

Understanding Spiritual Gifts

by Mark Driscoll



During his life on earth, Jesus was empowered by the Holy Spirit to do ministry. Jesus said that one day Christians would do even greater ministry than he did (John 14:12). While this does not mean that Christians are greater than Jesus, it does mean that Christians who are also gifted and empowered by the Holy Spirit can minister to more people than Jesus did because there are billions of Christians today spread across the earth. Therefore, as we begin our study of spiritual gifts it is paramount that we first see that our personal ministry is the continuation of Jesus' ministry. Or, to summarize, the gifts of God are dispensed through the Spirit of God so that the church of God can minister like the Son of God.

OVERVIEW

SPIRITUAL GIFTS SERVE THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS

"You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:2-3)

The entire point of ministry and spiritual gifts is to reveal the lordship of Jesus Christ as God over all people and things. Therefore, if someone says they are a Christian or want to do ministry but they do not affirm the lordship of Jesus Christ, they do not

have the Holy Spirit. The primary evidence of a person having the Holy Spirit is their love and submission to Jesus.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE GIVEN BY THE TRINITY

“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.” (1 Corinthians 12:4-6)

Here we see that the entire Trinity is involved in gifting the church for ministry.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS EXIST TO BENEFIT THE WHOLE CHURCH

“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”
(1 Corinthians 12:7)

Whatever someone’s gift, the purpose of the gift is to build up and benefit the entire church, not just edify the individual using the gift.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE APPOINTED BY GOD

“All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.” (1 Corinthians 12:11)

Spiritual gifts are given by God’s choice; we cannot choose our gift. So anyone who is unhappy about how God has designed them is, in effect, complaining about God not giving them the gift they wanted. This is like a spoiled kid unwrapping a present only to complain about it.

MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Sadly, it seems ignorance about spiritual gifts persists in our day. It is important to clarify some of the most debated aspects of the spiritual gifts.

- The spiritual gifts differ from natural talents (e.g., musical ability, creativity, athletic prowess, computer skills) in that one is given at new birth and the other is given at birth.
- Since no list of spiritual gifts in the New Testament seems altogether complete, compiling all of the lists together still may not result in a complete list (1 Corinthians 12:8-10; 12:28; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11; and 1 Peter 4:11).
- We are each given different portions of a gift.
- We must be open to serving outside our area of gifting.
- God will also give us passions and opportunities in addition to natural talents and spiritual gifts.
- Discovering our gift(s) is related to assessing our desires, joy, and effectiveness.

Every gift must be cultivated so that we are most effective in our ministry service.

THE GIFTS

Spiritual gifts are discussed and listed in the following New Testament passages:

1 Corinthians 12:8-10; 12:28; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11; and 1 Peter 4:11.

As the lists are not identical, there may be more gifts than these but what follows is a basic description of the major gifts listed in these passages:

THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF WISDOM

The gift of wisdom is the ability to have insight into people and situations that is not obvious to the average person, combined with an understanding of what to do and how to do it. It is the ability to not only see, but also apply the principles of God's Word to the practical matters of life by the "Spirit of wisdom" (Eph. 1:17).

People with the Gift of Wisdom have an ability to synthesize biblical truth and apply it to people's lives so that they make good choices and avoid foolish mistakes. These people today function well as coaches, counselors, and consultants.

Do You Have This Gift?

Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- When studying God's Word, do you find that you discover the meaning and its implications before others do?
- Do you seem to understand things about God's Word that other believers don't seem to know?
- Are you able to apply biblical truth in a practical way to help counsel others to make good life choices?
- Do you get frustrated when people make foolish decisions that damage their quality of life, because you know what they should have done instead?
- Do you find that when people have important decisions to make, they come to you for prayer and biblical counsel?

- Do you that when you counsel people, God the Spirit gives you wisdom to share with them from Scripture, which they accept as God's truth to them through you?

THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF KNOWLEDGE

The word of knowledge is the ability to research, remember, and make effective use of a variety of information on a number of diverse subjects.

People with the Gift of Knowledge love to study, love to learn, and are not content with a surface-level knowledge of topics. They are compelled to conduct thorough research and compile their findings so that others can benefit from their long hours of focused study. People with this spiritual gift love God with all their mind (Mark 12:29-30). And these people tend to like footnotes.

Do You Have This Gift?

Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- Do you love to study?
- Do you have a good memory that retains and compiles lots of information?
- Have others frequently pointed out your ability to know and understand God's Word?
- Do people often come to you with difficult problems and questions from the Bible, seeking your insight because they know you will have the answer or find it?
- In studying God's Word, have you found that new insights and understanding of difficult subjects come easy to you?

- Are you frustrated when you hear bad teaching?

THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF FAITH

The gift of faith is the ability to envision what needs to be done and to trust God to accomplish it even though it seems impossible to most people.

People with the Gift of Faith trust God in difficult, even impossible situations when others are ready to give up. These people are often visionaries who dream big dreams, pray big prayers, and attempt big things for Jesus. These people tend to be optimistic, hopeful, persevering, change-oriented, and future- focused. These people also tend to be very convincing about the truth of Scripture because they themselves are so convinced of the truth and power of God and his Word.

Do You Have This Gift?

Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- Do you view obstacles as opportunities and trust God for the impossible?
- Do you find yourself frequently boasting about the power of God and what you have seen him do?
- Do you get motivated by new ministries?
- Do you find yourself feeling opposed to anyone who expresses that something cannot be done or accomplished?
- Do you find other believers coming to you for hope when they face a seemingly overwhelming trial or task?

- Do you have an effective prayer ministry, with many wonderful answers to prayers?

THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF HEALING

The gift of healing is the ability to call on God to heal the sick through supernatural means for the purpose of revealing God.

People with the Gift of Healing trust that God can heal the sick and pray in faith for the physical restoration of those in need. These people see healing as a sign that God uses to reveal his power to people so that many will come to believe in Jesus. People with this gift do not see someone healed every time they ask God, since healing is something that God alone decides to do (e.g., Gal. 4:13-14; Phil. 2:27; 1 Tim. 5:23; 2 Tim. 4:20).

Do You Have This Gift?

- Do you have a deep compassion for people who are sick?
- Do you have a deep conviction that God can heal anyone he chooses?
- Do you enjoy praying for people who are sick?
- Have you seen God heal someone?
- When God heals someone, are you excited because it helps to reveal his power to others?

GIFT OF PASTOR/SHEPHERD

In one sense, pastoring is the office reserved for those men who meet the biblical criteria (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). In another sense, there is a pastoral gift also commonly known as shepherding or biblical counseling that God gives to people in the church beyond the pastors/elders. These people protect, guide, counsel, and disciple other people.

The person with a pastoral gifting has a love for people that compels them to meet with people to care for them and guide them with biblical instruction. People with this gift find great joy in seeing people mature in their faith and overcome besetting sin and discouragement.

Do You Have This Gift?

- Do you have a deep love for people that compels you to care for them?
- Do you enjoy meeting with people to listen to their life story and provide them biblical counsel?
- When you hear that someone is hurting is your first instinct to try and meet with them to be of help?
- Are you able to point out sin and folly in someone's life in a loving way that they receive as helpful?
- Do you enjoy meeting with Christians to help them mature in their faith?

THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF MIRACLES

The gift of miracles is the ability to call on God to do supernatural acts that reveal his power. People with the gift of miracles see God show up in extraordinary ways, from daily little events to major public displays. Examples from the Bible include demons

being cast out of people, nature obeying God's authority, and the dead being raised. Obviously, these sorts of things are uncommon and do not happen regularly—otherwise they would not be viewed as miraculous. People with this gift do not chase signs and wonders, but they do expect signs and wonders to follow God's people who follow Jesus.

Do You Have This Gift?

- Do you truly believe that God can do the impossible?
- When you read of the many miracles in the Bible, are you encouraged because you love to see God made known in ways that cannot be ignored?
- Have you seen someone freed from demonic oppression?
- Have you seen God perform miracles?
- Do you use stories of God's miracles to help prove to others that Jesus is God?

THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF DISCERNMENT

The spiritual gift of discernment is the ability to quickly perceive whether such things as people, events, or beliefs are from God or Satan. People with the gift of discernment know that Satan and his demons disguise themselves as holy (1 Cor. 11:14-15). They also know that Satan empowers counterfeit miracles (Ex. 7:11-22; 8:7; Matt. 7:21-23; 2 Tim. 3:8) to deceive people (2 Thess. 2:9), and that he empowers false teachers (2 Pet. 2:1), false prophets (Matt. 7:15), false apostles (2 Cor. 11:13), and false doctrines (1 Tim. 1:3; 6:3).

Do You Have This Gift?

- Have you felt a special responsibility to protect the truth of God's Word by exposing that which is wrong?
- Do you often make a swift evaluation of someone or something that was said, that others did not see but yet proved to be correct?
- Do you have a solid understanding of Scripture and a sensitivity to the leading of God the Holy Spirit?
- Are you keenly aware of moral sin and doctrinal heresy?
- Can you read a book or hear a teacher and almost immediately uncover any false teaching?
- Do you have an awareness of demonic presence and how to help people be free of demons?

THE GIFT OF APOSTLESHIP

The gift, not the office, of apostleship applies to such people as Barnabas (Acts 14:3-4, 14), Apollos and Sosthenes (1 Corinthians 4:6-9), Andronicus and Junias (Romans 16:7), James (Galatians 1:19), and Silas and Timothy (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2:6). They, like apostles today, were gifted individuals sent out to move from place to place in order to begin and establish local churches (Acts 13:3-4).

This gift also includes the capacity to minister cross-culturally (Acts 10:34-35; Ephesians 3:7-8). Today, church planters and missionaries are operating out of their gift of apostleship as well as those Christian leaders God raises up to lead and

influence multiple churches and pastors. People with the Gift of Apostleship often have a number of gifts, such as evangelism, teaching, leadership, faith, and exhortation and are motivated by difficult new tasks.

Do You Have This Gift?

- Can you effectively minister cross-culturally?
- Are you called and qualified to plant a church?
- Can you start a church from nothing?
- Are you an entrepreneur?
- Has God given you leadership and influence over multiple churches as a movement leader?
- Can you pioneer a ministry where others have failed?

THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF TEACHING

The gift of teaching is the God-given ability to understand and communicate biblical truth in a clear and relevant manner so that there is understanding and application.

People with the Gift of Teaching enjoy Learning, researching, communicating, and illustrating truth of Scripture. These people enjoy studying and learning new information, and find great joy in sharing it with others. The format of teaching varies from one-on-one discipleship to formal classes, informal Bible studies, large groups, and preaching.

Do You Have This Gift?

- Do you enjoy studying and researching?
- Do you enjoy imparting biblical truth to others?
- Do others come to you for insight into Scripture?
- When you teach, do people “get it”?
- When you see someone confused in their understanding of the Bible do you feel a responsibility to speak to them about it?
- Do you enjoy speaking to various sizes of groups about biblical issues you have strong convictions about?

THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF HELPS/SERVICE

The gift of helps/service is the ability to joyfully work alongside another and help that person complete the task God has given them. People with this gift generally prefer to work behind the scenes. They also tend to find joy in helping alleviate the burdens and responsibilities of others. This gift is usually accompanied with an attitude of humility and sacrifice, as well as an ability to perceive the needs of others.

People with the Gift of Helps/Service tend to demonstrate a servant attitude, loyalty, attention to detail, and responsiveness to the initiatives of others. They function well in positions of detail and assistant leadership.

Do You Have This Gift?

- Do you enjoy helping others become more effective in their work?
- Do you prefer to labor behind the scenes?
- When someone is doing a job poorly is your first instinct to help them instead of criticize?
- Do you prefer to work in a supportive rather than a leadership capacity?
- When you hear of someone with needs, do you offer your services if possible?

THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF ADMINISTRATION

The gift of administration is the God-given ability to give direction and make decisions on behalf of others that result in efficient operation and accomplishment of goals. Administration includes the ability to organize people, things, information, finances, etc. Often the mark of an administrator is the ability to accomplish things in a “fitting and orderly way” (1 Corinthians 14:40).

People with the Gift of Administration have a keen eye for detail. They may also possess the natural talents of organization, observing and using details, problem solving, and reasoning.

Do You Have This Gift?

- When things are poorly organized do you get frustrated and want to help fix things?
- Can you bring order out of chaos?

- Do you naturally organize your life, schedule, finances, priorities, etc.?
- Do you become energized working on tasks and projects?
- Do things like efficiency and promptness matter more to you than most people?

THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF EVANGELISM

The gift of evangelism is the ability and desire to boldly and clearly communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ so that non-Christians can become Christians.

People with the Gift of Evangelism often care passionately about lost people and have a strong desire to see them meet Jesus. They feel compassion for the lost and seek to earnestly understand their questions and doubts so that they can provide a compelling answer. An evangelist often prefers being with people in the culture rather than hanging out with Christians in the church.

Do You Have This Gift?

- Do you enjoy being with non-Christians and sharing the gospel?
- Are you able to effectively communicate to non-Christians in a language they can understand?
- Does a person's conversion bring you profound joy?
- Do you feel frustrated when you haven't shared your faith for a while?
- Do you enjoy teaching others how to share their faith?
- Do you find it easy to direct a conversation toward the topic of Jesus

Christ?

THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF ENCOURAGEMENT

The gift of encouragement (also called the gift of exhortation) involves motivating, encouraging, and consoling others so they mature in their walk with Jesus.

People with the Gift of Encouragement have an unusual sensitivity for and are attracted to those who are discouraged or struggling. As a result, people tend to pursue them for healing words, gracious truth, and compassionate counsel. These people also tend to have a high degree of patience and optimism.

Do You Have This Gift?

- Do people seek you out for advice and encouragement?
- Do you enjoy walking with someone through difficulties?
- Are you attracted to those who are hurting and needy?
- Are you patient with people?
- Would you rather speak personally with someone about their problems rather than send them to someone else for help?
- Do you find it easy to express joy in the presence of those who are suffering?

THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF GIVING

The gift of giving is the ability to give money and other forms of wealth joyfully, wisely, and generously to meet the needs of others and help support ministries.

People with the Gift of Giving genuinely view their treasures, talents, and time as on loan from God and not their own. They are often moved to meet the physical needs of others. They enjoy giving of themselves and what they have. Even if they do not possess the resources to help, they earnestly pray for those needs to be met.

Do You Have This Gift?

- Do you tend to see the needs of others more than other people do?
- Do you enjoy giving your time, talent, and treasure to others?
- Do you see giving to a worthwhile project as an exciting honor and privilege?
- Do you give to the church regularly, cheerfully, and sacrificially?
- Do you often hear people commenting that you are a generous person?

THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF LEADERSHIP

The spiritual gift of leadership is found in people who have a clear, significant vision from God and are able to communicate it publicly or privately in such a way that they influence others to pursue that vision.

People with the Gift of Leadership tend to gravitate toward the “point position” in a ministry. Others tend to have trust and confidence in their abilities. They best serve others by leading them. They tend to operate with a strong sense of destiny.

Do You Have This Gift?

- Do others have confidence in your ability to lead?
- Do you enjoy being the “final voice” or the one with the overall responsibility for the direction and success of a group or organization?
- When a difficult situation arises, do others look to you for input and leadership?
- Do you usually take leadership in a group where none exists?
- Do you find leadership enjoyable rather than frustrating and difficult?
- Do others look to you to make the major decisions for a group or organization?

THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF MERCY

The gift of mercy is the capacity to feel and express unusual compassion and sympathy for those in difficult or crisis situations and provide them with the necessary help and support to see them through tough times.

People with the Gift of Mercy have the ability to “walk in another’s shoes” and to feel the pain and burdens they carry. They desire to make a difference in the lives of hurting people without being judgmental. They may have a difficult time evaluating the intentions of others and at times appear naïve.

Do You Have This Gift?

- Do you find yourself being drawn to people who are needy, hurting, sick, disabled, or elderly?

- Do you often think of ways to minister to those who are suffering?
- Do you sense a great deal of compassion for people having personal and emotional problems?
- Do you find that when you visit those who are suffering it brings you joy rather than depressing you?
- Do you find yourself responding to people more out of compassion than judgment?

THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF HOSPITALITY

The spiritual gift of hospitality is the ability to welcome strangers and entertain guests, often in your home, with great joy and kindness so that they become friends. Hospitality is supposed to include one's family (1 Tim. 5:8), friends (Prov. 27:10), Christians (Gal. 6:10), and strangers who may not be Christians (Lev. 19:34).

People with the Gift of Hospitality tend to have an "open home" where others are welcome to visit. This gift is often combined with the natural talents of interior design, cooking, and event planning. Importantly, hospitality is NOT to be extended to false teachers and the like, who are a danger (2 John 10-11).

Do You Have This Gift?

- Do you enjoy having people in your home?
- Do you enjoy watching people meet and have fun at parties and events you helped to plan and host?
- Is your home the kind that most people feel comfortable in and drop by to visit unannounced?

- Do you feel that something is really missing in your life when you cannot have guests into your home?
- When you think of your home do you view it from the perspective of guests who will visit?

This article is found at TheResurgence.com

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