on their cards and name a way that spiritual gift could work to resolve the issue. Then, have participants talk about how the spiritual gifts written on their cards could work together to make a difference.

CLOSING

Gather the group in a circle. Place a Christ candle in the center of the circle and give a battery-powered votive or tea light candle to each participant. Light the Christ candle. Explain that the Christ candle represents our unity in Christ, and that our light depends on the light of the Holy Spirit. It is a reminder of Jesus’ promise to be with his followers whenever they gather together. Have participants light their candles and place them around the Christ candle. When all the candles are lit, pray:

We each carry the humble flame of your Spirit inside us, O God. This week help us trust the gifts you have placed in us. In unity with others, help us be a blessing to all. Amen.

Extinguish all candles.

■ ENHANCEMENT

WEB CONNECTION

Search YouTube for “Spiritual Gifts” to find a humorous video that illustrates some of the ways we mistake our pride, our faults, and even our meanness for God-given spiritual gifts as did the Corinthian community. Watch the video as a group. Then, decide what each character in the video is mistaking for a spiritual gift. Discuss:

- ✂ What are other ways you’ve seen people justify their bad habits by calling them “gifts” or “talents”?
- ✂ What are some remedies for the way we justify ourselves?
- ✂ How could any of the genuine spiritual gifts be a help?

Script

Scripture reader reads 1 Corinthians 12:2–3.

Voice 1: Hey, is he insulting us? We're not "ignorant" about spiritual anything!

Voice 2: Well, we've really been excluding and pressuring one another to be the same. That's not so spiritual.

Voice 1: I guess we also have to realize that we can't keep putting ourselves on pedestals when it's really the Holy Spirit working through us. The source for all good things.

Scripture reader reads 1 Corinthians 12:4–6.

Voice 1: We know about diversity! We're a *church* of diversity: refugees, slaves, land owners, Jews, Greeks, merchants . . .

Voice 2: Yeah, but we actually fight all the time. Plus, Paul is talking about the diversity of our spiritual gifts and ministries. Those are on the inside where it's harder to see.

Scripture reader reads 1 Corinthians 12:7–12.

Voice 1: I do feel judged sometimes because I don't have the flashy spiritual gifts you do. Also, you sometimes use them just to show off.

Voice 2: I'm sorry. I didn't really think about how *everyone* has a spiritual gift, even if it's not the fancy obvious ones. Sometimes I feel like I'm expected to be on top of everything all the time and I feel miserable when I mess up. Sounds like we'll have to work together better.

Reflection

What spiritual gifts do you sense at work in your own life?

How does it feel to have these gifts?

How are your spiritual gifts different than those of the other people in your church?

How can your gifts work together with other gifts to make an impact on God's world?

teaching giving leading peacemaking welcoming
serving healing preaching advocating thoughtfulness
working for justice organizing caring for creation