



the spiritual gifts

Small Group Guide: The Spiritual Gifts, Week 16

Key Takeaways:

1. Definition of the Gift

1. **Technical Definition:** A supernatural enablement to discern the character and identity of spirits.
2. **Layman's Definition:** The ability to discern whether a supernatural manifestation is of God or not of God.

2. Purpose of the Gift

1. Distinguishes between spiritual manifestations from God versus Satan.
2. Protects the church from deception.
3. Reveals the source and nature of supernatural activity.
4. Essential for churches that operate in manifestation gifts.

3. Satan's Counterfeits

1. Satan has counterfeits for every genuine gift of God.

2. Satan can transform himself into an angel of light.
3. Supernatural does not automatically mean godly.

Discussion Questions:

Understanding the Gift

1. What surprised you most about the definition of discerning of spirits? How is it different from general discernment or intuition?
2. In Acts 16:16-18. The slave girl was saying true things about Paul and his companions. Why was Paul "greatly annoyed" rather than pleased? What does this teach us about discernment?
3. Discuss the difference between:
 - a. The gift of discerning of spirits
 - b. General spiritual discernment
 - c. Human intuition or "gut feelings"

Recognizing Counterfeits

1. Why is it so important to understand that Satan can appear as an "angel of light"? How does this make discernment more challenging?
2. Pastor Allen's sermon mentioned that for every gift of God, Satan has a counterfeit:
 1. Word of knowledge/wisdom → Psychics
 2. Prophecy → Fortune tellers
 3. Healing → New Age healers
3. Why do you think Satan creates counterfeits rather than something completely different?
4. Have you ever encountered something that seemed spiritual or supernatural but didn't sit right with you?

Share your experience (without naming names if it involves specific people).

Deeper Reflection

1. Review the seven steps for judging prophecy:
 1. Know them by their fruits
 2. Does it glorify and testify of Jesus?
 3. Is it scriptural?
 4. Was it fulfilled?
 5. Does it point to God or to people?
 6. Does it produce liberty or bondage?
 7. Do we have an unction (inner witness)?
2. Which of these criteria do you find most helpful? Which is most challenging to apply?
3. Pastor Allen shared a story about someone prophesying that a man's wife would return in three days, when God had actually revealed she wouldn't. This wasn't demonic, it was from the person's own spirit. How can we guard against adding our own desires or thoughts to what God is saying?
4. Why is it dangerous to assume that all spiritual manifestations in church are automatically from God? What safeguards should be in place?

Practical Application:

1. Read Hebrews 5:14. This verse talks about training ourselves to distinguish between good and evil. What practical steps can we take to develop spiritual maturity and discernment?
2. Pastor Allen emphasized knowing God's Word as essential to recognizing God's voice. On a scale of 1-10,

how would you rate your current knowledge of Scripture? What's one practical step you could take this week to grow?

3. Have you ever been deceived by something that seemed spiritual but wasn't from God? What did you learn from that experience?

4. **Study Time:** Study the Counterfeits

1. Research what the Bible says about false prophets and teachers
2. Study passages like Matthew 7:15-23, 2 Peter 2:1-3, 1 John 4:1-3
3. Share your findings with the group next week

5. **Prayer Practice:** Prayer for Discernment

1. Pray daily for wisdom and discernment (James 1:5)
2. Ask God to help you recognize His voice more clearly
3. Journal any insights or promptings you receive

6. **Honest Conversation:** Read the following scenarios and discuss as a group whether you would need the gift of discerning of spirits or if the seven criteria would be sufficient:

1. A visiting minister prophesies specific details about people's lives that prove accurate, but never mentions Jesus—only "God" and "the universe."
2. Someone in your church begins operating in healing, and people are genuinely healed, but the person starts drawing attention to themselves rather than pointing to Jesus.
3. A prophecy is given that sounds encouraging and biblical, but something in your spirit feels uneasy about it.

How would you handle each situation? What questions would you ask? What steps would you take?

Closing Prayer:

Heavenly Father, We seek Your wisdom and discernment in spiritual matters, guarding us against deception. Help us grow in knowing Your Word and recognizing Your voice. Holy Spirit, operate Your gifts in our church according to Your will, that we may serve You faithfully. We lift up specific needs shared among us, trusting in Your love and perfect will for comfort and healing. May our lives reflect Your glory and truth in all we do. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

5-Day Devotional

Day 1: Distinguishing Between Good and Evil

Reading: Hebrews 5:11-14

Devotional: Maturity in Christ requires more than casual acquaintance with Scripture. It demands constant use and training. Just as an athlete develops muscle memory through repetition, believers develop spiritual discernment by consistently applying God's Word to daily decisions. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that solid food belongs to those who have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. This isn't merely intellectual knowledge, but practical wisdom gained through experience. Today, consider areas where you need greater discernment. Are you regularly feeding on God's Word, or are you still subsisting on spiritual milk? Ask the Holy Spirit to sharpen your ability to recognize truth from deception, righteousness from compromise. Spiritual maturity doesn't happen accidentally; it requires intentional pursuit of God's wisdom through His Word.

Day 2: Satan's Counterfeits

Reading: 2 Corinthians 11:13-15

Devotional: Satan's most effective strategy isn't obvious evil, it's deceptive imitation. Paul warns that Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light, and his servants disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness. This sobering reality means we cannot judge spiritual authenticity by outward appearances or even seemingly good works. The fortune-teller in Acts 16 spoke the truth about Paul's mission, yet operated under demonic power. How do we navigate this minefield? By developing intimate knowledge

of God's voice through His Word and cultivating sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's leading. Don't be impressed by supernatural manifestations alone test everything against Scripture. Ask yourself: Does this glorify Jesus? Does it produce freedom or bondage? Does it align with biblical truth? Guard your heart with discernment, knowing that not everything supernatural originates with God.

Day 3: Knowing Them By Their Fruits

Reading: Matthew 7:15-23

Devotional: Jesus provides a simple yet profound test for authenticity: examine the fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. This principle applies to ministers, prophecies, and spiritual movements. Yet we often overlook fruit in favor of charisma, eloquence, or impressive manifestations. Genuine spiritual fruit includes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, qualities that develop over time through consistent obedience to Christ. Don't be swayed by spectacular claims or crowd-pleasing performances. Instead, observe character, examine long-term patterns, and notice whether someone's life increasingly reflects Jesus. The fruit test requires patience and wisdom, but it protects us from deception. Today, evaluate the spiritual influences in your life. What fruit are they producing in you and others?

Day 4: The Centrality of Jesus

Reading: 1 John 4:1-6

Devotional: John provides a crucial test for discerning spirits: Does it acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh? Every spirit that confesses Jesus is from God; every spirit that doesn't is not. This isn't merely intellectual agreement but a wholehearted proclamation of Jesus as Lord, Savior, and the only way to the Father. Notice how many false teachings mention God but minimize Jesus His deity, His sacrifice, His resurrection, His exclusive claim to salvation. Satan doesn't mind religious talk as long as Jesus remains marginalized. The Garden of Gethsemane reveals there was no other way for humanity's redemption except through Christ's death and resurrection. When evaluating any teaching, prophecy, or spiritual manifestation, ask: Does this glorify Jesus? Does it point people to His finished work? Does it exalt His name above all others? Keep Jesus central, and you'll stay anchored in truth.

Day 5: Growing in Spiritual Discernment

Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Devotional: The Holy Spirit distributes gifts as He wills, including the gift of discerning spirits. While this supernatural gift operates in specific moments for specific purposes, all believers can grow in general spiritual discernment through intimacy with God. Jesus said His sheep know His voice, a familiarity developed through time spent in His presence and His Word. Discernment isn't suspicion or cynicism; it's Spirit-led wisdom that protects God's people from deception while promoting truth. As you mature in Christ, you'll increasingly recognize when something isn't right, even if you can't immediately

articulate why. Trust these promptings and bring them to God in prayer. Cultivate discernment by saturating yourself in Scripture, maintaining sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, and learning from mature believers. Remember: God's truth sets you free, while deception brings bondage. Pursue wisdom diligently, and God will faithfully guide you into all truth.