

**FAITH AND HEALINGS**  
**Opening Your Spiritual Gifts**  
**Dr. George O. Wood**

We're looking in the scripture tonight once more in 1 Corinthians 12. I'd like to read again the first eleven verses of 1 Corinthians 12 to take a look again at where we've been in the scripture and come to a consideration of tonight's teaching. "Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. You know that when you were pagans somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to dumb idols. Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says 'Jesus be anathema [or Jesus be cursed]. And no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. There are different kinds of gifts but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service but the same Lord. There are different kinds of workings but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom. To another the utterance of knowledge by means of the same Spirit. To another faith by the same Spirit. To another gifts of healing by that one Spirit. To another miraculous powers. To another prophecy. To another the ability to discern [or distinguish between spirits]. To another the ability to speak in different kinds of tongues and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All of these are the work of one and the same Spirit and he gives to each one just as the [Spirit] determines."

It's the desire I'm sure within all of our hearts that whatever the Lord may have for us as individuals persons and what he may have for us as the church should come to pass in our experience. I guess I always want to be a part of two kinds of churches. I have a great desire to be a part of the apostolic church so I look backward in history to see what it was like to have been in the early church. There are people periodically who say, "I would like to have been in the early church." Maybe they think in over glamorize terms of the early church. But when we think of being like the early church we must also conclude that there was the church at Corinth who had its problems. At least people are not getting drunk at our communion services. So not everything in the early church was ideal. And not everything in the body of Christ or in the church anywhere will ever be ideal. I'm not convinced that there is anything such as the perfect church. I am convinced that there are such churches as maturing congregations. If you look long enough you will find imperfections in this body. But our focus is not there. We want to be all that the church can be in the beginning. Also our eyes are not simply on the past. Our eyes are ahead to what new challenges and callings the spirit may have for us people today.

Tonight we look especially at the gifts of faith and healings. Two of the nine spiritual gifts as we have read in 1 Corinthians 12. We want to look at these gifts from several angles.

First I want to look at these gifts of faith and healings and their relationship to Jesus.

It should be noted that since the Lord is the head of the church and since we are his body we exist to simply carry out his wishes. One of the things that we do well to note in respect to any spiritual character quality or any spiritual gift aspect is to note that those gifts are also modeled and represented and exemplified in the person of Jesus Christ.

So far as I know the only spiritual gift, which Jesus himself is not seen as practicing is the gift of speaking in tongues and the interpretation of tongues. Otherwise all the gifts that are listed whether they be in 1 Corinthians 12 or in Romans 12 or in Ephesians 4 are gifts which he himself exemplified. The reason why he did not exemplify tongues with the interpretation of

## FAITH AND HEALINGS

### Opening Your Spiritual Gifts

tongues no doubt has to do with the sequence in which those gifts occur since they were not in place until after the day of Pentecost and the Lord ascended to heaven.

When we speak of the gifts, we look at the fact that Acts 1 tells us that in the third gospel or the first book which Luke wrote the “former book” he says “I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and to teach.” I love that verse because it tells us that as the history of the church unfolds it is but the continuation of what Jesus is doing and teaching. The gospel which covers the time of his ministry to his ascension is only the beginning of what he began to do and to teach. The history of the church is the continuation of what Jesus is doing and is saying.

There are some who look at the New Testament and almost continually talk in the past tense. I do not like talk in the past tense when dealing with any scripture. If I can I’ll find a present tense reference because these things which are described for us in scripture are not long ago events. They are continuing actions.

The Lord continues to work through the church and therefore when we look at Jesus’ life we will see the gifts of faith and healing very much present in his life. In fact in John 14:12 he says to his disciples, “Truly, truly I say to you he who believes in me will also do the work that I do. Not only say the words I say but do the works I do and greater works than these will he do.” For a long time I was hung up on that word “greater works than these will he do.” Because I wondered what in the world could be a greater work than the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead. How could anyone do anything greater than that? The whole Christian church has never seen a miracle greater than that. How could anything be greater than the healing of a man born blind? Or the healing of a paralytic coming through the top of the roof and lowered into a room. In terms of quality of miracle nothing could be greater than that. This leaves therefore the option that when Jesus was telling us greater works than these shall you do he was not talking about the *quality* of the work. He was talking about the *quantity* of the work. He was talking about the fact that his body would do more miracles than he himself did. And that those miracles would be more extensive in scope. His miracles were locked in time and place – to Palestine. But his followers, his apostles carrying the gospel throughout the world and throughout the centuries of time would extend his kingdom and indeed extensively would do greater works than he himself did.

When we therefore look at the gifts of faith and healing we see them first of all as belonging to Jesus and when they’re exercised today they are simply a continuation of his ministry.

The second thing that I want to look at in respect to the gifts of faith and healing is their relationship to what might be called the ordinary exercise and the ordinary exercise of healing.

All of the gifts that are listed in 1 Corinthians 12 have an ordinariness. For example all of us are called to exercise wisdom in life. All of us are called to grow in knowledge. All of us Paul says may prophecy. All of us may pray for the sick. All of us are called to have faith. It’s not that the gift of faith that’s something somehow only a few have and no one else needs to have faith. There is the kind of common quality to faith. A common quality to healing. For example Hebrews 11:6 when describing faith says, “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” The assumption is everyone is to have it. Romans 1:17 says “the just shall live by faith.” Ephesians 2:8 “For by grace you have been saved through faith.”

## **FAITH AND HEALINGS**

### **Opening Your Spiritual Gifts**

Faith is a fruit of the Spirit and is a gift of the Spirit. It is the only fruit that is also a gift. The only gift that is also a fruit. It's to be a common quality of the believer's life.

Therefore the important thing in looking at the list of the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 is to distinguish the operation of the gift of faith from ordinary faith or common faith. One translation is best when they call the gift of faith, the gift of special faith. Or extraordinary faith. Or a greater measure of faith, which God has assigned.

The same goes for healing. All of us when we are sick may come to the Lord in prayer and ask and seek and knock. We're invited in James 5:14-15 when we are sick to invite elders to anoint us with oil and lay hands upon us. There is nothing said that the elders by virtue of their office possess also the gift of healing. It's simply that healing is a common and ordinary phenomenon within the body. And prayer for the sick is to be part and parcel of every day experience.

But beyond all of this aspect of the normal praying for the sick and the normal praying for healing. There is a special operation of the gifts of healings. Notice it is in the plural. The gifts of healings indicating that there are different kinds of needs in respect to healing and therefore there are different gifts to meet them.

So in looking at whether or not you have the gift of faith or the gift of healings, first realize that as a believer you are called to faith. Whether or not you have the gift of extraordinary faith or mountain moving faith. You are certainly as a believer entitled and privileged to pray for yourself and for one another when you are ill.

Let's look thirdly, specifically at the functioning of the gifts of faith and the functioning of the gifts of healing.

The gift of faith.

The gift of faith as I understand it as it's developed in the New Testament has three fundamental purposes. When we recognize what the purposes are for it's easy to spot how we can then go about developing or seeking the experience of that gift in our life.

The first function of the gift of faith, which I would itemize would simply be that the gift of faith is meant to recognize and to call forth the potentiality in another person or in a group of persons. When you look at Jesus' life you see I think the gift of faith in operation when he first lays his eyes on Simon. He says to him, Your name is no longer Simon. Your name is Peter, which means a rock. A stable person. One of the things that I like least about pastoring is the fact that the sermons that really are my favorite I can only preach about once every 3-5 years lest I bore you to tears with hearing the same message. I try to be very careful.

I used to be very paranoid about repeating a message. I'm getting a little less paranoid about that as I get older. My favorite sermon in all the world is the one the Lord gave me about Simon and how when the Lord renamed him he psychologically did a masterstroke. Because every one of us is composed of the negative and the positive. Simon had all kinds of negatives in his life. But the Lord chose to focus upon the positive and draw it out and identify him as the rock and move him toward what he'd eventually become. It was an uncommon exercise of the gift of faith.

## **FAITH AND HEALINGS**

### **Opening Your Spiritual Gifts**

It takes faith to develop people. It takes faith as a parent to develop children. One in any situation in life when dealing with persons or dealing with groups has to avoid the temptation to lock people in a box. To lock an individual in a box and say, That's what they are and that's all they're capable of being. I asked the Lord, Deliver me from typecasting and stereotyping people because he surely doesn't do that. Let the gift of faith operate in me that things can be different than they are.

We in the Sermon on the Mount read the statement of Jesus "You are the salt of the earth." That sounds so very common and ordinary that we pass right over that. We forget that when Jesus first speaks that there are only twelve committed followers of his in all the world. He has the faith to believe that by following him they are indeed going to salt the earth and light the world.

When you get through with Jesus' training of the disciples you have seen the finished product of the gift of faith in operation where he takes ordinary people and turns them into extraordinary persons.

Barnabus in the scripture also has this extraordinary operation of the gift of faith as it relates to a person. He shows it in regard to two people. Saul when Saul of Tarsus is converted. Nobody in Jerusalem will have anything to do with him because they don't trust him. But Barnabus believes in him and introduces him to the apostles.

And also at Antioch when Barnabus is there teaching the church at Antioch, Acts 11, he recognizes that the church needs a teaching gift which he himself does not possess so he leaves the flock in Antioch, goes to Tarsus to find Saul, the tent maker and brings him back, the trained Christian rabbi. He has faith in Paul and Paul develops marvelously under Barnabus' encouragement.

He does the same thing again with John Mark. Paul didn't have the gift of faith for the potential in John Mark. Paul said he failed me once. He's not going to fail me again. He's a quitter. He walked out when the pressure was tough. I'm not going to take him any time else. Barnabus said to Paul, but God is not through with John Mark and you'll find him dependable. But Paul said, Nothing doing. And they split in disagreement over John Mark.

It was Barnabus' action on the part of working with John Mark that calls forth ultimately the potential in him. When Paul is in his final imprisonment in Rome he says "Get Mark for he is useful to me. Mark is a person who finally stood up under pressure. But it took someone to call forth the potential in his life.

We need to see that. Young people need to be around older people who believe that they can be something in the kingdom of God and do something in the kingdom of God. I pray regularly that we will be a people who help draw out the potential in one another to serve the Lord. The gift of faith operates therefore when in an unusual way we can see the potential in another person and begin to call things into being that are not.

The second function of the gift of faith is to grasp a vision of what God wants to accomplish and to confidently work and live that that vision might come to pass. A function of the gift of faith is to grasp a vision of what the Lord wants to accomplish and to confidently live and work that it might come to pass.

## **FAITH AND HEALINGS**

### **Opening Your Spiritual Gifts**

In the Old Testament Abraham is the classic example of the operation of the gift of faith. At the age of 99 God takes him out under the stars one evening and says Can you count them? And he says no. And the Lord says to him, “As many as are the stars is going to be the number of your descendants.” And the scripture says, “And Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.”

For years I read that scripture with the assumption that when the Bible talks about Abraham believing God it meant that Abraham was believing something about God. Like God is a spirit. God is immortal. God is omnipotent. God is invisible. Whatever. It dawned on me one day that that is not at all what Abraham believed when it says that Abraham believed God. In the moment in Genesis 15:6 when it says Abraham believed, what Abraham believed is the word of promise that God spoke to him. When Abraham believed God, he believed what God had said about him – Abraham. And he then began to act upon what God had said.

There are moments when the Lord does give us a special gift of faith to fulfill a calling upon our lives. We look back later and wonder how in the world we got through that time. But it was a special functioning of faith where God gave us a vision.

I think that the vision of faith may apply to a work of God in an area. I know it is a vision of faith that for years has driven me in terms of the ministry of this church. An ideal that I see this church, if the Lord tarry, in the year 2000.

The gift of faith always needs to be in operation when a church considers expansion and ministry and seriously taking the command of Jesus to fulfill the great commission.

A third operation of the gift of faith is that it is meant to under gird the body of Christ with perseverance when that body or when people are going through great time of trial.

Hebrews 11 the great hall of heroes of those who have been faithful tells us that not only were the mighty people who took kingdoms and the like persons of faith but also those died in faith who were sawn asunder and who dwelt in caves and who lived with sheepskin. They all died in faith. One of the functions of faith may be to see a vision come to pass.

Another function of faith may be to call people to be steady in a time of great danger. That really is the whole message of the book of revelation to a church under the heel of the persecution of Dometian in 95 AD. A church that was battered and shaken but was called to the fact that Jesus was the Lord of history and behind Caesar and behind Dometian and behind political power is he unseen but the very real power of Jesus Christ. And the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our God and his Christ and he shall reign forever and ever.

These three functions may be expected in respect to faith: to call forth potential in persons, to bring to pass visions of what God may do in a whole given area or in our lives, to call us to persevere when things are going tough.

Some other quick things that can be said about faith. Obviously faith supports the gifts of healing and the gift of miracles.

## **FAITH AND HEALINGS**

### **Opening Your Spiritual Gifts**

For example the working of the gift of faith may be seen in Peter's raising of the lady Tabitha or Dorcus in Acts 9. It's a very interesting scripture. If you compare it to Mark's gospel you find that Jesus was brought into the room of a little girl, the daughter of Jairus, who had died. Jesus kicked everybody out of the room and then he said with Peter, James and John present "Tabitha, cumi," which means "Little girl, rise." And the girl sat up.

In Acts 9 when Peter is confronted with the death of Dorcus he does the same thing. He remembers for a moment the room where Jesus had raised the little girl. Faith operates when we've seen it happen before. If we've been in a situation and seen God come through we have a lot more confidence when we get in a similar situation. In the room of death, he gets everybody out of the room, goes in, and says practically the same words Jesus said to the little girl. A tremendous operation of gifts of immediate faith.

When we come to the gift of healing we find of course faith addresses many different needs but healing especially addresses physical need. Sometime I think healing can refer to inward needs as well. Obviously within the physical realm there are a diversity of illnesses. That is why there is a multitude of gifts of healing because there are many illnesses.

I'm struck with what I see in Acts 8:7 where Philip the deacon goes to Samaria and under his ministry there are healed the lame and the demon possessed. That especially is noted. I've looked at that and wondered if there was not a special functioning of the gift of healing through Philip that did not embrace all illnesses. Inasmuch as only lameness and possession are singled out. I've observed persons who seem to have a special gift of faith and healing and praying for particular areas of illness.

Perhaps Philip is the first to model this. He has a special gift operating when it comes to the paralyzed and the demon possessed but there do not appear to be miracles happening in other areas. There are obviously many different kinds of illnesses. There are acute illnesses, ones that flare up immediately such as Peter's mother in law. And there are chronic illnesses, a long-standing condition.

The practice of praying for the sick is prevalent to us, the church of the New Testament and spirit filled churches today. The distinguishment between ordinary or the common practice of healing in the church and the gifts of healing seems to me as I read the book of Acts is that the gifts of healing are more especially functioning when the body of Christ is breaking through into new territory. The gifts of healing are especially present with what might be called apostolic ministries. The gifts of healing are especially functioning when the church is reaching out to unbelievers and a beachhead for the gospel is being established among non-believers. Otherwise the normal practice of healing is occurring in the Christian congregation. If any of you are sick, it does not say find somebody with the gift of healing and have them pray for you. And a lot of believers do that. They sort of migrate to whoever is perhaps exercising a gift of healing. The common practice among believers is to simply seek persons who have an office of leadership in the church and be anointed with oil and the prayer of faith shall save the sick.

But gifts of healing as you read the book of Acts, tend to be especially on the cutting edge of evangelism and growth and invasion of the gospel into new territory. You see this all through the history of the early church. And you see it today.

## **FAITH AND HEALINGS**

### **Opening Your Spiritual Gifts**

I think wherever you see a people who get out on the cutting edge of faith and get out on the cutting edge of evangelism and really believe in the power of the Holy Spirit you're going to see this kind of healing phenomenon happening again and again. That's why all over the world it's the people who take the book of Acts seriously that are involved in church growth. The church that believes miracles are in the past and healings happened a long time ago, is not the church that is dynamically alive in the world today. It is the church that believes and trusts God. I'd say to us as a body that desires the gifts of healing to function that the gifts of healings will function in our midst in direct proportion to the amount of evangelism that we become involved in. To our desire to really reach and impact our community for the Lord Jesus Christ. God will give us some keys and help us to step out of comfortability and ordinariness to do some things that only can be accounted for in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The gifts of healing obviously function for several reasons. They function to deliver the sick. They're not some kind of a sideshow. Jesus never hung a banner on his meetings "Signs and wonders being done here tonight. Come and see." His first motivation was to heal people and to minister to real needs. But when the healings occurred they established his tremendous claim. Jesus says in John 10:38 "Even though you do not believe in me believe the miracles that you may learn and understand that the Father is in me."

In Acts the miracles of healing authenticated the preaching of the gospel. It is by the name of Jesus of Nazareth whom you crucified whom God has raised from the dead that this man stands before you completely healed.

The miracles also bring praise to God. "When people saw the deaf and the dumb speaking and hearing, the crippled made well and the lame walking they praised the God of Israel." Matthew 15:31.

How do we experience the implementation of these gifts? That's always a concern. It's one thing to look at the functioning of the gift and know that they're in operation in other people's lives but how can we be activated to implement these gifts in our own experience?

I think there are two key ingredients to the exercise of the gift of faith, the gift of healing, or the gift of miracles. Where you see persons functioning in these gifts there are these two things present. You will find people who have dared to step out into a ministry where they would fail unless God came through. I'm not talking about doing things foolishly or presumptuously. God knows there's been enough people who've said God called me to do something and it never panned out. They weren't really called at the beginning. It was never confirmed or ratified by other believers.

But I'm talking about the kind of calling that's a real result of the work of the Holy Spirit where we step out in an area where we will indeed fail unless God comes through. I'm very concerned as a church body that we never come to a state of our dreams and expectations where we look at what we're doing and says, We can handle that. Don't ever want to be at that place where we say that. I always want to be in a place of dependency upon the Lord. Where I say, If the Lord doesn't come through this time we're really going to crash this ship.

## **FAITH AND HEALINGS**

### **Opening Your Spiritual Gifts**

Philip never had the gift of miracles, he never had the gift of healings until he went to Samaria. He stepped out into the unknown. He dared to do things for the Lord, he'd never done before and they began function, these gifts, through him.

Paul is never recorded as ever functioning with the gift of miracles and healing until he steps into the first missionary journey. He's been a believer at least 15 years by that time probably. Never do we see any of these things happening through him. Once he steps out into a new area and dares to venture into a ministry where he would fail unless God came through, then these gifts began to function. That is an exciting journey when we do that.

A second thing that I believe is involved in the implementation of these gifts is that we must be profoundly moved with human need.

These gifts will not function if we just want them to be adornments. If we want to be known as a person who has mountain moving faith or the gift of healing. God doesn't give gifts like Boy Scout badges to wear as some mark of boasting. He gives them because there are people that catch the heart of Jesus and are concerned about needs in the world.

These gifts of healing will never function by our simply wanting them. By saying, wouldn't that be a nice adornment to the church to have faith and healing function. They'd be nice like beautiful worship banners or the wreath or other nice appointments. The gifts don't function in that way. They must come to people who have caught the vision of Jesus for others. They will not even necessarily happen automatically then. But that is a precondition for them.

I'd encourage you if what I've shared from the scripture has awakened a desire in your heart or stirred up a desire that has gone dormant that God would work through you in faith and healing that you ask God to point your eyes to the need and opportunity where you can step out in arenas of activity that only if God comes through can anything be done. And the Lord will. Because he's said that in the last days he would pour out his Spirit upon all flesh. Upon the young men and the old men and the youth women and the old women he would pour out his Spirit and he would bring to us dreams and visions supernatural experience. We can pray that this will happen with us.

Our Father we come to you now in some moments of commitment and consecration. We thank you for the ordinary expressions of faith and healing that have been present among us. Not so ordinary when we reflect upon the fact that persons within our church body in the last year have had dramatic healings from cancer, from skin disease. We see dramatic operations of the gift of faith that have enabled us to expand as a congregation. To see a vision of what you want for us in this community. But Lord, more than anything we've ever seen in the past we want to experience more of you in the days ahead. Make our hearts, Lord, a spiritual hothouse. Make them a climate in which the Spirit is pleased to work and all the power of the Lord is poured forth. Keep us from the danger as a body of settling in with comfortability and simply saying, It's wonderful we're here and what a beautiful fellowship we have and we thank you for all that. But Lord, it's never enough that we simply enjoy one another. We must hear again and again your words to us, Go ye! Go ye! It is in that going, it is in that fulfilling of your word, it is in that stretching of our experience that you will minister to us and bring us a greater understanding and greater experience of

**FAITH AND HEALINGS**  
**Opening Your Spiritual Gifts**

your Spirit in our lives. Lord, stretch us. Expand us. Bring us continually into your heart that from you might flow your power in us. Thank you Lord. We praise your name.

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