

# 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them **in everyone**. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit **for the common good**. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

## Team Spirit

Do you feel good this morning? Does it feel good to be in church? I hope so, because God has given us a lot to feel good about. I'm going to talk about four things that God gives us that should make us feel good. Three of them I mentioned last week when I talked to you about baptism: Those are three things that our baptism should remind us of. Anyone remember? If you remember the words Jesus heard from the Father as he was coming up out of that water, it'll help you. What was it the Father said? *'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'* That's what God says to each one of us when we are baptized; *'You are my Son , (or daughter), my beloved; with you I am well pleased.'*

1. **That we belong to God ("You are my beloved")**
2. **That we are loved by God ("You are my beloved")**
3. **That you are specially gifted by God ("In you I am well-pleased")**

These three truths should make us feel pretty good about ourselves. To know that we belong to God gives us a sense of *identity*; when we forget that we belong to God we lose that sense of identity. Second, to know that we are loved by God brings us a sense of *security*; the one who claims us as his *loves* us as well, and so we are *secure* in God's tender care. To know that we are gifted by God gives us a sense of *ability*; we are *able* to do great things because God has created us to do great things. We may have gone astray, and lived a life of self-gratification, and we may feel bad about our wayward past, but that doesn't erase the fact that you are still wonderfully made by God and able do great things here and now. You may be old now and think that it's too late to make any difference in the world, but you still have gifts and you are still able to do great things for God. So in baptism we gain a sense of identity, security, and ability that remain with us throughout our lives.

We need just one more thing; we need a sense of *destiny*. Where are we going? As children of God who are loved by God and endowed with gifts from God, *what are we supposed to do? What is our GOAL?* Today I want to speak to you about that goal and how these gifts that God has given to each of us are meant to work together in achieving that goal. I titled my sermon "Team Spirit" because according to Paul it is the Holy Spirit that not only bestows these gifts upon us but works within us to prompt us to work together as a team to achieve our goal as Christians.

Let me start by talking about the Goal toward which we Christians strive. That goal is NOT self-righteousness. That goal is NOT just getting my own act together, making sure that I am following God's

commandments, that I'm not cheating on my taxes, that I'm staying close to the speed limit, that I'm adequately tipping the waiter, not drinking or eating too much, and living a holy lifestyle. That is NOT the goal. Living a pious lifestyle may better prepare me to achieve the goal, but the pious lifestyle in itself is NOT the goal. The *goal* is to proclaim the good news of God through word and deed, and the good news is that God's kingdom is at hand. Jesus came to initiate God's reign on earth, people who resisted God's kingdom killed Jesus, but Christ is risen and that kingdom has not been defeated. That kingdom is still at hand. That kingdom is upon you inasmuch as you and I submit to Christ's authority in our lives, and that kingdom is coming as eventually God will rid our world of sin and death. The kingdom is present, and the kingdom is a future. It is a reality, but it is also a goal. Many Christians have lost sight of this goal. Perhaps it's because they have grown cynical thinking that we're stuck with sin and death, that they will always be with us, and the best they can hope for is that *their* souls will 'go to heaven.' Perhaps too it's because they are self-centered – it's all about *my* life, and *my* gifts, and *my* salvation. When everything is about yourself, you tend to run into conflicts with others who think it's all about themselves.

Here I refer back to our passage. Paul is dealing with a divided church here, and it's because people have lost sight of a **common goal**. It's all about *who is more spiritual*. These people have come to know that they *belong* to God, that they are *loved* by God, and that they *are gifted* by God, but they are now competing with one another over *whose got the coolest gift*. "I speak in tongues; what can you do?" "I teach Sunday School. What do you do?" "I'm in charge of the Nominations committee? What are you in charge of?" It's all about me! And so there's squabbling over whose got what gift, **and Paul is telling them in today's passage that 1) EVERYONE has gifts and 2) they all come from God and 3) all these gifts work TOGETHER for the common good in order for us to achieve a COMMON GOAL. IT'S NOT ABOUT ME; IT'S ABOUT US! How are my gifts working together with your gifts to bring GOD's kingdom to light in our midst? Are we on the same team and working toward the same goal?**

I like sports even though I don't watch them that often. I used to watch the Washington Redskins play every week (because Washington D.C. was the closest city that sponsored a pro football team). And I would get completely enthralled in the game as *my* team took on their opponents and marched on toward the goal of becoming Super Bowl champions. I think that the Super Bowl is still the most viewed program in America, perhaps in the entire world. And part of it is because football is a metaphor for our lives. Life is a struggle against the New England Patriots. We strive to achieve goals while there are evil forces that work against us and try to prevent us from reaching those goals. And the important lesson that football and other team sports teach us is that it is TEAMWORK that brings us victory. There is a football game called the Pro Bowl that is held every year, but it is not nearly as interesting as the Super Bowl because the Pro Bowl is just a collection of the finest INDIVIDUAL athletes but the teams that are created are not the same quality as the teams that have fought together week after week, sometimes year after year in order to reach a goal. We have an implicit understanding that **together** we are in a long-term struggle to persevere and defeat forces that try to stop us, and to win we have to work together.

In a church, we have all sorts of people, none of them perfect, but all of them gifted. **No one is more important than anyone else**. Someone may seem to be less gifted and less vital to the success of our team, but perhaps you're seeing their gift as clearly as you should. There's a man named Daniel Eugene Ruettiger, known to many as Rudy. There was a movie made about him. Rudy loved to play football. The problem was that he didn't seem "cut out" for football; he was 5'6" and 165 lbs. – hardly the build that you need to play with the professionals. Well Rudy's dream was to play college football on the varsity team for the University of Notre Dame, the Fighting Irish, and he knew that Notre Dame had open

tryouts; anyone could try out for the team as long as they were a student at Notre Dame. Rudy had one more problem to face; he was dyslexic and as a consequence his high school grades weren't that good. He ended up going to Holy Cross College which was near Notre Dame, while he continued to apply to Notre Dame in hopes of getting accepted so that he could try out for the football team, and after being rejected three times, on his fourth application Rudy was accepted to Notre Dame University for his senior year; Rudy would have the chance to play for Notre Dame's varsity team for one year. His next challenge was to get onto the team, and though it was obvious that Rudy was not "cut out" to be on the Notre Dame football team he was kept on as part of their scout team – a squad that is used to help the varsity team prepare for games - because of his determination. Week after week went by, and Rudy continued to hope and pray that he would be able to play on the varsity team, but week after week his name did not appear on the roster for the upcoming game. When the roster for the final game of the season, the last opportunity Rudy would ever have to play on the varsity team, his name did not appear on the roster. Rudy was so discouraged that he decided then and there to quit the team. What was the point of continuing if he could not play that final game. But after some encouragement from a his boss and friend, a man who was also denied the chance to play on the varsity team due to the color of his skin, Rudy changed his mind and got dressed for the team's last practice. And I'd like to show you this short clip that shows what happened next. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TY0LUllwo8k>

I like to think of our church as a team. We have a lot of talent here; there are people here with incredible gifts of administration and finance and musical ability and teaching, and all of those gifts work together to help us achieve our goal of living out God's kingdom. This is not a showcase for our individual gifts and abilities but rather a place where we practice teamwork. And every member is important. And all of us need encouragement and recognition for the gifts that we have, even the ones that don't seem "cut out" for many tasks. Rudy was not "cut out" to play football, but he was so vital to his teammates that they were willing to sacrifice their time on the field to give him the opportunity that he had dreamed of. When Rudy dressed for that final practice knowing that he would still not play in the final game, Rudy showed that he was a team player, that it was no longer about him. And when his teammates placed their jerseys one by one on the coaches desk saying that they wanted Rudy to dress for them, to take their place on the field, they showed that they were team players, that there is no member of the team that is not important. My friends, we are a team. All of you are important, and all you have something to contribute to our ministry. May God give us eyes to see not just our own gifts but the gifts that others bring to the table. And may God give us hearts to see the needs we have to be recognized and appreciated and to be part of this wonderful team.