

# Approaching the Spiritual Gifts (Because of the Gospel)

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| SPEAKER  | Matt Ryniker                                                                |
| DATE     | Sunday, May 7, 2023                                                         |
| PASSAGES | 1 Corinthians 12; Acts 8; Acts 16; Genesis 12; 1 Kings 8; John 10; Esther 4 |
| MESSAGE  | Begins at 1:25:52 in the service                                            |

## THE BIG IDEA

Before Hope Chapel spends a season on what each gift of the Spirit is, Matt wanted to settle how we come to them at all. They are gifts, which means they are good, because the one handing them out is good. And they are handed out by a person — not a force, not a formula, and not a pile of parts left on the floor by a father who has gone out.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Whether someone taught you badly has no bearing on whether the thing they taught is true. Matt made the point from his years as a math teacher, and then applied it to the gifts: you may have seen them handled by people you found unhealthy or bizarre. That is not an argument.
- ◆ There are two ways to want power wrongly. The slave girl in Acts 16 had a real result from a false source. Simon in Acts 8 wanted the true source and approached it like a purchase. Most of us are not tempted by the first.
- ◆ Simon's error still runs in us whenever we treat prayer as more potent for using the right words, the right routine, or the right lucky charm.
- ◆ The gifts belong to the rank and file of the church, not to a fringe and not to an elite. "You don't get a free trial version of the Holy Spirit when you enter into Christ, and there's not a paywall."
- ◆ The more you believe God can actually do, the more you have to come to him the way a small child comes to a parent — asking again tomorrow without having been given the reasons.

- ◆ The gifts were never meant to build us a reputation. Solomon's prayer at the temple asks God to keep showing himself so that all the peoples of the earth would know *his* name.
- ◆ Jesus did not leave raw materials and instructions. He is a shepherd who stays, which means the responsibility for the outcome is not resting on the sheep.
- ◆ Mordecai's famous line to Esther has a first half we usually skip: if you stay silent, deliverance will come from somewhere else. Jesus will get his bride whether or not we get this right.

► 1:25:52

Hope Chapel has been working through First Corinthians, with a long pause in the middle, and this Sunday began what Matt called a series within a series: chapters 12 through 14, the chapters about the gifts of the Spirit. He set the pace up front — relaxed, unhurried, and not promising to say everything that could be said. “One of the main points is that the Lord can lead us in all these things according to his wisdom,” he said, “so we can express trust in him even in that topic.” Then he spent the whole morning on the approach rather than on any particular gift.

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## 1. A bad teacher does not make the theorem false

► 1:27:16

The illustration came from Matt's years teaching high school math. Students would turn up in his classroom for tutoring who were not even his students, because they could not learn from the teacher they had — a thick accent one of them could not follow, a teacher who had embraced an all-natural lifestyle that one boy could not get past when she leaned over his desk, a summer school teacher his whole class described as rude. But, Matt said, “no matter how poorly executed our lessons were as math teachers, or how rude or smelly we were, none of that has any bearing on whether the fundamental theorem of algebra is true or false.”

The room caught where this was going before he landed it. You may have seen the gifts of the Spirit embraced publicly and strangely by people you found unhealthy. Matt declined to argue about whether your assessment was fair. “You've seen them abused, you've seen people embrace them in a way that you found offensive — but that doesn't mean they're not a possession of the children of God.”

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## 2. Two wrong ways to want power

► 1:29:45

The first story is the slave girl in Philippi who made a fortune for her owners by telling fortunes through a spirit, until Paul cast it out and her owners started a riot over their lost income (Acts 16:16–19). Whatever she was doing, it was producing results people paid for. Wrong source, results in quotation marks.

The second is Simon, earlier in Acts, who watched the apostles lay hands on people and offered them money for the ability (Acts 8:18–20). Right source. He wanted the actual Holy Spirit. But he approached the free gift of God's own person the way you would approach magic — as a thing you buy.

Matt was blunt about the first category and then moved past it: very few people in that room are consulting Ouija boards, horoscopes, psychics or palm readers, and if you are, repent, because Christ is the way to the Father and he sets the terms. Simon is the one who has our number. You can approach the true God in an untrue way — with your money or with your time — “feeling like prayer works because you used special words,” as though it is more powerful in Greek, or as though you cast out demons better when you are wearing your lucky underwear.

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### 3. Cut loose from the gospel, cut loose from the story

► 1:32:31

Two ways that happens. The first is forgetting the cross. It is only by grace that we enter his fellowship, Matt said, echoing what had been prayed at communion an hour earlier — the Holy Spirit is not for sale, and wanting to buy him suggests we never understood that the cross was God's love poured out for free. Not free on his end. Free to us.

The second is superimposing the book of Acts onto your own timeline. People read it and conclude they do not yet have the Spirit and must do what the apostles did to get him, and a very appealing story follows: they stormed the gates of heaven, they prayed long enough and hard enough, and that is why the Spirit came. The Bible tells a different story. The Spirit was poured out because Jesus is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit and fire (Matthew 3:11), and because he died, rose, ascended and was enthroned. Detach the gifts from that, start reaching for special words and special routines, and Matt's question is fair: how different is that from what Simon was doing?

“The Holy Spirit and his gifts are not the Force from Star Wars,” he said. “The Holy Spirit is a person in the Trinity, and his gifts are given to us as he desires.”

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### 4. The text itself

► 1:34:49

“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says ‘Jesus is accursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit.”

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-3 ↗

Two lessons before a single gift is named. Paganism offered a variety of routes and they all arrived at the same destination — the kingdom of darkness does not care how you get there. And it is by the Spirit that anyone says Jesus is Lord at all; that confession is itself a gift. Matt tied that straight to why gifts exist: over against mute idols that are deaf and blind because they are wood and stone, we serve a God who is alive, who sees, who speaks, who hears, and who directs his people.

► 1:36:31

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good... All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.”

1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-11 ↗

Matt deliberately did not stop on any item in the list — wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, tongues, interpretation. Those are the weeks ahead. He wanted one word from the passage instead: *gifts*. Faith is a gift. Healings are a gift. Discernment is a gift. “They’re not payment in exchange for prayer time.” And if they are gifts, they are good, because God gives good gifts — “whatever he offers us is good, because he is good.”

He lingered on the last phrase too. As *he* wills. Not as we want, and not according to a ranking of who has earned it — a point made unanswerable by the fact that apostleship and the power to work wonders went to Paul, who had been violent toward the church. That does not stop you asking. “You can speak to the Holy Spirit. You can tell him, ‘I’m interested in serving you, I’m also interested in this, if it’s your will.’” What it stops is treating great Christian leaders like a vending machine — I want what you have, push D5, see what happens.

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## 5. Believing more means becoming more like a child

► 1:38:23

This was the turn of the morning, and Matt made it while people in the room were in the middle of hard things. A watchmaker God is easy to hold. He made the universe, he stepped back, and that explains why nothing seems to happen when the dark things come. That God costs very little faith.

But once you believe he counts the hairs on your head and wants to reveal himself and would love to give good gifts, you are in a different position — the position of a child with a parent. You ask. You do not know what will happen. You ask again tomorrow. You never get the whole rationale, and you keep asking anyway, because you can trust them. Any parent watching the livestream knows how much a child asks, Matt noted, and then added the part that matters: God is more patient than we are.

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## 6. Not the fringe, not the elite — the rank and file

► 1:42:05

Avoiding the gifts, Matt argued, does not make them go away. It relegates them — to the fringe of the church, or to the margins, or to some supposed elite. Both sides of that are distortions. If you have been the one praying when a miracle happened, it can go to your head until you feel like one of God's Marines and start offering autographs. If you have not, you conclude this is for people overseas, or the really special ones, or the man on television.

“They belong to the regular group of the body of Christ,” he said. “Your grandma. Your niece. Your cousin.” And then the line worth keeping: “You don’t get a free trial version of the Holy Spirit when you enter into Christ, and there’s not a paywall. Regular Christians can walk in his power — in fact, I don’t know if there’s another way to walk in Christ.”

► 1:44:06

He traced it back past Pentecost to Abraham:

“Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.”

GENESIS 12:1–2 ↗

Blessed in order to be a blessing — and the nation itself a miracle, since Abraham and Sarah were old and had never been able to have children. Every Israelite you ever met was walking evidence that something impossible had happened. Matt called it a good foreshadowing of the body of Christ: nothing about this should be the case, and it is, by mercy.

Yes, God speaks in the still small voice. But Matt pushed back on the idea that this is his only register. He spoke to Egypt through plagues, through a pillar of fire, through a parted sea, through manna every morning. Jesus himself said it:

“Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.”

Jesus is the substance of the message; the works are a tool he uses so that we believe him for who he really is. And over against idols that do nothing, “our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.”

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## 7. For his name’s sake, not ours

► 1:46:17

Solomon, dedicating the temple, prays for someone who is not an Israelite at all:

“Likewise, when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a far country for your name’s sake (for they shall hear of your great name and your mighty hand, and of your outstretched arm), when he comes and prays toward this house, hear in heaven your dwelling place and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you.”

1 KINGS 8:41–43 ↗

The foreigner hears about God from somewhere. The Exodus, certainly — Israel would tell that story. But Matt read Solomon as asking for more than a recitation of past acts. Solomon is not trying to obligate God to answer anyone who faces the building. He is asking him to keep showing himself, generation after generation, for a stated reason: so that all the peoples of the earth would know his name. Is that finished? Then we can pray Solomon’s prayer with him. Rehearse the great miracles, the Exodus, the resurrection — and also ask God to act again. “It is not for us to build a reputation as gift possessors,” Matt said, “but so that he will build up a reputation for his great name.”

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## 8. The furniture from IKEA

► 1:48:54

Here is the picture Matt admitted was imperfect and then used anyway, because it describes how a lot of us actually feel. A father brings home a flat box, hands it to the kids, says put this together, and leaves. All those little wooden dowels. We treat the gifts of the Spirit that way — raw materials to be assembled by people whose father is gone, and if we are diligent enough we will eventually figure it out.

“Jesus didn’t say, ‘Okay, I’m going to die and provide raw spiritual resources, and then I will leave and I won’t come back until you’ve fixed things up for me.’ As silly as that sounds, that is kind of how we embrace him, often.”

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees... He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.”

JOHN 10:11-13 ↗

Then the question Matt put to the room: where does the responsibility mostly sit — on the sheep to follow, or on the shepherd to guide? Our Lord is not half-hearted and lazy. He did not depart and leave us equipment.

“For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church.”

We are not shepherdless. We are not here to work out how to use the gifts and console ourselves until he gets back.

► 1:51:47

Before the last verse he gathered up what he had: the gifts are good, we should be informed about them, they belong to the rank and file of his body and not to “the few and the proud” or the special — and yes, we should study and practice them, but we go to *him* for that. “We don’t study and practice them like it’s the Force. We don’t just grow in power generically like Dragon Ball Z. We ask him, and we serve him, and he gives us gifts as he wills.” And the setting matters as much as the stone. Wanting the gifts in order to have them and make a name is the wrong frame; they “need to be like a jewel in a crown, put in their proper setting in the rubric of the gospel and in the overall story of God whom we know and love and trust.”

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## 9. Esther, and the half of the verse we skip

► 1:52:21

The book of Esther is short, theatrical and worth reading this week if you do not know it — a king about to authorize the slaughter of the Jews, a right-hand man with a personal grudge, and a queen the king does not know is Jewish. Her cousin Mordecai sends word:

“Do not think to yourself that in the king’s palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

ESTHER 4:13–14 ↗

We quote the last line. It has conferences and blog posts built on it, and it feels wonderful, because it means we are special and needed. Matt did the voice: *maybe our incompetent, lazy Lord — who is asleep, or gone, or both — maybe he needs me. I’ll rise up like the X-Men, and we’ll make this work.* He noted he was not doing the impression very well and that he had no intention of getting better at it.

► 1:55:34

The middle of the verse is the profound part, and it is Mordecai’s faith, not his flattery: *if you keep silent, relief and deliverance will rise from another place.* Suppose we botch it. Suppose this church handles the gifts badly. Jesus still gets his bride. That, Matt said, is what lets us put down the frantic IKEA energy and embrace the gifts with integrity and intimacy instead of the insane pressure to save everyone in Austin — the pressure that sends you back to the closet to shout worship songs louder, trying to mix the anointing to the right recipe, as though the outcome hung on getting the chemistry right.

## 10. One thing to obey

► 1:57:56

“Savior of the world — that role has already been taken,” he said. “We actually call it a Christ complex for a reason.” The alternative is not a smaller life; it is walking proudly as sheep who have a shepherd, on the strength of what he actually said:

all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him, therefore go, and he is with us to the end of the age. Not, Matt pointed out, *I had it for a minute, but now I’m giving it to you and I’m leaving.*

He closed with a habit he is trying to build into his preaching — asking what one thing you could obey Jesus in, from this message or from whatever the Spirit was saying while you were somewhere else. His own summary of the answer: we can trust Jesus with our salvation, with the church, with building a name for himself, and with shepherding us into these gifts even when we are worried they are weird. “As we serve him in these gifts, the whole point is to promote and proclaim Jesus the risen Lord.”

► 1:58:50

Then he prayed it rather than merely recommending it — thanking God for all of this, asking that we would walk in the power of his Spirit in a way that honors him, and that our eyes would be fixed on him

— and called the Heart Ministry teams forward. They were newly minted, so he told the room to mess with them and form really long lines. Prayer first, then the luncheon. A message about not being left to assemble anything alone ended with people standing at the front, available.

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**FOR FURTHER STUDY****SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- Acts 16:16–19
- Acts 8:18–20
- Matthew 3:11
- 1 Corinthians 12:1–3
- 1 Corinthians 12:4–11
- Genesis 12:1–2
- John 14:11
- Psalm 115:3
- 1 Kings 8:41–43
- John 10:11–13
- Ephesians 5:29
- Esther 4:13–14
- Matthew 28:18–20

**FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP**

1. Matt's math students could not learn from teachers who were rude, or hard to understand, or hard to sit next to — and none of it changed whether the math was true. Where has a bad experience with a person quietly decided what you believe about the gifts themselves?
2. Simon wanted the right thing and went about it the wrong way. What are your version of the "special words" or the lucky routine, and what do they reveal about what you think God requires before he moves?
3. Matt said the more you believe God can do, the more you have to come to him the way a child comes to a parent. Where has your asking gone quiet because you never got an explanation for the last answer?
4. Do you locate yourself on the fringe, among the elite, or in the rank and file? What changes if the gifts really do belong to your grandmother, your niece and your cousin?
5. Mordecai told Esther that deliverance would come from somewhere else if she stayed silent. What weight have you been carrying that belongs to the shepherd and not to you — and what is the one thing you will obey Jesus in this week?

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#### ABOUT THE SPEAKER

**Matt Ryniker** is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

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#### Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u96jNznTXr4&t=5152s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.