

Significance – Why *We* Need *You*

1. Warm up: Over the course of a lifetime, we receive lots of messages about who we are and how important – or not – we are. Those messages powerfully shape our sense of self and our sense of what we're capable of. Tell us about a time someone said something to you (or about you) that was very uplifting and empowering.
2. Unfortunately, not all the messages we receive are uplifting and empowering. We've all felt the sting of being rejected and unwanted. Scientists tell us that when we experience rejection, the same part of our brain lights up as when we are stabbed with a knife.
 - a. Tell us about a time you experienced rejection. How did you feel?
 - b. Unfortunately, a lot of churches specialize in telling us how bad and inadequate we are. Over time that message can cause us to internalize a deep sense of spiritual inadequacy. Instead of being told how precious we are to God and what we can do for God, we're told what we can't. Have you experienced that? Why were you told you weren't spiritually good enough? How did that affect you?
3. Granted, we're all sinners (Romans 3:23), but that doesn't mean we're disqualified. If it did, no human would be worthy of serving God. Yet many of us have spent a lifetime being taught that, when it comes to serving God, there are those who can – a privileged few, the spiritual elite – and those who can't. It's a story as old as time that goes all the way back to the Old Testament. In the old understanding, God was too holy to be close to ordinary people. So a priestly class was created as a kind of buffer to protect God from us and us from God.
 - a. The very layout of the Old Testament temple was designed around the idea of limited access to God. The temple consisted of five key areas, each more restrictive as you moved inward. Anyone could enter the outer Court of the Gentiles. Only orthodox women and men could enter the Court of Women. Only orthodox men could enter the Court of Israel. Only priests could enter the Court of Priests. And only certain priests (at certain times after elaborate cleansing rituals) could enter the Holy of Holies, where God was believed to be powerfully present. What messages were conveyed by the layout of the temple? What did it imply about God? What did it imply about ordinary people like you and me?
 - b. Some Christians believe that in Old Testament times God was different – more remove, aloof, and demanding. In this view, the Old Testament temple was laid out the way God wanted. Other Christians believe that God has always been right there with us, loving, merciful, and approachable. In this view, the Old Testament temple says more about how ancient people thought about God, than about how God actually was. Which view resonates with you? Has God changed how God interacts with us, or has our understanding of God expanded and changed?

4. Jesus igniting a revolutionary new understanding of who we are and how God feels about us. Jesus taught that we don't need a priest to mediate between us and God. Instead, he taught that the Spirit of God wants to dwell in each of us, that God's Spirit can speak directly to each of us and empower us. Jesus said, "The Spirit will guide **you** into all truth." John 16:13. Jesus told his followers, ordinary people like you and me, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8.
 - a. In Luke 9:48, Jesus said, "Whoever is least among you is the greatest of all." What do you think that means? What was Jesus getting at?
 - b. In the new way of understanding Jesus taught, God says, "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons **and your daughters** shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions . . . **Even upon slaves, both men and women** . . . , I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy." If you were a first century slave or woman and heard these words, how would you feel?
 - c. I Peter 2:9 declares, "You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's special possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God. . . ." What does it mean to say we are priests? Do you feel like a priest? Why or why not?
 - d. When Jesus breathed his last, the curtain in the temple that separated the Holy of Holies from everything else was torn in half. What's the significance of that?
5. The New Testament teaches that, because God Spirit dwells in you, you now possess one or more spiritual superpowers – *i.e.*, gifts of the Spirit – that you're meant to use to further God's work in the church and the world. Read the passage printed on p. 3.
 - a. If a ten-year-old asked you to explain this concept of "gifts of the Spirit," what would you say? How would you explain it?
 - b. The Bible offers 24 different examples of "gifts of the Spirit" – listed on p. 3 – and that's not an exhaustive list. A gift of the Spirit is any special aptitude God has given you that can strengthen a church community and further the work of Christ. Jeff said, "You will know that you're serving in your area of spiritual giftedness when: (a) what you're doing fills you with energy, instead of draining you; and (b) what you're doing blesses the socks off of others around you." Do you dare to believe that you (little ol' you) have been given one or more spiritual superpowers by God's Spirit? Is so, why do you believe that? If not, why?
 - c. What might be one of your gifts of the Spirit? Are you using that gift in a tangible way to further our work as a church? If so, how are you using it?
 - d. What happens to us (the church community) if you don't use your spiritual gifts among us? And what happens to you if you don't use your spiritual gifts?

I Corinthians 12:1-22, selected verses

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ⁴ There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷ God helps each of us with a gift from the Spirit as a way of helping the entire church. 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 discernment of spirits. ¹¹ All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹⁴ Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot were to 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 were to 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 the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as God chose. ²⁰ There are many members, yet one body. ²¹ 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 members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.

Examples of Gifts of the Spirit Mentioned in the Bible

Administration	Mercy
Apostleship	Miracles
Celibacy	Missions
Discernment	Pastoring (caregiving)
Evangelism	Prophecy (preaching)
Exhortation	Serving
Faith	Speaking in Tongues (and interpreting)
Giving	Teaching
Healing	Wisdom
Helping	
Hospitality	
Intercession	
Knowledge	
Leadership	