

SPIRITUAL GIFTS PART I

1 COR. 12:1-11 | ROM. 12:3-8 | 1 PET. 4:10-11

Open to 1 Cor. 12. 1 Cor. 14:1, “...Earnestly desire the spiritual gifts...” I’ve not done this well. 12:1, “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.” I think we often are, and we’re going to study them. And as we do, we need to guard against two errors. **One is over fascination**—people who think of gifts like **X-Men** where everyone has their own special superpower and their identity is connected to it; defined by your talent. **The other is endless skepticism about any spiritual activity**—Baptists allergic to spiritual *experience*: “Father, Son, and Holy Bible”. As if the Gk. says “don’t earnestly desire the gifts” He uses this construction 3 times about gifts. Never “earnestly desire missions, or care for the poor”, but “earnestly desire spiritual gifts.” Why? Because it is through the exercise of our spiritual gifts that body building happens. The reality is that God, through the Holy Spirit, distributes unique and various gifts to members of his body. And the reason Paul wants us to be informed about spiritual gifts is because God has specifically designed the exercise of those gifts to be a primary means through which his body is built. Getting this wrong is significant!

John Owen, chief among the Puritan theologians said, “[without the gifts of the Spirit] the Church cannot subsist in the world, nor can believers can be useful to one another and the rest of mankind...as they ought to be.” So we’ve got our work cut out for us today. And for the next 35 minutes, I’m going to give us a theological overview of spiritual gifts. We’re going to talk about what they are, why we have them, and how you can discover yours. Let me disappoint you up front and say that today, we’ll not be discussing the miraculous gifts. Nevertheless, you can’t teach on spiritual gifts without saying something about them. So, next week will be devoted entirely to that conversation. **Today may be like drinking from a fire hydrant.** Want to leave you equipped and well on your way to having a deeper understanding of spiritual gifts and more faithfully using them to build the church. **Pray.**

What Are Spiritual Gifts?

- God-given abilities that, when exercised, build up Christ’s body. (1 Cor. 12:6-7)

Let’s chat about this for a second. **First, these are God-given.** Paul uses a variety of words for spiritual gifts, but one of the most common is *charismata*, which literally means “gifts of grace”. Spiritual gifts are given to us and empowered by grace. Which means that **they are not a display of our spiritual strength.** In 1 Cor. 12:7, Paul says that these gifts are a “manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” These gifts are empowered by and exist to magnify the Holy Spirit’s at work powerfully in his church in various ways.

Also, as gifts given by grace, **they are not ultimately something that we choose.** 1 Cor. 12:11, “All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.” So, not like a buffet line. They are God given. **Second, they are abilities.** Spiritual gifts are something that you **exercise**—that you **enact** with you will or actions. They are not prizes to put on the shelf, or on our spiritual resume. They are abilities designed to be used and if they’re not being used, they’re being wasted. We use these abilities. Leading to component number 3. These God-given abilities are given to **provide spiritual benefit** to those who are on the receiving end of them. You could even say that spiritual gift is an areas where you are particularly effective in ministry. Where whatever you’re doing is uniquely beneficial to those on the receiving end of it.

This is really important to understand. Already saw Paul “for the common good” 1 Cor. 14:12, “So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.” 1 Pet 4:10, “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” Over and over again the emphasis is on stewarding these gifts in service to others, specifically, building up the church. So, understand that these are not gifts given to us primarily for us; but for building up the body. Michael Horton points out that we’re not even given these gifts because we need them, but because others need them. Other have gifts that I need. These gifts are designed for mutual edification.

And it’s important to realize that **if** the ability in question **doesn’t edify** others or build up the body, **it’s not a spiritual gift**. This is what makes it different from a natural talent. Sometimes we think they are the same thing, but they’re not. Just because you are natural talented at something doesn’t mean God will produce spiritual benefit from it. **Calculus teacher**—have the spiritual gift of teaching? Maybe—depends if God uses it to build. “We need to draw a clear distinction between man’s capacity to perform and God’s prerogative to bless, for it is God’s use of our abilities, [not] the abilities themselves, that constitute *charismata*. If no regularly identifiable spiritual benefit for others or ourselves results from what we do, we should not think of our capacity to do it as a spiritual gift.” (Packer)

So having given us a foundation for what spiritual gifts are and what they are not, we’re ready to talk about the gifts themselves. Now depending on who’s counting there are up to 19 different spiritual gifts listed in the NT the bulk of which come in 4 passages. **Flip sheet over**. My goal right now is not to explain each one, but simply show you that there are a variety. And if you were to stare at this list long enough you might gather that these gifts generally divide into two categories. 1 Peter 4:10-11 seems to confirm this “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.” So here we have what is likely a categorical summary of all the gifts. Two categories of gifts:

- **Speaking** gifts: largely connected to *word* ministry.
 - e.g., teaching, exhortation, encouragement etc. >>> tongues, prophecy, evangelism.
- **Service** gifts: largely connected to *deed* ministry.
 - e.g., service, administration, giving etc. >>> helping, healing, leadership

Now of course there is some overlap here. As I’m teaching, I’m serving you. And as you serve people, you are often speaking to them. But generally speaking, the focus of a particular gift is usually expressed in one of these two functions. And you might have noticed that I labeled your chart “*Examples of Spiritual Gifts*”. And that’s intentional. The list of gifts we have in the NT is not exhaustive. 1 Cor. 12:4 as an example says that there are “varieties of service. What could he mean? Well there are some specific expressions of service that are noticeably absent from this list: Hospitality and Singing/Musical Gifts. Does God gift people with those things to build the body? And you need to know that because I would hate for anyone to look at this chart and say, “**Well I don’t really see myself anywhere on here.**” Because the reality is that your gift may not be on here, and it doesn’t mean it’s any less of a gift! So we’ve got speaking gifts and serving gifts, and I know you’re likely itching to get to part three where we’re discovering our individual gifts but to do so responsibly we need to make four brief clarifications on the spiritual gifts.

Four Important Clarifications...

- God graciously gifts each believer **differently**. (1 Cor. 12:4-6)
1 Cor. 12:4-6 “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.” So the source of all of our gifts is the same, but the gifts he give each person are different. That’s why Peter tells us to be stewards of “God’s varied grace”.

Simply put, **no has access to all of the spiritual gifts**—only those God has given to you. Each person gets a unique set of gifts from God and mine may be a little or a lot different from yours. And it's here where it's helpful to distinguish between **spiritual gifts** and **spiritual fruit**. By spiritual fruit, I mean—love, joy, peace etc. **Each one of us is called to cultivate each one of these**. No one can punt on “self-control”. Every spiritual fruit is for every believer to cultivate. Not so with spiritual gifts. We're gifted differently which leads to clarification number 2...

- Each gift is _____necessary_____! (1 Cor. 12:14-26)

In discussing spiritual gifts, Paul anticipates a problem and that is that people are going to look around and assign greater and lesser value to all the gifts! Gives as great analogy, “16 And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.” Each part is necessary and not only that, each part is intentionally placed. God didn't just choose you to be a part of the body. In his wisdom **he chose which part of the body you would be**; what function you would serve. And if you forget that you'll begin to make the error Paul is correcting here—the error of valuing gifts based on their perceived impact and effectiveness. “He teaches, I just hold the door. I'm blue collar.” “I'm not valuable.” Or “I'm more valuable.” No! The value of the part is not seen in how it's operating but in the God it's operating for!

“If two angels were to receive at the same moment a commission from God, one to go down and rule earth's grandest empire, the other to go and sweep the streets...it would be a matter of entire indifference to each which service fell to his lot...for the joy of the angels lies only in obedience to God's will, and with equal joy they would lift a Lazarus in his rags to Abraham's bosom, or be a chariot of fire to carry an Elijah home.” (John Newton) Which angel was more valuable—the one sweeping or ruling? If we said ruling that would be a mistake. Don't make the same mistake when it comes to spiritual gifts... So we're gifted differently, each gift is necessary, and clarification number 3...

- Concentrate on _____your_____ specific gifts. (Rom 12:6-8)

This might sound strange, but I don't think you should focus a lot of attention in areas where you're not gifted. I'll even say it this way, when it comes to spiritual gifts, we're not really called to be “well rounded.” (Rom. 12:6-7) 6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.” The body thrives not when everybody is doing everything, but **when everybody is doing their thing**. And if you don't understand this, you will grow **resentful** of people who do care as much about a certain form of ministry. **Why isn't everyone as passionate about my thing** (i.e., poor, hospitality, teaching)? Are they immature? No—because not everyone is gifted at your thing. Having said that, recognizing you **aren't gifted** in an area is **never an excuse for disobedience!** Does everyone have the spiritual gift of giving? Should all give? Evangelism? Mercy (not mine!)? Two words for you: In areas of giftedness: **Focus**. In others areas: **Faithfulness!**

- Giftedness without _____love_____ is worthless. (1 Cor. 13:1-3)

The two longest chapters on spiritual gifts in the Bible come in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 and it's almost as if Paul calls a timeout. Like before he finishes his essay on spiritual gifts, he's got to warn about a danger that he anticipates in all this talk about giftedness. 1 Cor. 13:1-3 “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not

love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.” Summary: The most impressive display of spiritual gifts is worthless apart from love. You can know everything and move mountains, if it’s not flowing from a heart that is loving God and loving people, you are a zero.

And this cautions us in two ways: It caution us against valuing spiritual gifts over Christian character—I’m tempted to want to be known for my talent more than my character; for what I do well more than how I love well. Second, it cautions against equating spiritual giftedness with spiritual maturity (i.e., incredible singer, speaker etc.). But Paul couldn’t be more clear: **giftedness does not amount to godliness**. But it is dangerously possible to confuse the two, not just in others, but in yourself. Mt. 7 tells us of the frightening conversation Jesus will have with some people who will say “We prophesied, we drove out demons in your name” and he’ll look at them and say, “I knew never knew you.” And I just think we’re too quick to assume that external displays of spiritual giftedness somehow amounts to spiritual maturity and it doesn’t. Paul Washer, when asked to be the pastor after a sermon, **“You don’t even know if I love my wife.”**

We can be more enchanted with people’s gifts and give them as pass on everything else. It’s even possible to be more enchanted with the gifts than the gift giver! The greatest gift the Lord has given to us is not an ability. The greatest gift is himself. All this leading to the discovery of our personal spiritual gifts...

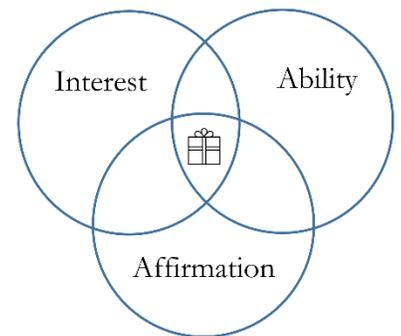
How Do I Discern My Spiritual Gifts?

It’s interesting that as much as Paul talks about spiritual gifts, he says almost nothing about how to discover ours. Wish had a sorting hat like Harry Potter for spiritual gifts, “LEADERSHIP!” But we don’t. So what do we do? Some have offered a spiritual gifts inventory. Like a Christian Meyers Briggs/Enneagram. Not wrong, but not the best method for two reasons (1) We don’t know ourselves like we think we do (2) We discover our gifts in community.

- **Pray** (1 Cor. 14:1)
John Owen said that **“Prayer is the principle means for their attainment...when Paul enjoins us to earnestly desire the spiritual gifts...this desire is enacted by prayer and no other[way].”** I’ve started doing this in my devotional time.

- **Serve** in the church in a variety of ways.
We said that you can’t learn your gifts in isolation. Learn as we serve. Important, otherwise you’ll try to discover your gifts privately *then* serve after you figure it out. But you discover your gifts **by serving!** **Explain >>>>>**

*Consider current opportunities.



For me it’s NOT singing, even though I’m good at it. IMO, affirmation is the most important in helping us discern our gifts. **Discovering my teaching gifts story.** **GIVE affirmation**, too: You may be confirming someone’s gifts!!!

“If you aren’t sure what your spiritual gifts are, I wouldn’t worry about it. If you give yourself to other believers in the church, you will inevitably be using your gifts...It’ll become clear as time passes, and asking other believers can help you discern your gift. We’re often in a great hurry to find our gifts, but God isn’t. He has a purpose and plan to use you in the life of your church, and it will become clear as you serve him and others.” (Schreiner)