

Understanding Spiritual Gifts



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UNDERSTANDING SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Many churches these days seem to place a great deal of emphasis on creating seeker-friendly environments, implementing membership growth programs, building a phenomenal multimedia ministry, and bringing on board “big-vision” staff members with charismatic personalities.

Who is really being glorified in all of this: God or man?

In our efforts to package church into something exciting, we may have overlooked one of God’s key provisions for our growth and maturity: 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.”*

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.

We have yet to see what God would do for His Church if we would all throw ourselves down before Him with an open Bible and cry, “Behold Thy servant, Lord! Be it unto me even as Thou wilt!”†

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

† Tozer, *Keys to the Deeper Life*, 47

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.

¹¹ Whoever 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?

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.

- **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?

OBSERVE

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

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

- circle the words *servicing* 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,

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?