

What are Spiritual Gifts?

Message 1 of 4 in the series: "Christmas in July: Unwrapping Spiritual Gifts"

A. In a letter to the early Christians in Corinth, Paul explained quite a bit about spiritual gifts.

"Now, dear brothers and sisters, regarding your question about the special abilities the Spirit gives us. **I don't want you to misunderstand this. You know that when you were still pagans, you were led astray** and swept along in worshiping speechless idols. So I want you to know that no one speaking by the Spirit of God will curse Jesus, and no one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit." 1 Corinthians 12:1-3 (NLT)

Note: The port city of Corinth was a major commercial center in the Roman empire known for its materialism, idol worship, and sexual immorality. Most of the Christians in Corinth had grown up with no knowledge of the God of the Bible, and they were struggling to live out their Christian faith in such a worldly place. Their pagan upbringing hadn't prepared them to work together or to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. "Each Sabbath found Paul at the synagogue, trying to convince the Jews and Greeks alike... that Jesus was the Messiah. But when they opposed and insulted him... he left and went to the home of Titius Justus, a Gentile who worshiped God and lived next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, and everyone in his household believed in the Lord. Many others in Corinth also heard Paul, became believers, and were baptized." Acts 18:4-8 (NLT)

Life Application: God wants us to live out our faith in a way that stands out in our worldly culture. "You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, **let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.**" Matthew 5:14-16 (NLT)

Life Application: God wants us to accomplish the good things He has planned for us. "God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. **He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.**"

Ephesians 2:8-10 (NLT)

Good News! The Holy Spirit is our power supply. "But **you will receive power** when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8 (NLT)

B. The Holy Spirit enables us to live out our faith and accomplish the good things God has planned for us by giving us spiritual gifts.

"Now there are **varieties of gifts**, but the same Spirit. And there are **varieties of ministries**, and the same Lord. There are **varieties of effects**, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the **manifestation of the Spirit** for the common good." 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 (NASB)

1. Spiritual gifts are manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. "**The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John**, for they could see that they were ordinary men with no special training in the Scriptures. They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." Acts 4:13 (NLT)
2. There are varieties of spiritual gifts. "To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice (word of wisdom); to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge (word of knowledge). The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages (tongues), while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said." 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 (NLT)
 - **Word of Wisdom** = the special ability to understand God's perspective and give timely counsel or advice. "**If you need wisdom, ask our generous God**, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking." James 1:5 (NLT)
 - **Word of Knowledge** = the special ability to know something that cannot be known by ordinary means. "But there was a certain man named Ananias who, with his wife, Sapphira, sold some property. He brought part of the money to the apostles, claiming it was the full amount. With his wife's consent, he kept the rest. Then Peter said, 'Ananias, why have you let Satan fill your heart? **You lied**

to the Holy Spirit, and you kept some of the money for yourself. The property was yours to sell or not sell, as you wished. And after selling it, the money was also yours to give away. How could you do a thing like this? You weren't lying to us but to God!" Acts 5:1-4 (NLT)

- **Prophecy** = the special ability to clearly communicate and persuasively declare God's will regarding a situation, issue, person, group, or the future. "During this time some prophets traveled from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them named **Agabus stood up in one of the meetings and predicted by the Spirit that a great famine was coming upon the entire Roman world.** (This was fulfilled during the reign of Claudius.) So the believers in Antioch decided to send relief to the brothers and sisters in Judea, everyone giving as much as they could." Acts 11:27-29 (NLT)
 - **Discernment** = the special ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. "Dear friends, **do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit.** You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world." 1 John 4:1 (NLT)
 - **Healing** = the special ability to pray in faith for people who need physical, emotional, or spiritual healing. "Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. **Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well.**" James 5:14-15a (NLT)
 - **Faith** = the special ability to trust God to accomplish His purposes regardless of circumstances. "Then Peter called to him, 'Lord, if it's really you, tell me to come to you, walking on the water.' 'Yes, come,' Jesus said. **So Peter went over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus.** But when he saw the strong wind and the waves, he was terrified and began to sink. 'Save me, Lord!' he shouted. Jesus immediately reached out and grabbed him. 'You have so little faith,' Jesus said. 'Why did you doubt me?'" Matthew 14:28-31 (NLT)
 - **Miracles** = the special ability to do things that cannot be accomplished by ordinary means. "But the believers who were scattered preached the Good News about Jesus wherever they went. Philip, for example, went to the city of Samaria and told the people there about the Messiah. Crowds listened intently to Philip because they were eager to hear his message and see the miraculous signs he did. Many evil spirits were cast out, screaming as they left their victims. And many who had been paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was great joy in that city." Acts 8:4-8 (NLT)
 - **Tongues** = the special ability to speak in languages not previously known/studied.
 - **Interpretation of Tongues** = the special ability to interpret what a person speaking in tongues is saying.
3. There are varieties of ministries. "Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the **apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers.** Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ." Ephesians 4:11-12 (NLT)
 4. There are varieties of effects. "The seed that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and understand God's word and produce a harvest of **thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times** as much as had been planted!" Matthew 13:23 (NLT)
 5. Spiritual gifts are given to us for the common good, NOT to glorify ourselves. "God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. **Use them well to serve one another.**" 1 Peter 4:10 (NLT)
 6. The same Holy Spirit decides which gifts we all get. "It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. **He alone decides** which gift each person should have." 1 Corinthians 12:11 (NLT)

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Connect Group Questions:

Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, and then discuss the following questions:

1. When did you first hear about spiritual gifts? What was your reaction?
2. How does it make you feel that Jesus wants us to stand out in our culture (Matthew 5:14-16), do the good things He has prepared for us to do long ago (Ephesians 2:8-10), and tell people about Him everywhere (Acts 1:8)? How are we supposed to do this?
3. Discuss the following list of spiritual gifts from 1 Corinthians 12. Has the Holy Spirit given you any of these gifts? Can we just choose which gifts we want? (1 Corinthians 12:11)

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 - Prophecy = the special ability to clearly communicate and persuasively declare God's will regarding a situation, issue, person, group, or the future. (Acts 11:27-29)
 - Discernment = the special ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. (1 John 4:1)
 - Healing = the special ability to pray in faith for people who need physical, emotional, or spiritual healing. (James 5:14-15a)
 - Faith = the special ability to trust God to accomplish His purposes regardless of circumstances. (Matthew 14:28-31)
 - Miracles = the special ability to do things that cannot be accomplished by ordinary means. (Acts 8:4-8)
 - Tongues = the special ability to speak in languages not previously known/studied. (Acts 2:1-12)
 - Interpretation of Tongues = the special ability to interpret what a person speaking in tongues is saying.
4. If the Holy Spirit causes spiritual gifts to be used in varieties of ministries (Ephesians 4:11-12) with varieties of effects (Matthew 13:23), why do you think we tend to evaluate ministry effectiveness on a "bigger must be better" scale?
5. Read 1 Peter 4:10 & 1 Corinthians 12:7. Who is supposed to benefit from our spiritual gifts? Why is it easy to focus on what's in it for us?