

Gifted Teammates



Topic

Spiritual gifts

Theme

The believer ought to use his spiritual gifts in love.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will lovingly put his spiritual gift to use in his local church.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 13

Scripture Focus

1 Corinthians 12; 13

Summary

The Holy Spirit has given every believer at least one spiritual gift to employ in love. The Corinthians overemphasized temporary gifts to the neglect of the greatest gift of love.

Outline

I. The Bestowing of Spiritual Gifts (12)

- A. Their scope (12:1–10)
- B. Their source (12:11)
- C. Their synergy (12:12–31)

II. The Best Spiritual Gift (13)

- A. Love excels (13:1–7)
- B. Love endures (13:8–13)

Memory Verses

*"And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.
And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.
But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal"
(1 Corinthians 12:5–7).*

GETTING STARTED

Gifts and Gratitude

Did you say thank you? How many times did you hear that as a child? How many times have you said that to your kids?

ASK: How did your parents respond if you failed to tell someone thank you for a gift or a kind deed? (Q1)

ASK: What, if anything, did they make you do to correct your lapse? (Q2)

As parents, we want our children to say thank you because an ungrateful attitude reflects poorly on us. But have you ever stopped to consider what God must think about our ingratitude towards Him? He has given us spiritual gifts to use to edify others and glorify Him. When we ignore our gifts and fail to develop them, we are showing an attitude of ingratitude. This lesson will challenge us to be grateful for our spiritual gifts.

Who Is the Gift Really for?

When a husband gives his wife a new set of pots and pans for Christmas, who really benefits? The husband does, of course. He gets to enjoy all the meals his wife cooks in the pots and pans.

ASK: What gifts have you given that really benefited you more than the receiver of the gift?

ASK: How were those gifts received?

Spiritual gifts are not primarily for the believer using the gifts. Rather, they become his gifts to others as he serves them by exercising his gift. Paul wrote to Corinth about exercising spiritual gifts out of love for others.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. The Bestowing of Spiritual Gifts (12)

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul emphasized an important correlation between the Holy Spirit and believers who make up the body of Christ. *Diversities of gifts* originate from the *same Spirit* (12:4), going to the *many members . . . of that one body* (12:12). These gifts allow the body to function effectively when all the members use their gifts for the purpose for which they were given—that is, to benefit one another (cf. 12:7).

To say it another way, everyone in a local church receives blessings from the Holy Spirit that are given via other believers, who are placed in the body by God's sovereign design to serve their fellow believers.

A. Their scope (12:1–10)

The Corinthians had asked Paul for more information and clarification about spiritual gifts. Since Paul did not want them to stay in the dark about this import-

ant subject, he provided a lengthy answer, which he introduced by stating: *Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant* (12:1).

The Corinthian believers had been saved about five years. Formerly, they were heathen, captives led by speechless idols (12:2). By faith in Christ they had escaped the bondage of heathenism, but even as believers they were not free from the attempts of false teachers to deceive them. Such false religionists asserted that Jesus was *accursed* and devoted to destruction. Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that the Holy Spirit did not empower such people.

The spiritual person is taught by the Holy Spirit to proclaim Jesus as Lord (12:3). A believer's acknowledgment of the lordship of Christ is basic to spirituality. More specifically it affects a believer's attitude toward God's distribution of spiritual gifts.

The triune God is involved in distributing spiritual gifts widely and wisely (12:4–6). And once distributed, we can trust Him to oversee the use and effectiveness of each believer's gifts (12:6, 7).

READ: 1 Corinthians 12:7. **ASK:** What is the purpose of spiritual gifts? (Q3) *To profit other believers by building them up spiritually. When exercised, spiritual gifts ultimately bring glory to God.*

ASK: How does the subject of Christian stewardship relate to spiritual gifts? (Q4) *A Christian's stewardship includes determining, developing, and exercising his spiritual gifts.*

The believers at Corinth had received a variety of spiritual gifts. First Corinthians 12:8–10, 28, and 29 list some of them for us. Most Bible teachers divide these spiritual gifts into two groups: temporary and permanent. The temporary gifts faded out as the writing of the New Testament neared completion. When the New Testament was finished, the temporary gifts ceased altogether. The permanent gifts continued and are still in use today.

There is some disagreement about how to categorize the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, and faith. Some believe they are permanent gifts, but most likely they were special temporary gifts to help the church in the earliest stages of its development. Notice the following descriptions of the gifts.

- **Wisdom:** A direct understanding of divine mysteries not yet explained in the New Testament.
- **Knowledge:** Direct spiritual insight into truth not yet revealed in the New Testament.
- **Faith:** Trust in God for the working of miracles.

Certainly, a believer today can gain wisdom, knowledge, and faith through the written Word of God (cf. Rom. 10:17; James 1:5), but what they gain is not like spiritual gifts described above. In the apostolic era, before the New Testament was written, the Spirit gave the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, and faith specifically for transmission of truth and working of miracles to authenticate that truth.

The miraculous sign gifts were foundational to the Church Age and thus limited to the apostolic era (cf. Eph. 2:20). We can be certain that the following gifts that Paul listed were temporary.

Other New Testament passages also reference spiritual gifts (cf. Rom. 12:6-8; Eph. 4:11; 1 Pet. 4:9-11), but for this study, we are confining our attention to the lists in 1 Corinthians 12.

- **Healing:** The miraculous ability to restore health without medical attention.
- **Miracles:** Extraordinary divine interventions to authenticate the message of the cross.
- **Prophecy:** Foretelling the future and telling forth divine truths before they were revealed in the New Testament.
- **Discerning of spirits:** The supernatural ability to distinguish whether a pronouncement or teaching was of God. This was a special gift before the New Testament was completed. (Today, believers need to discern truth and error based on New Testament teaching.)
- **Tongues:** The ability to speak in a foreign language without having learned it.
- **Interpretation of tongues:** The ability to interpret what was spoken in an unfamiliar foreign language.
- **Apostles:** Men, directly chosen and commissioned by the Lord to preach the gospel; they were also eyewitnesses of Christ's resurrection.
- **Prophets:** Those appointed by God to announce direct disclosures from God concerning His will.

Paul's list also included gifts that clearly are still in use today.

- **Teachers:** Those who help others learn God's Word.
- **Helps:** Service on behalf of others; relieving others of their burdens.
- **Governments:** Competence in watching over ministries in the church.

B. Their source (12:11)

The Holy Spirit imparts spiritual gifts to believers as He chooses, and He overlooks no one as He shares them (12:11). Some believers may have several gifts, but every believer has at least one. This means that every believer can contribute to the work of the Lord in a significant way.

READ: 1 Corinthians 12:11. **ASK:** How should our attitude toward our spiritual gifts be affected by the fact that they come from the Holy Spirit? (Q5) *We should rejoice in the gifts the Spirit has given to us. We should not covet other gifts or wish we didn't have the ones He gave us.*

C. Their synergy (12:12–31)

The function of the church has some correlations with the function of a football team. A successful football team must follow the coach's play calling, must accept their assigned roles, must treat all team members as important, must know the goal, must take the game seriously, and must practice and develop their skills.

ASK: What might happen if every member of a church tried to function without regard for the Lord's instructions? (Q6) *The church would become chaotic and would cease to glorify the Lord or minister to people.*

ASK: What might happen if the church members failed to develop and use their spiritual gifts? (Q7) *There would be no real ministry or spiritual accomplishment.*

The Corinthian church was supposed to operate like a team. Every member

was supposed to employ his spiritual gifts in cooperation with his teammates.

Paul used the human body as another illustration of the church. The Holy Spirit spiritually baptizes believers into the Body of Christ the moment they trust in Christ as their Savior (12:12, 13). The Holy Spirit then uses believers to make the church a multi-equipped body (12:14) prepared by the Spirit of God to serve Christ obediently for the good of others and for God's glory. Each local church is a microcosm of the Body of Christ and is divinely outfitted to serve the Lord in its sphere of influence.

ASK: Why is union with Christ basic to the employment of spiritual gifts?

(Q8) Christ is the head of the Body of Christ. If we are not responsive to Him, we will not be a productive part of His Body.

Paul gave a description of the various parts of a local body of Christ (12:15–26). He showed not only how the different members fit together and why all are necessary, but he also described the activity of some of the parts. The eye must be seeing, the ear must be *hearing*, and the nose must be *smelling* (12:17), otherwise the body will be incapacitated.

READ: 1 Corinthians 12:15–30. **ASK:** Why is there no such thing as an unsentential believer in a church? *(Q9) Because God places every person in the church with the gifts He desires so that all may contribute for the good of the body.*

ASK: What gives a sense of worth and dignity to even the least conspicuous ministry in a church? *(Q10) It can be done for the glory of God and to earn eternal reward.*

ASK: What happens when everyone in the church is using his gifts as God intended (12:25, 26)? *(Q11) There are no divisions, the members care for each other without prejudice, and the members suffer and rejoice with one another.*

In closing his discussion about the bestowing of spiritual gifts, Paul pointed out that the Corinthians were coveting the best gifts, but he would show them a *more excellent way* (12:31). Paul presented this *more excellent way* in chapter 13.

II. The Best Spiritual Gift (13)

Paul continued his discussion of the use of spiritual gifts in chapter 13, a chapter that we often wrench from its context because of its poetic beauty. The chapter is meant to give us the proper motivation and mindset in using spiritual gifts.

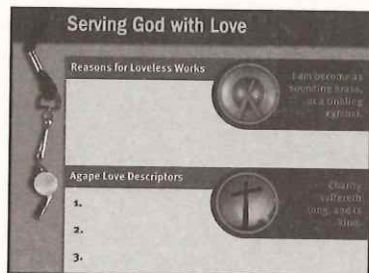
A. Love excels (13:1–7)

A team may be loaded with talent, but if it is characterized by dissension, it will likely encounter a losing season. Bickering, jealousy, grudges, pride, and bitterness can turn even the best equipped team into a dismal failure. Team spirit involves mutual respect and caring. In a church, love for the Lord and one another knits hearts together in ministry. *Agape* love guides a team of believers in the right use of their spiritual gifts because it is self-sacrificing and Christlike.

The Corinthian church set a high value on oratory (cf. 2:1). Perhaps that is

Covet (12:31) could be translated you are coveting. In view of Paul's teaching that the spiritual gifts are sovereignly distributed by the Holy Spirit, it seems unlikely that Paul would encourage the Corinthians to covet any of them.

why the gift of tongues ranked at the top of their list of coveted spiritual gifts. But Paul informed them that even gilded oratory, delivered without love, was no better than the harsh sounds of *sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal* (13:1). The gifts of prophecy, knowledge, and faith were also ineffective without the added dimension of love (13:2). Even the gift of giving, demonstrated in the surrender of possessions and life itself for the sake of others, was worthless without love (13:3). Such a sacrifice would not yield the full potential of eternal rewards.



RESOURCE: Display resource 13. **ASK:** What might motivate a person to serve without love? (Q12) (Reveal or record answers.) *Pride, guilt, competition, fear, attempt to earn favor with God, or a sense of duty.*

READ: 1 Corinthians 13:4–7. **ASK:** Summarize Paul’s descriptions of agape love using just three words. (Q13) (Reveal or record answers.) *Perhaps selfless, pure, and effective.*

B. Love endures (13:8–13)

In the process of giving us a beautiful treatise on the character and importance of love, Paul also gives significant doctrinal teaching on the nature of the miraculous sign gifts that were intended only for the apostolic phase of the church age.

Using a word that describes a leaf falling from a tree and dying on the ground, Paul wrote that love never *fails* (13:8). It will endure long after prophecies have failed, tongues have ceased, and knowledge has vanished away (13:8). Tongues would cease because the written New Testament would fully validate the believer’s message. Incomplete knowledge of God and incomplete preaching about spiritual truth would be done away upon the arrival of *that which is perfect* (13:10).

Paul was referring to the final, written form of God’s revelation when he used the phrase, *that which is perfect* (13:10; cf. Rev. 22:18, 19). This is evident from the fact that the *perfect* entity in view here is shown to be superior to its counterpart, *that which is in part* (13:10), namely the ability that the miraculous sign gifts gave to *know in part* and *prophecy in part* (13:9).

That which is perfect and *that which is in part* must both be forms of God’s special revelation (13:10). Truly, *all the counsel of God* (Acts 20:27) is readily accessible in His *perfect* revelation in Holy Scripture (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 2 Pet. 1:3). Compared to it, even the supernatural gifts of prophecies, tongues, and knowledge fade into oblivion. In Heaven we will surely look back and wonder how we could ever have exercised such little faith and hope when we could have drawn freely on the eternal Word of God.

ASK: If we truly believe the Bible is complete and superior to all other revelation, how should that belief affect our lives? (Q14) *We should read and study it much more faithfully, claim its promises, and yearn to learn more about its teachings.*

In one sense, love is God’s *greatest* eternal gift to His people. It is greater than even faith and hope (13:13). Faith accepts God’s offer of salvation and all His promises (cf. 2 Cor. 5:6, 7). Hope anticipates the goal of salvation and the fulfillment

The view of 13:8–13 that is expressed in this lesson is summarized from the writing of Dr. Myron Houghton. He originally developed this interpretation in a paper entitled, *1 Corinthians 13:8–13, Yet One More Look!* The paper is referenced with Dr. Houghton’s permission.

of God's promises (cf. Rom. 8:24). Yet faith and hope are unnecessary in Heaven. Love, however, continues throughout eternity. We will love God eternally for Who He is and for what He has done for us by grace (cf. 1 Pet. 1:8, 9).

READ: 1 Corinthians 13:13. **ASK:** How should we respond to the fact that love never fails? (Q15) *We ought to seek to grow in our love for God and for our fellow believers. We should also desire to tell the world of God's everlasting love demonstrated on the cross.*

Spiritually gifted believers today can bring a little bit of Heaven into their service for Christ by employing their gifts in love!

MAKING IT PERSONAL

No New Revelation

What would be the ramifications of God giving us new revelation today? They may be more serious than you think. There is a Biblical example of what this would be like in Acts 18:24–28. Apollos had to be retrained because he was not aware of the latest revelation of New Testament truth. Much of his previous ministry, therefore, was deficient.

ASK: How serious is it when someone claims today to be giving new revelation by exercising a miraculous gift such as speaking in tongues? (Q16) *It is very serious because casts doubt on whether God's revelation is complete and sufficient for us today.*

ASK: How will you respond to the fact that the Bible is complete and sufficient? (Q17)

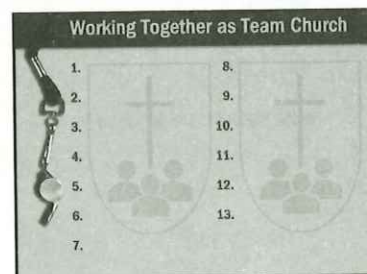
Exercising Gifts with Love

ASK: What have you learned in this lesson that will help you exercise your spiritual gifts toward others with greater love, knowledge, focus, and motivation? (Q18)

Summary and Memory Verse

Use resource 1 to review the response for this lesson: Use your spiritual gifts with love.

Encourage your learners to memorize 1 Corinthians 12:5–7. Give them an opportunity to quote the verse in class next week.





Topic

Spiritual gifts

Theme

A church should declare God's truth in understandable words, in an orderly manner, and for the edification of its members.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will seek to edify fellow believers while using his spiritual gifts.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 14

Team Focus: Edification

Scripture Focus

1 Corinthians 14

Summary

The Corinthian church valued speaking in tongues above prophesying. Paul taught the Corinthians to value prophesying above speaking in tongues and to conduct their worship in an orderly manner for the edification of other believers. His emphasis on edifying others through personal ministry in the church is timeless.

Outline

I. A Priority Gift (14:1–5)

- A. Its identity (14:1)
- B. Its importance (14:2–5)

II. A Perspective about Tongues (14:6–12)

- A. The clearly defined sound (14:7–9)
- B. The intelligible language (14:10–12)

III. A Procedure to Follow (14:13–40)

- A. Interpretation (14:13–28)
- B. Revelation (14:29–40)

Memory Verse

"Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church" (1 Corinthians 14:12).