Text: I Corinthians 12:4-7
Title: "Unwrapping Spiritual Gifts"

INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION – Dr. Bill Bright the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ told the following story in one of his books:

> During the Great Depression a man named Ira Yates owned a sheep ranch in West Texas. But because he wasn't able to make enough on his ranching operation to pay the principal and interest on the mortgage, he was in danger of losing his ranch. With little money for clothes or food, his family (like many others) had to live on government subsidy. Day after day, as he grazed his sheep over barren West Texas country, he worried about how he would pay his bills. Then one day a seismographic crew from an oil company came into the area and told him there might be oil on his land. They asked permission to drill a wildcat well, and he signed a lease contract. And they struck a huge oil reserve. The first well came in at 80,000 barrels a day. Many subsequent wells were more than twice as large. In fact, what would later become known as the Yates Oil Field was one of the largest in the country. And Mr. Yates owned it all. The day he purchased the land he had received the oil and mineral rights. Yet, he'd been living on relief. Imagine that … a multimillionaire living in poverty. What was the problem? He didn't know the oil was there even though he owned it.

That's the way it is with many believers. They are not aware of the vast reservoir of power that resides in them by the Holy Spirit. And they live their lives in spiritual poverty because they do not draw on that strength and power. And that's why I've decided to preach this series of messages entitled "The Spirit Way … the life you've always wanted … the power you've always needed." The moment you were saved God deposited His Spirit within you and you were born again. So God is dwelling in you by His Spirit to produce and amazing life.

And we're going to see today and in the weeks to come that along with the Holy Spirit, God gives you a spiritual gift or gifts by which He wants you to share His love and power with others. Let's turn again to I Corinthians 12:1.

1 Corinthians 12:1 (NIV) - Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.

Believe it or not, when you come to discover and unwrap the unique spiritual gift that God has given you, it is one of the most exhilarating and fulfilling things that can happen in your life. It's one of the most important discoveries you can make in your Christian life. It will open up new realms of effectiveness and meaning in your life.

> You see, God didn't give you His Spirit just to make you <u>happy</u>. He did it to make you <u>holy</u> … and to make you <u>helpful</u> in His Kingdom.

Hundreds of us have been through PLACE training a program where we strive to equip people to understand not just their spiritual gifts, but also their unique personality and experiences that God will use in ministry.

> In PLACE you learned that a spiritual gift is not a talent (sense of humor, intelligence, music, etc.). These talents can be found in people who are believers and non-believers. And we must not confuse the gifts of the Spirit with the fruit of the Spirit (Gal.5:22-23). And we must distinguish between gifts and various roles in ministry. We'll see that here in our text. But the definition we are given there is a good one:
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> "A spiritual gift is a special attribute given by God's Spirit to every member of the Body according to God's grace for use with the context of the Body for the building up of the Body."

So this morning I want to help you unwrap your spiritual gift. So you need to see that the spiritual gifts are given…

1. BY <u>GRACE</u> (v.4)

1 Corinthians 12:4 (NIV) - There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.

The Greek word for "gifts" here in v.4 is *charismata*. The word for "gifts" is *charismata* … different from the word that is used for "gifts" in v.1. And you can hear in that word the word *charis* which is the word for grace. So whatever the gifts are, they are not badges of superior righteousness … no, just like our salvation, the gifts are by God's grace. The gifts are "handed down," not "worked up."

And v.4 also says that there are "different kinds of gifts…"

Note: This would be a good time to just acknowledge that there are some who believe that spiritual gifts no longer exist … that all, or at least part of them have ceased to function (they are called cessationists). At the other end of the spectrum are those who, like the Corinthian church, are making the spiritual gifts something totally chaotic and confusing … not at all what the Bible teaches. Example: Speaking in tongues, healing, miracles, etc. We'll try to sort that out as we get to those gifts in the list here.

I believe that God doesn't want us in either one of those ditches. There's a middle of the road view that I believe the Bible teaches, and that is that God by His Spirit gives various attributes and abilities to us the moment we are saved. He then wants to use by placing us in the church to use those attributes and abilities to edify His church.

Romans 12:6a (NIV) - We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.

So all these gifts come by grace from the same Spirit. It is not by human merit. The Spirit determines who gets what gifts (v.11), so no one can think they have been marked out for special status because of their gifts. Some of the gifts are more visible than others, but none is more essential than the others.

Note: Bible scholars do not agree on the exact number and distinction of kinds of gifts. Because the Scriptural lists are not identical, it seems clear that God did no intend to give His church either a rigid or a precise and exhaustive list of gifts, but rather general categories.

> Among the gifts that are listed in a hand full of NT passages we have the following: Administration, giving, discernment, helps, evangelism, encouragement, faith, hosptitality, knowledge, leadership, mercy, pastor/shepherd, prophecy, service, teaching and wisdom.
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> And then there are those mysterious gifts described here as tongues, healing and miracles. We'll talk about those as well.

But there's more. The spiritual gifts are by grace …

2. FOR <u>SERVICE</u> (v.5)

1 Corinthians 12:5 (NIV) - There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.

The spiritual gifts are intended to be used in a Christ-like spirit of servanthood. The word "service" means a ministry; the word is the word from which we get our word "deacon." It simply means to serve.

> **Mark 10:45 (NIV) - For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."**

So God gives each of us spiritual gifts. And those gifts are used in a variety of different ministries.

> A person with the spiritual gift of teaching may use is in a variety of ministries (teaching children, teaching adults, teaching seminary students, etc.) A person with the gift of evangelist may use it in a variety of ministries (preaching or one-on-one witnessing). A person with the gift of administration might us it in a ministry in a homeless shelter, or in organizing the finances of the church.

1 Peter 4:10 (NIV) - Each one should use whatever <u>gift</u> he has received to <u>serve</u> others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

We must never forget that the gifts are for loving ministry in the church. They are not for our own gratification. They are for church edification. When this is ignored, confusion sets in.

So the spiritual gifts are by grace, for service …

3. WITH <u>POWER</u> (v.6)

1 Corinthians 12:6 (NIV) - There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

The spiritual gifts are a result of God's powerful working in a person's life, and they result in God powerfully working through us in the lives of other people.

Do you see the word "working"? That word means effects or energy. In fact we get our word "energy" (*energema*). God provides the spiritual gifts and the power and faith with which to exercise those gifts. They are given supernaturally and energized supernaturally.

> There are varieties of effects. People using the same spiritual gifts with not all have the same results, or the same quantity of fruit. This is the work of a sovereign God who works all of these things out.

A spiritual gift is not just a desire, but it is also an ability. God not only gives you the desire to minister to people in a particular way, He makes it effective in the lives of others. It really blesses others.

Philippians 2:13 (NIV) - for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

SUMMARY – So you see there are differing <u>gifts</u> that operate in a variety of <u>places of service</u> and with a wide range of <u>results</u>.

> When I am rightly related to the Holy Spirit, as we say last week … not resisting the Holy Spirit, receiving the Holy Spirit, not quenching the Spirit, not grieving the Spirit, walking in the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit, what will happen is that then the spiritual gifts become the outworking of God's Spirit through us, bringing about the supernatural transformation and ministry of Jesus in the lives of other people. This is the way Jesus ministers to us … through the Spirit-empowered gifts that we utilize in our various places of service and ministry.

EXAMPLE: Let me show you how this works. There are certain people in our church that have the gift of wisdom. When they say something, a situation becomes clear. The right way to go becomes apparent. And when I benefit from that wisdom, I praise God because I know it is God, by His grace, coming into a situation to make the way clear. Sometimes the person with that gift doesn't even know that God used them to make something clear to me. That's where God's power comes into the equation.

But there's more. The spiritual gifts are by grace, for service, with power …

4. TO EVERY <u>BELIEVER</u> (v.7)

1 Corinthians 12:7 (NIV) - Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

Another way to describe spiritual gifts is that they are a "manifestation of the Spirit." They reveal the Holy Spirit of Almighty God whenever those gifts operate. They are not hidden; they are

manifest; they are evident. God wants your gift to work! And that kind of manifestation is given to every believer.

And it says that they are "for the common good." Our gifts build up others so they can use their gifts effectively. The gifts are not for us to feel good (though that may happen), but that is not the purpose. It is the good that God wants to do in the lives of others that is the motivation.

All believers have at least one spiritual gift. But no one believer possesses all of the gifts. And every believer is to use their gift in at least one ministry. And that ministry is to be the place where that gift becomes the outflow of God's power into the lives of other people.

ILLUSTRATION – Story of my experience as a college student driving home from a concert where a friend's singing group performed.

CONCLUSION

Why take this seriously?

- **Unwrapping your spiritual gift helps you discover your unique purpose in life.**

  The word charismata has as its root the word char which means joy. There is great joy

- **Understanding spiritual gifts helps you appreciate other people.**

  The source of conflict in many churches is that we want everyone to be like we are. We want people to be interested in the same things that we are, or participate in the same ministry that we are. We want them to respond the same way we respond. God has given each of us a unique passion. We're not all alike. When we understand the gifts we understand that God has given us unique gifts, we'll quit insisting that everyone has to be like us.

- **Using your spiritual gift strengthens the church.**

  Our church will never reach its potential until each of us has discovered and are using their spiritual gifts. It's not just the pastor, or the staff or a few committed Christians. It will take all of us.

ILLUSTRATION – Let me see if I can help you visualize this in this way. If you go into the pharmacy to get something for an upset stomach or some aching muscles, you will see something called Alka-Seltzer. (Older folks remember "Plop, plop, fiz, fiz, O what a relief it is!)

Each packet has a couple of tablets in them. You're supposed to unwrap the tablets and drop them in a glass of water. Then something really funs starts happening. The water starts fizzing and bubbling. And when the tablets are completely dissolved you drink it and it makes you feel better.

Now I can drop these tablets, still in the wrapper into one glass. And in the other one, I'll unwrap the tablets and drop them in. Both glasses have the Alka-Seltzer, but it's only working in one because the tablets were unwrapped.

APPLICATION – Some of you have spiritual gifts with the wrapper still on them. And as a result your gift is not really impacting anyone … because you haven't yielded to God's Spirit … because you're not in a ministry where it can be used … because something, like sin, is blocking the power of God flowing through your gift to others. Get it right today!