

Title Slide In December I really appreciated Jonathan's and Andy's messages on Success. I wanted to build off of those and take a look at how at the individual level we can position ourselves so that Cornerstone can be successful. How can you and I be the types of disciples that glorify God through Cornerstone? I am glad you asked.

Slide 2 Our passage today highlights important practices that are powerful, but not new. Prayer, Love, Hospitality, and Exercising Your Spiritual Gifts. Each of these would merit individual sermons, but I wanted to highlight these and focus a little on Spiritual Gifts. I have been really blessed and encouraged by what I have seen and experienced at Cornerstone by the way I have seen these things practiced by you. So I hope you hear the words today in a loving challenge to meet you where you're at so that we can individually and collectively improve and reflect our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ even better. What I'm sharing are not new insights in any way. They are old truths that sometimes we may take for granted, but it is good to reflect how we are doing in light of God's commandments. And be open to Holy Spirit's movement in our life in one or multiple of these areas. In preparing for this sermon and looking in the mirror, I know I certainly have room for growth.

Slide 3 V7 - The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. Peter calls us to have a clear and focused prayer life. I don't want us to get distracted by the "end of all things portion." In multiple places throughout the NT, the writers talk about Jesus's return being imminent. The way to understand this is that in terms of the events of Salvation History series of events for the unfolding of God's redemptive story, Jesus's return in judgement is the next event to occur. Our prayers should be focused in this time because our enemy is focused on distracting the church and the individual from faithful and committed following of Christ. If we are emotionally tossed back and forth by the news and events around us or if we try to dull the pain of brokenness around us through too much drink or the balm of

material goods, then we are distracted and our prayer life is not rooted and grounded in the reality and abundance of God. In Ephesians 6 when Paul is talking about the armor of God, he tells us that our enemies aren't one another or someone with a different view point or allegiance. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. In talking of the armor of God, Paul concludes by saying And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. In light of the battle we face, I think our prayers for one another need to be more than for the infirmities we face, but for the battles we face to stay faithful. I don't discourage praying for each other in sickness, because sometimes those are part of the battle. Let's pray with clarity and focus for one another to remain faithful.

Slide 4 V8 - Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Love each other Cornerstone Above all. If we can't love one another, then these other things won't matter. Chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians is often read at weddings because of its focus on the importance of love. **4** Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. **5** It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. **6** Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. **7** It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

However, in context Chapter 13 is talking about relationships within the church NOT a marriage and it is talking about love in the exercise of spiritual gifts. Love covers a multitude of sins doesn't mean a Disney love story conquers all. It means that people who live in communion loving each other as 1st Corinthians 13 calls out are less likely to sin against each other in the first place and when we do, we aren't quick to

find fault and hold a grudge but to forgive and move on. Love each other. Let's face it, proximity will bring conflict. The answer isn't to avoid proximity, but to love one another like 1st Corinthians 13 says we should. We need God's grace overflowing out of our lives because love like that is difficult in our own strength.

Slide 5 V9 - Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Love and hospitality are at the heart of living in community. Hospitality is not just coffee or tea and those little frozen quiches served on pretty paper plates. It is joyfully, not begrudgingly, opening yourself and your resources up to others. That can be as simple as dinner, that can be a place to stay, that can be a time by the pool together. But when we do that, we open ourselves up to some risk. People can abuse generosity, we may not be thanked, we may lose some measure of control or or time or independence in a situation. But if we only show hospitality when it is low risk, we are not demonstrating the kind of love Jesus calls us to in the Sermon on the Mount. Read my lips - Forget southern hospitality, how about Christian hospitality. But the word used for hospitable here can be broken down into two other words - friend and stranger. Being a friend to strangers. So not only can hospitality enrich community within the church, it can support the mission of the church.

Slide 6 V10-11 - Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. I'll bring in 1 Corinthians 12:7 here as well. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

Some good stuff here, but there are two points from this section that I want to highlight:

Slide 7 The context here is spiritual gifts - so the manifestation of the Spirit is referring to the ways that Holy Spirit has empowered each believer - each one has at least one spiritual gift. Yes, you. You may not know what it is, it may be dusty from lack of use, it may be a little raw and uncomfortable because you are early in its use and development - but each believer in Jesus Christ has a spiritual gift! Now - this may be old news for some. And some may be asking, what's a spiritual gift - is that on Amazon? Important and really big question that we will come back to, but no, they are not on Amazon.

Slide 8 It's for the common good and glorification of God. For the common good of whom? Not your family. Not your job. Not the Global Church. Not a parachurch organization. It's here. It's the local church. The New Testament letters weren't sent out as letters for personal devotion, but read out loud in the local church whether that is the specific audience of the church in Corinth or the more general letter of Peter to the churches spread over a broader region. Now, your gift may bear fruit in other places which brings God glory which is really great, but God's design is for your gift to be firstly exercised in the local church for the benefit of the local church. And chances are if you are listening, that is Cornerstone.

Back in August - this notion of spiritual gifts and the common good was really resounding in my head and I tried to articulate it to the Elders, but for some reason it felt and seemed incomplete. Fast forward to a few weeks ago - Jonathan preached a sermon on what is a successful mission and Andy one on what is a successful church and it came together for me. God equips every church, even small ones, with everything they need to be successful. Remember from Jonathan's sermon the better way to frame it is a faithful mission - not focusing on success. We should be faithful and leave the results to God. We faithfully exercise the gifts He has given us collectively and leave the results to Him. Otherwise we tend to be overly focused on metrics like

the 3 Bs. And from Andy's message, if we strip away all the churchy stuff - what is it that is central to church. Worship, community, mission and commitment. My proposal to you today is that we have the elements we need. God has equipped us with spiritual gifts to do the work He wants us to do - we don't need more people - we don't need more money in the bank - I do not believe that God has things for us to do that He will not equip us to do or directly intervene and do Himself. Actually, our Spiritual Gifts are God intervening in a sense as we carry no supernatural capacity on our own! The question is then, are we exercising those gifts? Are you exercising them within the context of Cornerstone? If so, thank you - thank you so much. If not, why not? If not, do you feel guilty yet? That isn't my goal, because God doesn't want us operating out of guilt because then it is me-focused and I'm doing it to address the guilt. It should be done out of Love of God and a love for each other that we spoke of earlier. It should be done out of a recognition of God's graciousness in giving us a gift in the first place. When you don't exercise your gifts, it is really inefficient and incomplete for the church and the kingdom. Because either some things don't get done or they get done by someone who isn't gifted in that area or they're done by someone who is burning out because they are already carrying many other responsibilities. You and your gifting matter to us. You have your gift for us and for the kingdom of God. If Spiritual Gifts are truly empowered by God, then when you are exercising those there is a fulfillment and fruitfulness that is not paralleled because nothing comes close to being close to God.

I've had the opportunity to travel to France a handful of times and my French has never been very strong - some would say my English is not very strong either. The first time I went to the grocery store I filled up one of those baskets you carry through the store. I went through the checkout line and paid the cashier. There were plastic bags behind the counter, but after paying, my items just stayed on the counter. The cashier looked at the next customer in line. I asked in my preschool

level French for a couple of bags. The lady behind the register told me I had to pay for them (which I thought was outrageous by itself.) It was pretty clear I didn't have my own bags so I asked her why she didn't offer me a bag and she responded "you didn't ask." She clearly had something that would have helped me and she knew I needed what she had. We each have something Cornerstone needs, that God's kingdom needs. And He gave gifts to us for the common good. Don't hold on to your plastic bags.

Some may not really understand what spiritual gifts are and some may get uncomfortable because talking about spiritual gifts can open the door to controversial topics like speaking in tongues.

Spiritual gifts are a big topic worthy of a deeper dive. There are several passages covering spiritual gifts we can point to. There are many resources and tests you can take to help uncover your gifting. But I first want each of us to recognize we have a gift we're supposed to be using faithfully at Cornerstone. We don't have a sign up sheet for various positions in the church in the foyer or on-line. But I encourage you first to consider how God has gifted you and then consider how you can serve within Cornerstone in the power of the gifting. This is a take-home test - it's open book and you can ask for help. There isn't a simple formula to figure out how we should each serve in our gifting - but I think that is a good thing. Because that causes us to dig, to pray, to draw close to God and one another, to try, to mess up and show grace, and to grow. And I think that when we exercise our gifts in a committed way towards worship, mission, and community then we'll be successful because we'll be faithful.

Slide 9 So what are spiritual gifts. This is one definition I think is helpful: Spiritual gifts are various supernatural capabilities ...[given by] grace ... to Christians by the Holy Spirit to be used to build up others and point them to Jesus. " Chase Thompson There are various listings in

different places in the New Testament and this list is not exhaustive: Prophecy, teaching, exhorting, service, leading, giving, mercy, tongues/interpretation of tongues, evangelism, administration, shepherds, apostles.

Couple of quick points on spiritual gifts so I don't leave you completely hanging - having a talent is not the same as a spiritual gift. Public speaking is not a spiritual gift, but if you are able to evangelize or teach the congregation in a winsome, effective and supernatural way - that is. Spiritual gifts are not fruits of the spirit which we are all expected to demonstrate - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. If I am not gifted in evangelism, I am not absolved from evangelism - I am still expected to share the gospel - I just won't be a Billy Graham. However, if your gifting is teaching - don't expect everyone else to be able to teach. But I'll say, sometimes we don't know we are gifted in something until we try it and what better context to try something than in a family of believers who loves you very much. Let's also encourage one another when we see someone in their spiritual gift, because sometimes we don't see it ourselves.

Slide 10 Pray with a clear mind, Love one another earnestly Above all, be Hospitable, serve Cornerstone in your Spiritual gifting. Let's be faithful in these things individually, collectively as Cornerstone I believe God has graciously given us everything we need to be successful - Holy Spirit and each other!

Slide 11 Benediction: 2nd Peter 1:2-4 Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.