

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

What energizes you? What gets you going? What pumps you up and gets you excited for the day ahead of you? It's different for every one of us. Maybe it's that cup of coffee, you absolutely need it to be able to function. Maybe having eight hours of uninterrupted sleep refreshes you for the new day. Or maybe, even, it's the hardcore workout you put your sleepy body through each morning that gets you up and ready to go.

Well, what energizes you spiritually? I'm talking about what gets you ready and excited to go about doing the Lord's work every day? To use the gifts he's given you? To let your light shine? There really is only one answer. It's Jesus. Jesus Reveals Himself to Us through the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. And Jesus Energizes Us to Use Them!

The Corinthians were in need of some of that. They needed the encouragement, they needed to be energized to use their spiritual gifts. I mean, that appears to be at the heart of one of the questions they had asked the apostle Paul.

You see, the book of 1 Corinthians is really a letter Paul had written in response to a letter he had received from the church in Corinth. The Corinthian church was dealing with a lot of spiritual issues and questions, so they wrote to Paul, asking for his spiritual guidance.

Paul's return letter gave these believers so much great biblical advice, like on how to approach divisions within the church, how to deal with brothers and sisters who were erring in sin, and what God teaches about sexual immorality, marriage, the Lord's Supper, Christian freedom, adiaphora, and many other topics.

And now come our verses. Paul shifts his attention to the use of spiritual gifts. I imagine the question had been posed to Paul, something like this, "Paul, we have people here who have all of these gifts, we're talking about spiritual gifts, so talents and abilities to use in our church to serve God and his fellow believers here. But they aren't using them. At least, they're not using them wisely. They're not evaluating those gifts properly. Some are even abusing their gifts. How do we deal with those people and how should we deal with their gifts?"

This was Paul's answer, "Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant."

To Paul, these believers had no legitimate reason to not be using their gifts. They couldn't use the common excuses in defense of their laziness with these God-given abilities, like, "I don't know how to use it. I didn't even know I had that gift. There's no place for me to use my gift here. No one's asked me to use it," just to name a few of those excuses. Any of those reasons, in Paul's eyes, were just plain ignorance.

Now, at one time, that's what those believers had been. Ignorant. Unknowing. Even if they had the spiritual gifts, they wouldn't have used them. You know why? Because at one time, they were pagans, meaning they were led and influenced by mute idols. They had worshipped false gods, not uncommon in the immoral city of Corinth.

But that's not who they were anymore. Paul writes, "Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

These people had been changed. By God's grace, they had found the truth and had seen the light, the true Light, Jesus Christ, revealed to them. They were now children of God. They had been filled by the Holy Spirit, now able to rightly say, and believe, that "Jesus is the Lord. Jesus is God. Jesus is my Savior from sin!"

And along with that change, the Holy Spirit had poured out spiritual gifts on the people. The Holy Spirit energized them to want to use those gifts. And now, the Holy Spirit was presenting numerous opportunities for these believers to use their gifts for God.

Now, can you see some comparisons between these believers Paul was writing to with maybe your own life, with your own spiritual gifts?

When's the last time you spent some time looking at your spiritual gifts? When's the last time you evaluated your abilities? When's the last time you went one step further and looked for ways, for opportunities to use those spiritual gifts to, first and foremost, serve the Lord, and then, secondly, to serve his dear children, your fellow believers?

Well, if it hasn't been too recently, then how about today? You know, what a fitting Sunday to be talking about our spiritual gifts. Today, we are going to be taking a hard look at plans for this congregation's ministry, look at the various avenues in which we can carry out the work of the gospel. And you're going to have the chance to look at those plans, see the gifts needed to achieve those plans, and then decide whether your gifts can be utilized in those plans or not.

Well, of course, there is no shortage of reasons and excuses we can come up with not to use these gifts and abilities, right? Can you think of some of them? I can, because I've used some of them before, and I suspect you may have as well.

Excuses like, "My certain set of gifts, skills, can't be used here." "My gifts are pretty insignificant, not really worthwhile." "I don't even have any gifts." "Well, I've never been expected to use my gifts before, or at least no one has ever asked me to use my gifts, my talents, my abilities." "It takes too much time away from me to use these gifts here." "I'm too worn out to help out here." "I'm just not excited, or maybe, I'm just too lazy, to get involved, to find my niche, to do anything here..."

How would you rate those excuses? I would say those are pretty poor excuses. They show, just like what Paul says, just how ignorant we can sometimes be. Unknowing, everything revolving around this basic excuse, "I just don't care about using these gifts."

You know the saying, "Ignorance is bliss"? That the less I know about my spiritual gifts and what my abilities are, then I can't be held accountable for my lack of using them. Is that being faithful with your gifts? Can you be satisfied it that's how you're serving God, using gifts given to you by the Holy Spirit?

Well, the question really is, "Is God satisfied with how I'm using my gifts...or not using them." "Would God be pleased with how I've managed, or mismanaged, the abilities he's given me to serve him?" And, unfortunately, sometimes the answer to that is no. There are times where you and I allow the temptations of ignorance, laziness, selfishness to affect those skills and abilities that God has graciously given us and how we use them.

And all we can do is fall on our knees and cry out to our God, "Oh, God, have mercy on me. Oh, God, forgive me." And brothers and sisters, I tell you the very words of God, "You are forgiven."

Because of the one who faithfully used his gifts all the time, you are forgiven. Because of the one who used his gifts, not for his own benefit, but who did everything with you and me in mind, you are forgiven. Because of the one who reveals himself to you and me through these gifts of the Holy Spirit, you are forgiven.

Of course, I'm talking about Jesus. He is the giver of every good and perfect gift that you and I have in our lives. But before we talk about the spiritual gifts he's given us, let's talk about the greatest gifts he's given. You, of course, know what that is, don't you?

The gift of himself. We celebrated the birth of our greatest gift just a few weeks ago, wrapped up for us, not in beautiful wrapping paper with ribbons and bows, but in clothes, placed in a manger. Still the greatest gift because that child, throughout his life, was sinless, perfect.

And that perfection he gave to us, free of charge, because he loves us, which is the real reason most people give gifts anyways. Nothing of ourselves, but because Jesus loves us, he gave us perfection, the forgiveness of sins when he died on the cross to serve the punishment for our sins, like our misuse of our spiritual gifts.

And the bow on the top of that present of Jesus? His resurrection, coming back to life so you and I can be sure that the present he gave us, forgiveness, will last for all of our lives, until we reach heaven.

The greatest gift, Jesus, revealed to us, as our Savior from sin. And he doesn't stop with that gift.

Now you might notice that so far, we've talked about gifts of the Spirit, spiritual gifts, but we haven't specified what those gifts are. That's because the list of these gifts, of abilities, of talents, of skills that God gives us through the Holy Spirit is endless. The list could go on and on.

Now, in our verses, Paul mentions some of these gifts, all given by the same God, the same Holy Spirit who loves us. Take a look at those gifts again. I want you to take note of that last verse, "All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines."

You know, you might not have any of these gifts Paul just mentioned. But that just means that the Holy Spirit has given you other gifts, different from each other. Now, if your spiritual gift is that you come and worship and praise your Savior here faithfully week after week, and that's it, wonderful. But I would challenge all of you here today to honestly and prayerfully look at yourself and see what your gifts are,

because I'd be willing to bet that some serious self-reflection would turn up more gifts you can use to serve your God.

Maybe you're a people person, like talking to people. You could be a greeter, or help our outreach team as we go and meet new people to tell them about Jesus or follow-up on worship guests to say thanks for coming.

Maybe you're artsy or dabble with graphic design. We have a website that's always looking to be updated, new banners that can be made for the front of church, fliers that can be designed to advertise our church.

Maybe your gift is you care...especially about people who are sick or who haven't been to church lately. You can go visit members in the hospital or go and encourage other straying members to come back to the fold.

Maybe you like to cook, which I'm guessing there are a few of you; our potlucks are always amazing. Can you make meals for those who might be going through a hard time?

Maybe you love little children and want to serve God by finding ways to help and encourage parents in the spiritual upbringing of their children.

You see where I'm going? The possibilities are endless. The needs are endless. And you all have spiritual gifts, given by the Holy Spirit, to use, as Paul says, for the common good, to serve God and his body of believers.

You know what's so great about using our gifts? Paul tells us it's a manifestation of the Spirit. Using our spiritual gifts is the way we reveal Jesus to others, to show we love God so much, we want to use what he's lovingly given to us for his glory.

And that's what energizes us spiritually, to use our gifts. Number one, the fact that Jesus lived, Jesus died, Jesus rose for our sins gives us energy to live for him. But also, the opportunity to return a small portion of that love to God by using our gifts, our talents, our abilities, that gives us energy, too.

Need your spiritual cup of joe? That's the Holy Spirit, working in us each and every day to continue living for God, a response of love to Jesus' amazing gift of salvation. And part of that living? Using our spiritual gifts, whatever they might be, because that's our way of saying thank you to God, for those gifts, for everything he's done for us. That's our way of showing our love for him. That's our way of revealing Jesus to others. And that's our way of carrying out the Lord's work.

So, feeling energized to use your gifts? We will, and we do. Amen.