

I LOVE MY CHURCH – WEEK 3 – SERVING – 1 Corinthians 12:4-7
Pastor Jon Haakana

Superheroes and superpowers. When you were growing up, did you have a favorite superhero? Who was yours? *

Needless to say, mine was always Superman. Normal guy by day, normal job and normal life, except for the fact he was from the planet Krypton and had superpowers.

I looked up the definition of “superhero” in Webster’s. It says, “A fictional hero having extraordinary or superhuman powers; an exceptionally skillful or successful person.” Now, I don’t mean to criticize Merriam-Webster on their ability to curate definitions. It is their business. However, I don’t think this one is correct. It’s not inaccurate; it’s just incomplete. Superheroes are more than just extraordinary, super-powered, exceptionally skilled people. That’s not even half of what makes them who they are. Superheroes are superheroes because they utilize their abilities within a specific context to help in a specific way. Who is the superhero of Metropolis? Who is the superhero of Gotham? New York? Okay—NY is spoiled, there’s actually a few, but you get my point. I don’t care what the superpower is someone may claim to have, whether it is flying, fighting, webbing, running, strength, or anything else. If they aren’t using that power in a specific context to help in a specific way, then they’re just a dude sitting on the couch. Having superpowers is one thing, but it takes action to make one a hero.

If you are a follower of Jesus, did you know that God has given you superpowers so that you can be a superhero? I’m not saying that He’s made it possible for you to become famous and have movies made about you. Most of us will never be known widely. But fame is not part of the equation in what makes a superhero. A superhero is someone who utilizes his or her abilities in a specific context to help in a specific way. In fact, I think part of loving your church is being the hero God has made you to be. And the hero God has made you to be has superpowers, is part of a superpower team, and has a community/city in need.

You Have Superpowers: Spiritual Gifts

First Corinthians 12 starts off letting us know that Paul, the author of the letter, is going to talk about spiritual gifts. In elaborating on them he says this: **Read text.**

The part I want to zoom in on is the last part of verse 6: “it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone,” meaning that God empowers all His followers with gifts.

God gives each and every one of His followers at least one, sometimes more than one, spiritual gift. A spiritual gift is a Holy Spirit–empowered ability that is given to serve others. It is a spiritual superpower, if you will, given for you to use in a specific context to help in a specific way.

Though not exhaustive, some of these possible gifts could be exhortation, giving, leadership, mercy, service, teaching, administration, discernment, faith, helps, knowledge, and wisdom.

There are two really important things to remember about spiritual gifts:

1. *God is the one who picked yours.* The passage tells us that God is the one who empowers us. God, in His infinite wisdom, love, care, and power, knew exactly which gifts you needed and which gifts were best suited for you. Just think, God blessed you and entrusted you with this specific ability to make a difference in your community and the world!
2. *It is a Spirit-empowered gift.* When you hear the list of possible gifts, you might be doing a proverbial scratching of the head. You might be stumped, thinking, “I’ve had some really good teachers in my life and some of them didn’t love God, didn’t even like Him. How can they be a good teacher if they weren’t given the gift of teaching?” The thing to realize is that there are a lot of really good teachers out there, some amazing, incredible teachers out there. But there’s a difference between great teaching and teaching empowered by the Spirit. One is exhibiting their natural ability (which is also God-given I might add) and the other is exhibiting an ability infused by the power of the Spirit of God to speak in such a way that surpasses the mere passing on of information and inspiration. One teaching with the spiritual gift of teaching does so while being led by the Spirit, guided by the Spirit, powered by the Spirit, supported by the Spirit, and sustained by the Spirit. That’s incredibly different. Think of it like this: When Mike Tyson, even in retirement, throws a punch, it is going to be powerful and it is going to hurt. Even more so if it was thrown during his prime. That’s his natural talent. When Superman throws a punch, it is going to hurt *way* more. There’s more than natural ability going on, there’s something supernatural happening.

You have been given an amazing ability to be used by God! That is incredibly exciting. It might also be slightly confusing because the natural question is, “What are my gifts?” Here are three ways you can discover your gifting:

1. *Experiment in serving.* Get involved in the church somewhere. If you’re not sure where, then... Try out a ministry for a month or two. After that time ask yourself how it is going. Ask the leader how it is going. If you are both ecstatic about what you’ve been able to do, then what you’ve been doing might make clear what your gifting is. If one or both of you feel it is just not your area, then don’t be discouraged—move on to something else. The big thing is, where do you see results? Specifically, where do you see results of impacting people for Jesus? If you are gifted in a specific way, then it is going to bring people to Jesus, help people in their relationship with Jesus, show people Jesus, etc.
2. *Ask others.* Ask specific people whom you’ve spent time with, whom you trust, and whom you know love you the ways they see God using you in the church community. Specific questions you could ask them are:
 - When you hear the different spiritual gifts, which one(s) come to mind when you think of me?
 - What am I doing when you see Jesus in me or coming out of me?
 - How is it that I make this community better?

Remember—this isn't to give us a big head. This is to help us discover how God has gifted us. No one will know better than the people you are in community with and serving with.

3. *Check your energy level.* As you try different serving opportunities, ask yourself how you're feeling. If you are tired, dreading going to the serving opportunity, or not feeling a lot of passion, then whatever you're doing probably isn't something you're gifted in. If you are ready to go, looking forward to the opportunity, feeling passion, then that is more than likely something that complements your gifting.

Whatever your gift(s) are, they were supernaturally given to you by God. They are something you are empowered by the Spirit to do, not for your own gain but for the benefit of others. You have a superpower in the church. But you're not alone!

You Have a Superpower Team: The Church

The thing I love about the movie *The Avengers* is that it wasn't about one person. The Avengers were a team, an ensemble, a group. They couldn't meet the specific needs of earth alone; they needed one another. This is God's plan for you and me as well. **Read Romans 12:4-5.**

This passage complements what we read in 1 Corinthians 12, that you and I need one another. Here's the thing that might be hard to grasp, but we have to allow the Scriptures to guide us:

Your gift was not given to you for you! The Bible teaches that spiritual gifts were given *to us* but *for others*.

Your gifts were given to you to help others, to serve others, to benefit others. Romans 12:4-5 says that we purposely and specifically by design don't all function the same way with our gifting. We have different giftings because we need one another. Romans 12:5 even takes it so far as to say that we are "members one of another," meaning each member belongs to all the others. So your gifts aren't yours; they're mine. And my gifts aren't really mine; they're yours. Because God made the DNA of this church to be supernaturally infused with all of these gifts. ***Spread your arms wide in front of the crowd indicating you are talking about everyone.***

This should be a lesson in both humility and responsibility for us. Humility because the gift is not about us, but responsibility because God knew someone else would need our help, would need to experience God working through our gifts to minister to them.

Thor couldn't save the world on his own; he needed the rest of the Avengers. The truth of the matter is that God doesn't need any of us, but He chooses to use us and invites us to be used by Him—but He does that by bringing us *together*, mobilizing us *together*, teaming us up *together*, using us *together*. Sure, there's strength in numbers. But numbers brought together by the hand of God and empowered by God ... that's more than natural strength. That's the type of power that can change a church for God, change a neighborhood for God, change a nation for God, change the world for the Gospel. You have been given superpowers. You are part of a superpower team. But remember ... to just have power isn't what makes a hero. There has to be action.

This Superpower Team Has a Community and a City in Need

This church needs you. This neighborhood needs you. This city/community needs you. Not because they need *you*, but because they need God. And God in His wisdom and plan has decided that He would empower us with the ability to serve one another and the world around us.

We have a children's ministry that needs people to model Jesus to them. We have a youth ministry that needs people to model Jesus to them, befriend them, and mentor them. Young adults, couples, that need the gifts that God gave you to be in action and in motion. This city needs the gifts that God gave you to be in action and in motion.

Can you imagine with me a little bit right now? Can you imagine what our church would be like if everyone was flowing in their gifting? Can you imagine what our community would be like, what this city would be like, if we all were serving in ways that utilized the gifts that God has given us? Think about it, imagine it ...

So let's switch gears. Christmas presents. Who doesn't like opening Christmas presents? Picture being six years old, coming down to the tree, and there was your present - Just waiting to be opened, just waiting to be discovered, just waiting to be enjoyed and used and played with. And then picture looking at it, shrugging your shoulders, saying "eh," and then walking back upstairs ... never opening the gift. There would be something super wrong with that, wouldn't there be?! When you're given a gift, you open the gift! You don't leave it sitting there!

What do superheroes and Christmas presents have to do with a church? If you are a follower of Jesus who is not utilizing the spiritual gifts that God has given you for the betterment of the church and community, then you are like a Christmas present that's ignored and unopened. You are walking up to the gift that God has given you, shrugging your shoulders, saying "eh," and then walking away. And that's not how it is supposed to be!

Here's my final question: Why did God give you to our church? Most of the time we ask what we can get out of church. Wrong question. Why did God give this community the gift of you? Was it because of your teaching, your leadership, your encouragement, your discernment, or whatever it is that makes you the super-powered you? Why did God give us the gift of you?

Don't be an unopened gift. Discover the gifting God has empowered you with. Discover the ways you can passionately utilize those gifts. Be the gift that you are—serve this church and this community the way God made you to with the gifts He's given you. Be a hero for Jesus. I can't speak for you, but I know for myself ... I want to be a hero for Jesus.