

Spiritual Gifts

Imagine a church where everyone is actively involved in various ways to build up the believers and reach out to the world in such a way that God's people are growing, the lost are reached and the world is changed in a substantial way. That is God's plan, and He will do it through His idea of Spiritual gifts.

What are Spiritual gifts? In *Network* Bruce Bugbee and Don Cousins define Spiritual gifts: "Spiritual gifts are special abilities given by the Holy Spirit and distributed to every believer according to God's design and grace for the common good of the body of Christ."¹ Spiritual gifts can be similar to our natural talents or completely different, depending on the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:11). Every Christian has Spiritual gifts; 1 Corinthians 12:7 declares, "A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good." God equips each of us to help each other and reach out to the world.

The Spiritual gifts can be semi-permanent as well as incidental. 1 Corinthians 12 describes the church as a body, where each individual is one part of the body (e.g. eye, ear, etc.), which would indicate that each of us has a major part to play in the body on a fairly permanent basis; not many ears change into eyes in the body analogy. But we should all be open to a gift like prophecy, giving, or encouragement coming on an "as needs" basis. Acts 2:17-21 seems to indicate that prophecy, dreams and visions were to be fairly common in the church. 1 Corinthians 14:1 states that believers should especially desire the gift of prophecy; this doesn't mean we can turn on the gifts we want when we want; the Spirit is the one who is in control, but it does mean we should be open to being used in different ways as the Spirit leads us.

In the next few minutes, I want to describe the most common Spiritual gifts, make a case for the continuance of the more supernatural gifts like tongues, prophecy and miracles, and help you on your journey to discovering your Spiritual gifts and how you can be used in the body of Christ in your special, unique, God-given way.

List and Description of the Most Common Spiritual Gifts

The following definitions are of the gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12-14 and Romans 12:3-8. There is some overlap. I am distinguishing between gifts and offices, so the office of pastor, prophet, apostle, etc. are not discussed. This is not an exhaustive list of Spiritual gifts, so be open to other possibilities as well.

Word of wisdom: God gives you a wise insight to share with someone, to apply a spiritual truth to help someone in need of wisdom.

Word of knowledge/teaching: God gives you knowledge to teach others God's truth.

¹ Bruce Bugbee and Don Cousins, *Network: Participant's Guide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 27.

Faith: God gives you an extra amount of faith to act on God's promises.

Gifts of healings: The ability to heal someone supernaturally. Both *gifts* and *healings* are in the plural in the Greek, indicating that all types of healing (e.g. physical, emotional, partial, total, etc.) can be included and through various means (e.g. laying on of hands, commands, anointing with oil, etc.).

Miracles: The ability to perform a miracle other than healing (e.g. walking on water), especially in conjunction with sharing the gospel (i.e. signs and wonders).

Prophecy: Sharing a truth in a timely manner to edify the church or individual, often not premeditated and sometimes predictive.

Distinguishing between spirits/discernment: The ability to distinguish between truth and error, evil and good, right and wrong in a particular situation. Note that this is not the gift to judge someone else's heart; that gift doesn't exist.

Tongues: The gift of speaking another language without having learned it.

Interpretation of tongues: The ability to interpret the gift of tongues.

Service/helps: The ability and desire to help others in need.

Encouragement/exhortation: The ability to present truth to someone who is hurting or discouraged.

Giving: To contribute money to people or ministries with cheerfulness and liberality.

Leadership: The ability to cast vision, motivate and direct others to do ministry.

Mercy: The ability to comfort and show compassion to those in need.

Administration: The ability to organize and manage a ministry.

Craftsmanship/Artist: The ability to create artistic expressions that produce a spiritual response.

Evangelism: The ability to effectively communicate the gospel to unbelievers.

Intercession: The ability and desire to pray for others as well as needs of the church.

The Continuance of the More Supernatural Gifts

I believe prophecy, dreams, visions, tongues, miracles, and healing gifts are still available to the church today. Obviously, all Spiritual gifts are equally supernatural, but I needed to indicate that

the gifts that are not also seen as natural abilities are still around. Many Christians disagree on this issue and hold to what is called cessationism. Cessationism is the belief that the more supernatural gifts ceased at the end of the first century, once the Bible was completed. They still believe that God can do miracles, but He doesn't gift individuals with these gifts. Sometimes, they appeal to 1 Corinthians 13:8-12, but these verses actually teach the opposite. Let me explain. The passage says that prophecies, tongues and knowledge will end "when the perfect comes." Cessationists believe "the perfect" refers to the completion of the Bible. But the passage goes on to describe the perfect as when we "see face to face," which more naturally means when Jesus comes back. It makes sense that when Jesus comes back, we won't need prophecy or tongues anymore, so this passage seems to indicate that they won't cease until He comes back. Acts 2:16-21 agrees with this assessment. It states that "in the last days" visions, dreams and prophecy, and by implication of the context of Acts 2:1-13 tongues, will be prevalent among the body of Christ. Men, women and servants will all participate in these gifts. The passage then describes the very last days "before the great and glorious day of the Lord comes," indicating that the gifts will be around until then. Since we have not passed the last days yet and Jesus hasn't come back, we can expect these supernatural gifts to be widespread in the church.

Of course, the supernatural gifts need pastoring. Prophecy can be used in a wonderful manner, but it could also be abused. Tongues are actually addressed in 1 Corinthians 14 because they were being abused in the church. There were the haves and have nots, with the haves looking down on the have nots. Not everyone has any particular gift, including tongues (1 Cor 12:29-31). People were speaking in tongues without an interpreter in the church service, disrupting the service (1 Cor 14:26-33). Some people differentiate between the gift of tongues and the personal prayer language, but 1 Corinthians 14 defeats that idea, treating the gift and personal prayer language in tongues as one and the same thing. Not everyone has the gift of tongues, but it does seem to be a prevalent gift in the book of Acts (Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6 and see 1 Cor 14:18, 39). Since the Bible indicates that the church should have both a large group setting, meeting typically on Sundays and a small group setting, meeting from house to house throughout the week (Acts 2:46; 5:12, 42; 20:20), it seems practical to use and practice the more supernatural gifts most often in the small groups. In the small groups there is more freedom and room for discussion to be able to pastor any errors stemming from these kinds of gifts. It appears that this is the case in 1 Corinthians 14:26-33, where all the members felt free to give a hymn, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, etc. Of course, the Holy Spirit can lead to do these things in the large group setting as well, but more structure would be necessary.

How Can I Use My Spiritual Gifts?

No one wants to waste their time, especially when it concerns serving God. How can I get started in finding my place in the church and help make real the vision of a church where everyone is doing their part? Ephesians 4:11-16 gives us some insight:

And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, equipping the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body

of Christ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness.... From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part.

In this passage, Paul mentions several offices of leadership who are to help equip the church to do the work of the church. An office is not the same as a Spiritual gift. These leaders have Spiritual gifts, but they use them in an official capacity to help the church be the best it can be. The individual Christians follow the leadership, receiving help from them to be able to effectively serve Christ in the church. Christians are to grow up and stop being babies. Then they will fit together in such a way that body of Christ is built up – as each member is doing his or her part. Leaders can help followers potentially discover their Spiritual gifts and their ministry passions, as well as help them be mature so they can be as effective as possible in their ministry.

First, we need to discover our potential Spiritual gifts. Remember, each Christian has a set of gifts that they normally use, and they can be used in other giftings as the Spirit prompts. We want to discover how God has gifted us and be open to the other gifts at any time the Lord wants to use us. How do we discover our more permanent gifts? This is the tricky part. There are Spiritual gifts tests that can help, but they are not full proof. Most tests assume you have been a Christian for a long time, and so they go by how you have ministered in the past. They also can rely on past natural giftings, which is not the same thing as a Spiritual gift. So, I recommend you take the test, but be cautious about the results. There is an app you can get called "Spiritual Gifts Test" by Lifestyle that is easy to use. Added to the test, you should study all the gifts, praying to God as to which gifts He wants to give you. Ask your mature brothers and sisters in Christ, especially the leadership of the church you serve in, what giftings they see that you might have. In our western world, we are rampant individualists who want to do things solo and hear from God solo, but God's plan is different than that. We hear in community (e.g. Acts 13:1-3). As you begin to use the different gifts, you will be able to discern which are your primary gifts. It is not an exact science; it is a relationship with God and the church.

Second, we need to discover our ministry passions. Spiritual gifts indicate *what* you do in a particular ministry, and ministry passion indicates *where* you serve, what ministry you serve in. To identify your passion, ask yourself, "What really motivates me?" "What area of ministry am I passionate about?" A passion can be for a particular age group, people group, issue or needed task. Some examples of passions are: Children's ministry, youth ministry, young adults, elderly, Hispanics, Somalis, homeless, abortion, abused women, chronic pain, disabled, divorced, human trafficking victims, missions, addiction recovery, spiritual warfare, evangelism, discipleship, family, racism, fellowship, hospitality, etc. When you think of these areas of ministry, which one or two really motivate you to serve? Try a few ministries, using your Spiritual gifts in that ministry to see where you really fit. Let's say you have a gift of administration and a passion for youth. You probably won't do well attempting to lead a teaching or facilitate the games or counsel the youth, but you could be a great asset behind the

scenes on the leadership team over the youth. Discover your gifts and your passion and then get involved where you would be both fruitful and fulfilled.

Now let's put it all together. As each part finds its part to play in the overall vision of the church, the church flourishes and the kingdom of God is advanced. At Harvest Fellowship we want to make mature disciples who help advance the kingdom of God together. The kingdom is advanced especially when unbelievers switch kingdoms and become disciples of Christ. Each ministry fits this overall vision. When someone volunteers at the PRC to help save unborn babies, they are also concerned for the mothers who are abortion minded. They ultimately want to see the mom come to Christ, because even if she keeps the baby, if she doesn't become a disciple, she won't spend eternity with God and the family of God. When we help serve the poor, we do a valuable service to humanity, because all people are created in the image of God and should be shown kindness, respect and care. We value all human beings because God values all human beings. But the greatest care we can show them is to share the gospel with them. You might not be the one who leads them to Christ, but as a team that is the ultimate goal. Evangelism is our priority, because of the eternal consequences.

So, what is your part? How does God want you to serve in the church? I know it is not to be a couch potato or a bad example. Continue to grow in Christ but get involved now. You are desperately needed for the advancement of the kingdom.