

Teaching Plan EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: April 15, 2018

Lesson Title: "Serving God's People"

Lesson Passage: 1 Corinthians 12:4-12,21-26

ABOUT THIS LESSON

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul begins a discussion of "spiritual gifts" that continues through chapter 14. His purpose is to assure the Christians in Corinth that the members of the body of Christ are endowed with a diversity of God-given abilities that are equally essential to the functioning of the church. Paul names several of the spiritual gifts that are important to the life of the community of faith and emphasizes the unity that makes the whole more than the sum of its parts.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

- (1) Describe the nature of spiritual gifts in the body of Christ.
- (2) Apply Paul's concept of unity in diversity to our own church.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

Begin with this illustration: On July 20, 1969, when astronaut Neil Armstrong became the first man ever to set foot on the moon, the world heard him say to mission control in Houston, "That's one small step for man, one giant step for mankind." But what most of the world didn't know was that it took a team of 218,000 people, most working behind the scenes, to make it possible for Neil Armstrong to take that historic step. Not only did the project require the services of highly trained aeronautical engineers, astrophysicists, and rocket-propulsion experts; the project team also included scores of carpenters, typists, computer technicians, electricians, accountants, pipe-fitters, and truck drivers. And the connections made by the pipe-fitters were just as essential to the success of the mission as the design work of the aeronautical engineers. In this lesson, Paul is saying something like that concerning the various functions of the members of the church. It takes a lot of people doing a lot of different things to make the body of Christ function properly. *Ask someone to read 1 Cor. 12:14 and 12:26.*

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. *Call attention to the first two words in 1 Cor. 12:1, "now concerning." Observe that Paul seems to have been responding to questions that had been submitted by the Corinthians. Note that the subject he is now introducing is "spiritual gifts." Suggest that his subsequent discussion in chapters 12-14 implies that their question had to do primarily with the relative importance of various spiritual gifts.*

2. *Ask the question, "What are spiritual gifts?" Let class members respond, then share these thoughts:* Spiritual gifts are the skills, abilities and understandings that God gives through His Spirit to all Christians, to equip them for service in the community of faith. Contrary to what some people believe, spiritual gifts are not bestowed upon only a select few; gifts of the Spirit are given to all Christians. (On the day of Pentecost, according to Acts 2:3-4, the Spirit was given to every believer, not just to selected leaders.) In his discussion of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14, Paul makes it clear that spiritual gifts are not bestowed for individual aggrandizement, but for the

benefit of the whole body of Christ.

3. *As class members examine 1 Cor. 12:4-7, share these thoughts:*

- (1) There are a variety of spiritual gifts. In I Cor. 4-6, Paul emphasizes this by repeating the Greek word for "varieties" three times in one sentence. (This is obvious in the RSV, but other versions use synonyms like "diversities," and "different kinds.") APPLICATION: We some-tims limit our recognition of spiritual gifts by assigning various degrees of importance to them. For example, the ability to encourage and comfort elderly nursing home residents is less likely to be thought of as a spiritual gift than preaching, singing or Bible teaching. (2) All spiritual gifts are from God. Three sources for these gifts are named in the Bible text--Spirit (v. 4), Lord (v. 5) and God (v. 6)--the three persons of the Trinity ("it is the same God who inspires them all in every one," v. 6). (3) The gifts are all to be used in the service of the same Lord. As he writes in 1 Cor. 12:4, there are many different kinds of spiritual gifts, but they are all from the same Spirit and they are all to be used for the benefit of the church, the body of Christ, and its purposes. (4) The phrase "in every one" (v. 6) implies that every believer possesses a gift that God has given him or her. (5) The spiritual gifts are not given for the personal benefit of those who possess them; they are intended for "the common good" (v. 7). (6) Paul lists nine spiritual gifts in 1 Cor. 12:8-10. But this was not a complete list of gifts, for Paul names other gifts in 1 Cor. 12:28, Rom. 12:6-8 and Eph. 4:11.

4. *Comment on Paul's discussion of "unity in diversity" in 1 Corinthians 12:21-26:* (1) The functioning of the body of Christ depends upon a variety of members who, in many ways, are quite unlike one another; yet, they work together in unity, every member exercising his or her respective gifts. (2) Paul speaks of the source of a church's unity in verse 11: "All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit."

CLOSING THE LESSON

For discussion: Many interpreters believe there are spiritual gifts beyond those mentioned in New Testament writings. *In a sense, a major defining characteristic of a spiritual gift is its function. (For example, water can be used to help a garden grow, or to flood a home. A greeter at the door of a department store can promote business; or, at the door of a church, to help newcomers feel welcome in the family of God.) Similarly, talents and personal abilities can be regarded as spiritual gifts if they are devoted to the service of the Lord.*

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