

Understanding Spiritual Gifts



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UNDERSTANDING SPIRITUAL GIFTS

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UNDERSTANDING SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Spiritual gifts are a necessity in the ministry of every body of believers. All of us, as Christ followers should be working together to strengthen the body, to produce unity, to be lights shining in the darkness, and to bring glory to God. This is done through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, through the gifts that He gives us.

As the preacher A. W. Tozer wrote, “These are not natural talents merely, but gifts imparted by the Holy Spirit to fit the believer for his place in the body of Christ. They are like pipes on a great organ, permitting the musician wide scope and ranged to produce music of the finest quality. But they are, I repeat, more than talents. They are spiritual gifts.”*

* A.W. Tozer, *Keys to the Deeper Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 44.

Unfortunately, many Christians seem to be unaware of the gifts of the Spirit—what they are, how they are received, or how they are to be used.

In the next six weeks of study you will learn the answers to these questions and more. As you discover a fuller vision for how God intends spiritual gifts to work within the church, your study of this subject will prepare you to tap into God's agenda and play an active role in His ministry, not only to the body of Christ but possibly even to the rest of the world.

WEEK ONE

Sometimes the subject of spiritual gifts seems so confusing it can be hard to even know where to start the discussion. There are so many questions. Who has a spiritual gift? All of us? Or are they for super-spiritual people only?

To get the answers, we're going to go straight to the gift giver Himself and let Him explain the gifts. As you read for yourself the straightforward truths of the Bible, we believe you'll find the subject is not nearly as complicated a subject as you may have thought.

First, we'll consider these two questions: what kind of gifts are there, and who qualifies to receive one?

OBSERVE

Jesus prepared Peter for the world's tribulation; then Peter was to prepare others. So the apostle wrote a letter to the "chosen," the believers scattered throughout Asia during the intense persecution of their day, to encourage them and instruct them in how to live according to God's will (1 Peter 1:2; 4:2).

Leader: Read 1 Peter 4:10–11 aloud. Have the group say aloud and...

- draw a box around each reference to **a gift**, including the pronoun **it**:
- underline the phrase **each one**, which refers here to **believers**.

1 PETER 4:10–11

¹⁰As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

¹¹Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which

God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

As you read the text, it's helpful to have the group say the key words aloud as they mark them. This way everyone will be sure they are marking every occurrence of the word, including any synonymous words or phrases. Do this throughout the study.

INSIGHT

One way to better understand what the text is saying is by asking the “5 Ws and an H” questions—*who, what, when, where, why, and how*—about the passage. By asking these questions, you slow down and actually see what the writer is saying.

DISCUSS

- **Who** receives a gift?
- **What** is this passage about?
- **What** are believers to do with the gift they have been given?

- **How** are they to use what they've received?
- Is the gift to be used for one's personal benefit? Explain your answer.

INSIGHT

A *spiritual gift* is a God-given ability to serve God and other Christians in such a way that Christ is glorified and believers are edified. Each believer has at least one spiritual gift, no matter what his or her natural abilities.

- **What** two categories did Peter divide the gifts into?
- **What** are those who speak supposed to speak?
- **How** are those who serve to carry out their role?

- **Why** are we to use our gifts in the way described? Look carefully at the end of verse 11 if you need a hint.
- Now let's evaluate what you just read and see how it applies to you. Looking at your experience serving in the church and your desire to do so, which category better describes the way God has equipped you: serving or speaking?
- What have others said to you that confirms this?

ACTS 6:1–6

¹ Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food.

OBSERVE

The early church experienced growing pains that alerted the apostles to the impossibility of doing all the work themselves.

Leader: Read Acts 6:1–6 aloud. Have the group...

- circle the words *serv*ing and *serve*.
- draw a box around each reference to *the word*.

DISCUSS

- What complaint had arisen within the congregation?
- How did the twelve respond, according to verse 2? What does this tell you about their understanding of their gifts?
- What type of gifts did the twelve have?
- What category of gifts was needed to resolve the conflict?
- Many people today believe the pastoral staff should take care of all the work related to the life of the church. From what you saw in this passage, is this true? Explain your answer.

2 So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.

3 “Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.

4 “But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

5 The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus,

Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch.

⁶ And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

EPHESIANS 4:1–6

¹ Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,

² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,

³ being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

- How does this relate to what you read in 1 Peter?

OBSERVE

In the first three chapters of his letter to the Ephesians, Paul described the awesome reality of our salvation. In chapter 3 he specifically wrote about the fact that faith in Christ brings unity to radically different people groups, such as the Jews and the Gentiles. Writing in light of these things, he opened with the word *therefore* in Ephesians 4:1.

Leader: Read Ephesians 4:1–6 aloud. Have the group say and ...

- mark references to **unity**, including the word **one**, with a semicircle, like this:



- draw a stick figure over the word **body**, like this:

DISCUSS

- List the behaviors and characteristics Paul instructed the believers to display in verses 1–2.
- According to verse 3, why are we to behave this way?
- What did you learn from marking *one* in verses 4–6?
- How does this apply to our discussion of spiritual gifts?

⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;

⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

⁶ one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

EPHESIANS 4:7–8, 11–16

7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

8 Therefore it says, "When He [Jesus] ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men."...

11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,

12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the

OBSERVE

Paul moved from describing what all believers have in common to detailing how they differ from one another. Let's look at what he identified as areas of individuality within the unity of the Spirit.

Leader: Read Ephesians 4:7–8 and 11–16 aloud. Have the group say and...

- draw a box around the words **given, gave, and gifts.**
- mark every reference to **the body** with a stick figure.

Leader: Read the passage again. This time have the group...

- say aloud and mark each reference to **Christ**, including synonyms and pronouns, with a cross: †

DISCUSS

- According to verses 7 and 8, who gave what to whom?

- When did this happen?
- Make a list of the gifts mentioned in verse 11.

INSIGHT

Apostle—one sent forth with a message.

Prophet—one with the God-given ability to speak forth a message from God's Word that edifies, exhorts, and/or comforts the body.

Evangelist—a messenger of the good news; one who shares the gospel clearly that others may come to faith in Jesus.

Pastors and teachers care for and teach local congregations.

Pastor—a shepherd; one who feeds, tends, protects the flock

Teacher—an instructor who teaches the truth of the Word in a clear and understandable way

knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

¹⁴ As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;

¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,

¹⁶ from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to

the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

- Were all of the gifts given to everyone? Explain your answer.
- Which category of gifts would these fit into: speaking or serving?
- What is the purpose of these gifts, according to verse 12?
- How long are the gifts needed?
- Ultimately, what are we to look like as we walk in the gifts we have received?
- According to verse 16, how are these gifts tied to the health of the church?

WRAP IT UP

While we will spend the next five weeks studying the topic of spiritual gifts in greater depth, the simple truth from this week's lesson is that you are gifted by God.

As we've clearly seen, "each one has received a *special* gift..." (1 Peter 4:10). This means that, if you are a follower of Christ, then you have been gifted by God to serve the body of Christ, the church.

That knowledge should be a tremendous encouragement to you. What an incredible privilege!

We also saw this week that, broadly speaking, the spiritual gifts given to believers fall into two categories: serving and speaking. Neither category is more important than the other, because all the gifts are intended to equip the saints and build up the body. Every gift is important.

If you don't already know what your spiritual gift is, spend some time this week reflecting on the ways you're already involved in meeting the needs of others or in fulfilling a particular role within the church. Most people are naturally drawn to areas of ministry that fit their gifting, so this may help give you some insight.

If you're *not* actively involved in your church in some way, we encourage you to consider why that is. If you are follower of Christ, He has equipped you and called you to take an active role in His work. Will you prove worthy of His calling?