

All God's Children Got Shoes

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[0 : 00] So I just want to, if you've been around for a couple of weeks, you know that we are moving into, we've been moving through a fall series called the Marks of a Liberating Church and asking what it is to be a liberating church. What are the distinctives of such a community?

And we've had the privilege of having a couple of guest preachers. So Antonio, many of you know, preached last week and it was fire. And Trevor will be preaching this week and I want y'all to give him a warm welcome. Trevor is somebody who's so often humbly been back there week after week. And then I heard tell of there was some like some Christian education in the background. And I was like, oh, this brother, he's going to preach at some point. So I'm so excited you're here. And again, just welcome him warmly.

Nice love, y'all. I appreciate you. Can we see that first slide? I got shoes. You got shoes. All of God's children got shoes. My Lord is when I get to heaven when I put on my shoes and wine. I walk all over. Oh, my God.

So I'm an anime head. Anime is a Japanese style of cartoon or animated TV series. And yeah, there's an anime out there that I love called My Hero Academia. Anybody watch that? Anybody on there?

[1 : 45] Turn up. We got some anime heads out here. I see y'all. And so in this show, there is a main character and the main villain and each have these really distinct powers that are extremely desirable or quirks as they call them. And so the villain, he's got this power.

His name's All for One. You can see him over here. And his power is also called All for One. And the hero, Deku or Izuku, his power is called One for All. And the concept of these powers is pretty simple, right? All for One has this power where he amasses different people's powers. He steals their powers to kind of become more powerful himself to ultimately aim towards his future goal or his ultimate goal of being the ultimate villain, the demon lord, as you will. And Deku's power, One for All, is a power that is passed down through generations.

He stores up powers of each hero who had the power before and it builds upon that power. And then they pass it down to the person in the next generation that they choose, right? That they seem deemed worthy of the power, right? And so this means that every generation, this power grows stronger power. And it's one power that's utilized for the benefit of all. Hence the name One for All. Because my big idea for today, power used for all creates communities of connection, while power used for one creates structures of oppression. If you don't remember anything I say today, remember that.

I'm gonna say it like 12 times, so you'll be all right. So what's up, y'all? My name is Trevor Wendt. If you don't know me, I'm an experiential artist making art to challenge perspectives and give hope to the marginalized and oppressed. And I'm just another person in this congregation like each and every one of you. And this September, we've been rocking through this series called The Marks of Liberating Church, where we've been exploring what does it mean to model our community, not after the mega churches or institutions of power and privilege in this society, but rather after faith communities on the margins. Specifically using hush harbors, which were communities of faith from our enslaved ancestors as black US Americans as a starting point. So we're grounding ourselves in proclamation rooted in their rituals and resistance and asking ourselves, how might we be a liberating church?

[4 : 19] And today we're exploring the concept of all God's children got shoes, or how I prefer to say all God's children got shoes. And so this comes from the black spiritual that you heard earlier that you saw the video of on the screen. And as many black spirituals were, these were songs of hope and resistance. And so we're going to explore what this song has to teach us, right, in tandem with the book of 1 Corinthians. So if you have a Bible, we'll be in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, verses 4

through 11.

And if not, it's going to be on the screen. But as folks turn that way, let me kind of set the stage for what's happening in this part of the Bible. So the Apostle Paul, who is one of the key leaders in the New Testament, is writing a response to this church that he started out in a city called Corinth, which is in modern-day Greece. And in this section, Paul is straight up just calling these folks out. He's like, yo, y'all been tripping. Y'all out here following false teachers. You're believing false doctrines. And he's just like, y'all need to do better. Y'all need to improve. And so specifically in this section, he's trying to set them straight about their viewpoints on spiritual gifts. And he's outlining what are these gifts and what are they for? And so that's where we're going to pick up in this passage today. Verse 4. 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 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 of these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually, just as the Spirit chooses. Let's pray. God Most High, Jesus our Brother, Holy Spirit our Helper, we recognize your presence in this place, and we walk through this passage today. And as we walk through this passage today, and draw on the wisdom of the least of these, may you guide, direct, and inspire us with ways to be a community of liberation and change, both among ourselves and within our community at large. In the DMV, as it is in heaven. Amen. So I got five points for y'all today. If you're trying to check where we are, take some notes, or you're trying to calculate how far away brunch is. So first point, y'all, first point.

People are equal. So Paul comes right out the gate with, arguably, in my perspective, one of the most important pieces in Scripture regarding church structure and power dynamics, right? And so let's run that part back. Verse 4, 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. So Paul right up here, like, he sets up what is called a triadic formula. Everybody say triadic formula. See, y'all are some theologians. I knew it.

And so this is just something that is used in kind of biblical text in that sort of era of time to create a pattern using three points, three references to tell an underlying story. And so in this moment, as he's setting up a varieties or setting up the varieties of gifts that the church of Corinth knows and ultimately the people of God have, he references three folks. He references Spirit, then Lord, then God. Before Paul even breaks into talking about these gifts, he wants you to know that they should reflect the triune God in a few ways. In equity, in shared power, in shared responsibility, and communal purpose, meaning that it's for the good of the community as a whole. So Paul is saying here that all members of the community, all members of the body of Christ are the same. All God's chilling God's shoes. Point two, we moving along. But even more than that, the Greek here, the language that the New Testament was written in, suggests that these distinctions that Paul is breaking down are all the same. Paul continues this triadic formula to illustrate completion or unity. He lays out these three assignments, these three different types of gifts, right? He says, gifts of grace, which are like supernatural gifts, speaking in tongues, prophesying, healing, etc., right? And then we got acts of service. So this can be anything from waiting tables to priesthood. It's a really wide range of acts of service. And then operations. And anytime we see this word show up in the New

[9 : 52] Testament, this is referencing just operations by God. Like these are operational works of God. These are the works of God going down. And so these three words that we see in Greek are *charismata*, *diakonai*, and *energata*. I took like four semesters of Greek and that stuff is still hard.

But all these gifts, right, they're very different, but they're provided by the same triune God. And Paul reinforces this with verse 7 saying that all of these are manifestations of the same spirit. And he breaks them down in parallel, in tandem, to connect them to God's self as he's connecting them to God's self. He said before, spirit, Lord, God. He's doing this to show equality. No longer is the person with the charismatic gift like speaking in tongues specially marked out from everyone else.

Everyone's set on an even playing field. The person with the acts of service is right there. Because the purpose of all of these gifts is for the benefit, for the good of the community.

This is huge right here. This means that whether you're a greeter or a group leader, whether you're an activist or an artist, whether you're on stage or in the soup kitchen, all of our gifts are equally valuable and meaningful echoes of God. Nothing is greater than any other gift, no matter how mystical or typical that you see them as, because they all serve the same purpose in the kingdom and the kingdom of God to enrich and grow the community. I got shoes. You got shoes.

[11:40] All God's chilling, got shoes. So let's keep it going. Verse seven, 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 workings or the workings of miracles, to another prophecy, to another, the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another, the interpretation of tongues, all are activated by one and the same spirit who allots to each one individually, just as the spirit chooses. So point three, the common good. Paul says that each of these gifts are given to the people by the spirit for the common good, for the benefit of us all.

And when he lays this thing out, he lays it out really intentionally. We see at the top, we see like wisdom, we see faith, all of these kind of showing up as spiritual gifts, right? He puts them right at the front. But then at the back end, we see the speaking of tongues and interpreting of tongues at the back end at last. And he's doing that because in Corinth, they kind of viewed those as the highest forms of gifts because these were the gifts that were seen as supernatural, like, whoa, I can't explain this. So they were, they're viewed as better or special. And so he's doing this intentionally to exalt the common and to humble the supernatural, to level the playing field across the board. See church, we all have gifts of the spirit and how those manifest is varied, but whatever the gift is, we got to have three stages for it to benefit us all. One, realization, two, recognition, three, representation. And I probably messed up that slide because I changed those.

But this is the pattern. It's all going to get to the same point. We're going to be all right. So, so this is the pattern that we see in our black spiritual from earlier though, right? So realization is I got shoes. Recognition is you got shoes, all guys chilling got shoes.

Then representation, going to walk all over God's heaven. We acknowledge what our gift is off top. I got shoes, knowledge what God gave us. And then from individual acknowledgement, we moved to communal acknowledgement. You got shoes, all guys chilling got shoes. And then we just know that them shoes might look different. You might got spiritual bands on. I got spiritual loafers on. They got spiritual pumas. Some people got new balances, but these are all very gifts of God. And then we represent or we embody those gifts in community for the common good.

[14:42] We're going to walk all over God's heaven. And all these things are pointing to dignity, our inherent dignity. That's why Paul made sure that everyone knew that they were on the same playing field. Because to be a liberating church, we have to ensure that each person has shoes by acknowledging their dignity and helping to cultivate or express their gifts.

And this can show up in a lot of different ways. Off top, we got to give space. What I mean by space is we have to acknowledge the inherent dignity in all peoples, no matter your race, sexuality, gender identity, popularity, personality, whatever. And then we recognize your inherent value as image bearers of God's self and then give opportunities for and empower you to live out who you are in this community. So we give space for people to serve both in the church and in the community.

We give space for people to lead in various ministries and beyond, right? And then we give space for people to express their gifts. Like you see Antonio up here all the time, flag bearing.

We see Drew pop locking in the spirit. We see all of us with this freedom, right? To express how we feel most comfortable in worship. You can sit down, you can stand up, you can hold your hands out, you can dance in the back, you can moonwalk, whatever you want to do.

And another way to embody this is through mutuality, where power isn't centered on a central figure, but it's shared among the congregation. In the book *Liberating Church*, which inspired this series, we hear this concept of all God's telling God's shoes, enabling a leaderful community.

[16:31] So what is a leaderful community and how do we cultivate one? Well, that mutuality of power I just talked about as one of the ways that we cultivate one. And one of the ways that we do that here at the table is happening before you right now, through teaching. At the table, a third of the teaching is done by Toneta, a third is done by Anthony, and a third is done by the preaching

team.

And not just through teaching, but from elders to ministry leaders to directors to group leaders. These various types of leaders in the church are volunteers. Because this is all of our community, right? If we want the table to thrive and be a light in this community, we all must take responsibility and utilize the gifts that God has given each of us for the good of us all. We going to walk all over God's heaven. Point four, dignity for all. See, I understand that in this room, there are likely many of y'all who felt like their shoes have been stolen, that they've been worn down and abused, that they'd been lost along the way. And the co-author of *The Liberating Church*, Brandon Wrench, puts it like this, saying, all God's chilling God's shoes is a way of claiming dignity that isn't acknowledged in dominant culture. My people, I'm here to tell you today that when prejudice or bigotry has barred you from the expression of your gifts in the body of Christ, this black spiritual is a reminder of your worth and your dignity. It says the queer people, walk all over God's heaven. It says to women, preach all over God's heaven.

It says the BIPOC folk, move freely over all over God's heaven. It's a prophetic calling to speak truth to power, imploring all of us to bring heaven down to earth together. The spiritual goes on to say, everybody talking about heaven ain't going there. Everybody talking about heaven ain't going there. Now, this isn't to say that this is my eschatology or my belief about the end of the world, nor is it the tables, but these are the words of resistance by my enslaved ancestors holding on to hope that God would see them in the midst of their oppression and that justice would come. It's also challenging the concept that heaven or God or right and wrong is something that's defined or held in the hands of the people in power. It's like how Paul said at the top of this passage that nobody speaking by the spirit of God is going to say, let Jesus be cursed. Don't make no sense. Just like nobody morally sound is going to say, you can own and oppress people. Can you imagine what heaven looked like to a Klansman?

That ain't Jesus. They talk about heaven, but it's devoid of the fruit of the spirit. It's devoid of the dignity of all peoples because power used for all creates communities of connection, while power used for one creates structures of oppression.

[20 : 04] that's why black folks have a special connection to stories in the Bible, like the Exodus or the apocalyptic texts, like Revelation is an example of one of those. And I know that when we hear apocalypse today, most of us think about catastrophic end of the world, but the Greek word for this actually means to reveal or to uncover. That's what it literally means. And in the Bible, apocalyptic is a genre that is where God reveals an aspect of God's self or reveals the future for the purpose of comforting the people of God in our times of need. So when we see Moses at the burning bush and God shows up and is like, yo, go get my people out of slavery in Egypt, fix that. That's an apocalyptic passage.

Or the entire book of Revelation where Jesus is painting this picture to John saying like, yo, I know you're oppressed right now. I know your peoples is oppressed. And the bad thing, the bad news I got to tell you is all these kingdoms are eventually going to become unjust empires, but you got to stand up against oppressors, yo. And then one day I'm a slide back through and I'm going to make everything new and make everything good forever.

It's hope and a challenge in time of need. That's apocalyptic. It's the hope that God will make things right for the wrongs and oppressions that we have endured and we are currently enduring.

It's the hope of being enslaved. It's the hope of the Israelites in Babylonian captivity. It's the hope of an abused mother. It's the hope of a trans person assaulted in the street.

It's the hope of a Khalifa Marcellus Williams, a black man wrongfully convicted and sentenced to death this week. It's the hope of the Latina homie in the community here who was just verbally abused while picking up a DoorDash order.

[22 : 07] Or it's the Palestinian child hoping for clean water and a bed and for the bombs to stop. It's the recognition that those in power may be dictating your current reality, but they don't have the final say.

Because everybody talking about heaven ain't gone there. They don't see it. They don't see that power used for all creates communities of connection, while power used for one creates structures of oppression.

And this truth calls for us to be liberated. And it also calls for us to liberate. It says to us, Cishet brothers, Recognize and dismantle patriarchy.

It says to our white siblings, Recognize and dismantle white supremacy and racism and systemic oppression, right? It says to us, Black Cishet brothers, Recognize and dismantle the violence that we commit against trans people, especially trans women.

And on and on and on. How will we use our gifts, our power, to create communities of connection, to meet the needs of our communities fully, with a heart of liberation and restoration?

[23 : 35] So my final point, number five, you are enough. In verses 12 through 23, chapter 12, Paul makes this extended metaphor comparing us all to members of a body.

It's balance. These parts of the body that are powerful or indispensable in our minds, right? are often the most vulnerable. Think about your heart or your brain, right?

They're so strong. They're so powerful, so essential. But think about how vulnerable they are. If they didn't have the ribs, if they didn't have the skin, the fat, the tissue, the skull, et cetera, to protect them, what are they?

So whether we are able-bodied or differently abled, all of our bodies and its parts must harmoniously rely upon one another for us to survive and thrive.

Yet we have this tendency in our modern church to exalt people with charisma and these gifts that could lead to notoriety or celebrity or something like that, and it gets us into trouble all the time.

[24 : 48] We've all seen it. When we center charisma over character, we create Caesars and celebrities rather than liberating communities. I say it again.

When we center charisma over character, we create Caesars and celebrities rather than liberating communities. And when we do this, we cultivate abuse and infidelity and Messiah complexes and empire because power used for all creates communities of connection while power used for one creates structures of oppression.

Whether one person or one group of people, power for one will create structures of oppression. But this is not the way. We need all of us for all of us.

And I know that you might have been wounded. I know that you might feel like you don't have what it takes. You might say to me, Trevor, I don't have a gift. I can't speak in front of people. I'm shy. I use a wheelchair.

I don't know the Bible well. I'm just normal. And I say, tell me what you can do. Paul says the acts of service are gifts of the spirit. That your gifts that you think are ordinary and boring and just, whatever you think about those things, they're just as valuable as preaching or singing or teaching or whatever charismatic, charisma-filled gift that you see.

[26 : 13] What are your gifts? What are your interests? How do we get creative about empowering you in what you're good at for the benefit of yourself and for the benefit of others, both within our community and within the DMV?

Do you like to pray? We got a prayer team. Do you like to plan events or parties? Let me tell you, we have affinity groups. You like to make people feel welcome? Well, guess what? We got greeters. Hey, sit with the person who don't know anybody yet and service.

You got a friend. You like to make people coffee? We got a hospitality team. You like to go hard in the YouTube comments? Let me tell you, we have a live stream. Look, online community, y'all.

Online community. We need to cultivate community there. Get up in them YouTube comments. Just don't get reckless. This is for the Lord. Look, do you love activism or organizing?

We got a justice ministry. You like to style or dress? Well, guess what? We can create, we can curate a fly clothing drive. Think about that. Look, I'm telling you, I be thinking about this stuff, God.

[27 : 27] So hear me when I say this, y'all. You are enough. As you are, you are enough.

All gifts are equal. I'm telling you, your ordinary might be someone's open door. Your regular could be someone's restoration. Your normal could be someone's newness.

Your ho-hum might be someone's hallelujah. All you got to do is take that first step. Think about it. Them five loaves, them two fish.

The widow with the two pennies throwing the offering bucket. Moses had a speech impediment. You don't know what God will use. You can walk all over God's heaven now.

So this is what we finna do. We got a call to action. I want you to think of a way to walk in those shoes, to use your gifts to help us be a community of connection, to be a liberating church.

[28 : 36] If you want to serve or explore what it might look like to serve in this church, we're going to have a QR code on the stream. So you can scan that mug with your cell phone and look, if you don't, if you have an idea that doesn't fit into the categories that you see on there, dope.

Fill out the joint that you can go and get coffee with a ministry leader and we can start exploring that or, you know, you can think about it through the rest of the service, through communion, this, that, and the third. We got these cards on the table, on the welcome table out there next to the name tag, I believe, and you can fill out something here.

You can do the same thing with get a coffee with a ministry leader. It says, I'm all in. I'd like to shadow someone. Can we get a coffee first? So look for one of those if you don't want to do a QR code situation.

But I want to encourage y'all to take a step in them shoes. And hey, it might not be serving right now. It might just be showing up again next week or singing songs for the first time in years or taking communion later.

But we want to give you space. We want to give you the opportunity opportunity to feel free to be all that God has for you to be. Help us to become a liberating church in here, in our communities, and in the DMV.

[29 : 57] So one thing, I'll tell y'all one more thing about My Hero Academia, my dog, Deku. The main character of My Hero Academia, before he inherited this power that I was talking about, one for all, he was just a regular kid without a power.

Matter of fact, because he didn't have a power, it made him an outcast in society because the rest of everybody else had powers. But he was chosen by the predecessor before him to inherit one for all because of his character.

And even after gaining what was seen as the power of all powers, it was his heart. It was the joint that people saw as normal that was actually his gift.

And he didn't have to earn it, but it enabled him to understand that all people have inherent dignity and gifts, whether they're superpowers or not.

And all those people and their gifts are essential for their community to be free, for their community to be beacons of hope. A beacon of hope that everyone in every community could experience freedom and could experience liberation too.

[31 : 14] And just as the Holy Spirit gives gifts to each of us, no matter how normal or supernatural that we see those gifts as, all of them are essential for us to be beacons of hope, to be a liberating church.

Because power used for all creates communities of connection while power used for one creates structures of oppression.

All God's chilling God's shoes. Let's all walk all over God's heaven. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye.