

# Spiritual Gifts

*What are they and what are they for?*

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God wants to give us spiritual gifts because he loves us and wants us to actively be part of what he is doing in the world. When we turn from our sin and follow Jesus we are given the Holy Spirit. He is the very presence of the living creator God, and has made his home in us. The Holy Spirit does the internal work of giving us a new heart that loves God and frees us from slavery to sin. The Holy Spirit leads us into a deeper relationship with Jesus by doing things like convicting us of sin, growing us in holiness by changing our character, and revealing the meaning of Scripture to us.

The Holy Spirit also gives us spiritual gifts to partner with God to actively and powerfully bring God's kingdom here and push back Satan's kingdom of darkness.<sup>1</sup> Jesus taught, healed, cast out demons, and proclaimed God's kingdom in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is that same Holy Spirit that is given to us when we follow Jesus. The same things Jesus did, we are empowered to do and even greater things though the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> God equips us with the gifts needed to fulfill what he has asked us to do. This means that he often gives gifts at different times for different tasks. This requires us to be open to new gifts and for our gifts to change as we journey with him.

When we use the spiritual gifts God has given us, we point to how great and powerful God is and give people a preview of what things will be like when Jesus returns. There will be no more sickness, death, disease, demonic influence, injustice, and poverty. God has equipped us through the gifts of the Holy Spirit to be part of that story and actively invite others to join us in it.

A good place to start as you study spiritual gifts is reading 1 Corinthians 12-14.

## Purpose of Spiritual Gift

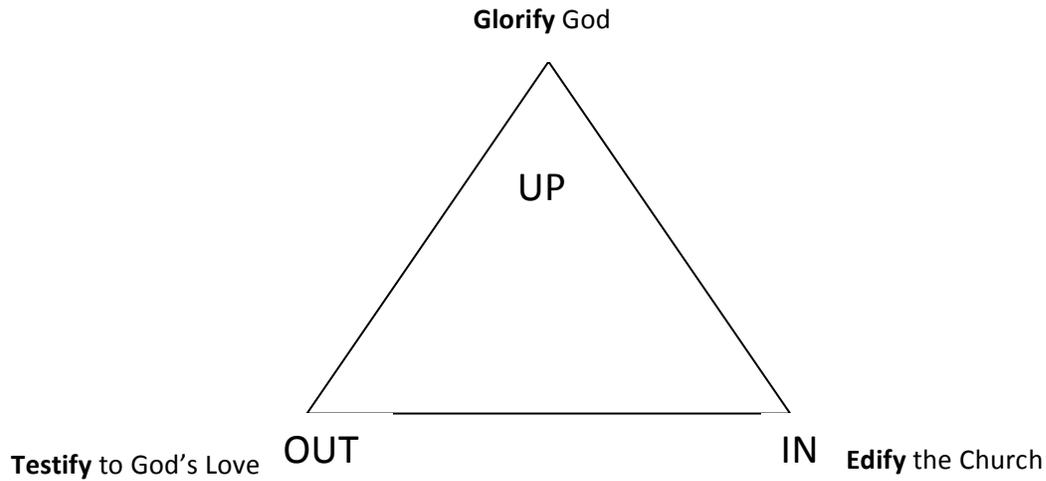
Jesus had relationships in three dimensions – UP (with God), IN (with other believers); OUT (the World/unbelievers). Spiritual gifts are to be used in all three areas.

1. **To glorify God (UP)** – (1 Peter 4:10-11). The gifts are not to be used to point to the gift itself or to the person possessing the gift but to God.
2. **To edify and build up the church (IN)** – (1 Corinthians 12:7). They are not to be used to puff ourselves up or make us look good but to build up the church.
3. **Testify/Confirm the Message of the Gospel (OUT)** - (*Acts 4:13-14; Acts 5:12-16; Hebrews 2:4; Mark 16:20; Luke 9:1-2; Luke 10:1-20; Acts 14:3; Acts 15:2*). People are often more receptive to the gospel when God has tangibly demonstrated his love, compassion, and power. The gifts testify to the message of the Gospel.

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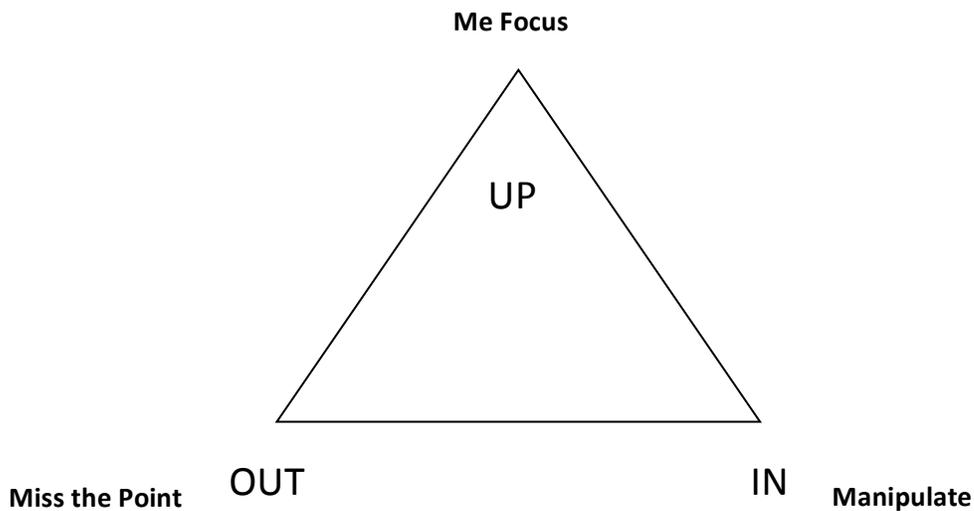
<sup>1</sup> John 16:11; Eph 2:2

<sup>2</sup> John 14:12



### Based in Love

The chapters in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 about spiritual gifts sandwich a chapter on love. If we don't first love God and love others, then spiritual gifts are pointless. Making sure we are living a life of love will help keep our motives for using spiritual gifts pure. If we do not love then our motives become compromised.



**Me Focused** - Instead of glorifying God we begin to use the gifts to glorify and boast in ourselves. We are tempted to pursue the gifts and not the Giver.

**Manipulate** - If we don't love others then we will use the gifts to manipulate and control the people around us.

**Miss the Point** - We will use the gifts to serve others but do it without a heart of love and compassion. We will miss the point that the gifts are to be used to demonstrate God's love not just something we are to do out of duty or obligation. The gifts should point to Jesus.

## List of Spiritual Gifts

### Ephesians 4:11-16

These are different leadership roles within the church and are not spiritual gifts. Those who hold these roles can have a variety of spiritual gifts. Every leader has a bent towards one or two of these areas.

- **Apostles** - extend the gospel. As the “sent ones,” they ensure that the faith is transmitted from one context to another and from one generation to the next. They are always thinking about the future, bridging barriers, establishing the church in new contexts, developing leaders, networking trans-locally. Yes, if you focus solely on initiating new ideas and rapid expansion, you can leave people and organizations wounded. The shepherding and teaching functions are needed to ensure people are cared for rather than simply used.
- **Prophets** - know God's will. They are particularly attuned to God and his truth for today. They bring correction and challenge the dominant assumptions we inherit from the culture. They insist that the community obey what God has commanded. They question the status quo. Without the other types of leaders in place, prophets can become belligerent activists or, paradoxically, disengage from the imperfection of reality and become other-worldly.
- **Evangelists** - recruit. These infectious communicators of the gospel message recruit others to the cause. They call for a personal response to God's redemption in Christ, and also draw believers to engage the wider mission, growing the church. Evangelists can be so focused on reaching those outside the church that maturing and strengthening those inside is neglected.
- **Shepherds (Pastors)** - nurture and protect. Caregivers of the community, they focus on the protection and spiritual maturity of God's flock, cultivating a loving and spiritually mature network of relationships, making and developing disciples. Shepherds can value stability to the detriment of the mission. They may also foster an unhealthy dependence between the church and themselves.
- **Teachers** - understand and explain. Communicators of God's truth and wisdom, they help others remain biblically grounded to better discern God's will, guiding others toward wisdom, helping the community remain faithful to Christ's word, and constructing a transferable doctrine. Without the input of the other functions, teachers can fall into dogmatism or dry intellectualism. They may fail to see the personal or missional aspects of the church's ministry.
- *(Definitions from Alan Hirsch – [www.theforgottenways.com](http://www.theforgottenways.com))*

### Romans 12

These gifts can be done in our own strength by God's grace or we can be given the supernatural ability to do these gifts through God's power. For example, there may be times where God gives you the ability to teach when you are not usually a good teacher. Either way we are to use these gifts to glorify God, edify the church, and testify to the world about God's love.

- **Prophecy** – may refer to the proclamation of truth or the same as 1 Corinthians 12 which is the sharing of something that God has spontaneously brought to mind.
- **Serving**
- **Teaching** – the ability to clearly communicate the message of the Bible and God's Truth to people. This is specifically applied to teaching the Bible and the truths of God, not other material.

- **Encouraging** - All Christians are called to encourage one another (1 Thess. 5:11; Hebrews 3:13, 10:25). This is a gift to encourage those who deeply need encouraging. It is not simply encouraging them for their human ability but encouraging them in their faith and who they are as followers of Jesus. This is encouragement through sharing the truth of the Bible with them and reminding them of the Gospel.
- **Giving** – This may also apply to the gift of giving your body over to hardships as well to serve the Lord (1 Cor. 13:3).
- **Leading**
- **Mercy** – To be graciously compassionate.

## 1 Corinthians 12

These are specifically said to be gifts of the Spirit. These are different manifestations of the Holy Spirit—ways the Holy Spirit shows himself through us (1 Corinthians 12:7). These are supernatural gifts that are not possible on our own apart from the Holy Spirit.

- **Message of Wisdom** – this is not simply human wisdom. It is a supernatural amount of wisdom to make decisions in difficult situations. Ability to debate and persuade people to the way of Jesus by the words given by the Spirit (Acts 6:10).
  - Example: Those who argued with Steven’s message couldn’t stand up to the wisdom that the Spirit gave him as he spoke (Acts 6:8-10);
- **Message of Knowledge** – where you are given information about a person, situation, or event that you shouldn’t normally know. Sometimes this comes in a dream or vision, or just an inner sense. This message should be shared if it is for the edification of another or for the building up of the church. This is to be used with caution as it can cause damage by telling someone difficult news they may not be ready to hear.
  - Example: Ananias knowing Paul’s conversion and that he was on his way (Acts 9:1-19); Jesus knew what they were thinking (Luke 5:22).
- **Faith** – All believers have faith in God. This is a gift all of us are given by God to receive salvation. However, the gift refers to a supernatural type of faith, a faith that we are not capable of in our own abilities. This is the gift of having faith in a very difficult situation that goes beyond natural faith. It is a deep sense of knowing God will prevail or do something in a specific situation.
  - Example: Steven proclaiming the Gospel as he is about to be stoned (Acts 7).
- **Healing** - Praying for someone and healing them in the name of Jesus. This is often done by putting your hands on someone and healing them. This can be either physical or emotional healing.
  - Example: Jesus heals Peter’s mother-in-law (Luke 4:38-31); Jesus heals the man with leprosy (Luke 5:12-16); Peter heals a crippled beggar (Acts 3:1-12); Paul heals a man with crippled feet (Acts 14:8-10). Jesus drives out a demon that made a man mute (Luke 11:14). Peter casts out a demon from slave girl (Acts 16:16-18).
- **Performing Miracles**– the ability to perform supernatural tasks and miraculous signs that are beyond your natural capabilities.
  - Example: Handkerchiefs and aprons that touched Paul were taken to the sick and their illnesses were cured and evil spirits left them (Acts 19:11-12).
- **Prophecy** – Telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind. These are messages from God to be shared for the strengthening, encouragement, and comfort of others (1 Corinthians 14:3). This can come through a word, a picture, or internal sense God gives you.

God will often use this gift to bring specific Scripture to mind to share with someone you are praying for. It is important to ask God what he wants us to do with prophetic messages. He may want us to share them or He may just want us to pray for something specific he brings to mind. Prophetic words are not to be put on the same level as Scripture. The delivery of prophecy can be given in error, so it is important to test all prophecy (1 Cor. 14:29). Do not base your life around a word of prophecy but pray about it and see if it is confirmed and weigh against what Scripture says.

- Example: Agabus prophesying that Paul would be arrested (Acts 21:10-14); Peter getting the message from God that the Gentiles are clean and part of salvation and sharing it with the people (Acts 10:1-11:18).
- **Distinguishing between spirits** - knowing clearly what is good and evil. Being aware of evil spirits and determine whether a spirit is good or evil or knowing specifically what evil spirit is present.
  - Example: Paul knew the spirit within the girl who predicted the future was evil even though she was saying, “These men were servants of the Most High God.” Since he knew it was an evil spirit, he cast it out of her (Acts 16:16-18). Also *Luke 13:11; Mark 9:25, 29; 1 John 4:6; 2 Tim 1:7.*
- **Speaking in Tongues** – there are two different ways of speaking in tongues. The first one is a prayerful, heavenly language that you cannot understand, but it is a way of your soul connecting with God (1 Cor. 14:2, 14, 15). It is to be used in private prayer time or in worship, but only when there is an interpreter (1 Cor. 14:26-28). The second kind of speaking in tongues is speaking in another earthly language that you haven’t studied. This would be like speaking to a group of people in Africa and they understand you in their native language. Tongues are not required proof that you are filled with the Spirit, but a gift given by the Holy Spirit just like the other gifts.
  - Example: Speaking in other languages at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-8). Paul talks about human languages and angelic languages (Acts 13:1).
- **Interpreting Tongues** – Interpreting what either you pray in tongues or what someone else says to a group of people. This is essential if someone is speaking in tongues in a public setting. If this gift is not present when tongues are spoken in public, then the person speaking in tongues should be asked to stop or pray quietly. This gift may be given to the person speaking in tongues so they may interpret or given to someone else in the body of Christ that they may interpret on behalf of the one speaking in tongues.
  - Example: Paul says that we should pray and ask the Holy Spirit to give us the ability to interpret what we pray if we pray in tongues (1 Cor. 14:13). Paul says an interpreter is necessary for someone to pray in tongues in public (1 Cor. 14:28).

## Frequently Asked Questions

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### Where do spiritual gifts come from?

Spiritual gifts are given by the Holy Spirit. *1 Corinthians 12:11* “All these [spiritual gifts] are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.”

We do not get to decide which gifts we are given though we are encouraged to desire specific gifts and even ask God for them. What gifts we are given is determined by the Holy Spirit. He gives us the gifts He sees fit for us and they are given to us when we need them.

### **Who is the Holy Spirit?**

The Holy Spirit is a full and equal part of the Trinity. He works in the world to make all people understand their need for Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit lives inside every follower of Jesus from the moment they decide to follow Him. The Spirit is our power source for life, ministry and spiritual growth. To tap into that power, we must continually yield to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works “in” us to make our character like Jesus and also works “through” us to do the things Jesus did.

*(Genesis 1:2; Judges 14:6; Psalm 51:11; 139:7ff.; Isaiah 61:1-3; Joel 2:28-32; Matthew 1:18; 3:16; 4:1; 12:28-32; Luke 1:35; 4:1,18-19; 11:13; 12:12; John 14:16-17,26; 15:26; 16:7-14; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4,38; 4:31; 5:3; 6:3; 8:39; 13:2; 16:6; 19:1-6; Romans 8:9-11,14-16,26-27; 1 Corinthians 2:10-14; 3:16; 12:3-11,13; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30; 5:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:19; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 1:13-14; 3:16; Hebrews 9:14-15; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 John 4:13; 5:6-7; Revelation 22:17)*

### **Do all of us have spiritual gifts?**

The Holy Spirit wants to give all followers of Jesus spiritual gifts. You don’t have spiritual gifts if you are not a follower of Jesus because you don’t have the Holy Spirit. God gives them to us at different times on our journey especially when we are open to receiving them. We are told to ask God to give you spiritual gifts. While God can give us gifts without us being willing to receive them, often times he waits for us want to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Quenching the Spirit’s activity in your life can diminish the presence of gift in your life.<sup>3</sup> Spiritual gifts aren’t just for advanced or mature Christians but for all Christians – this includes children!

### **How do I find out what gifts are given to me?**

Try it out! If you want to know if you have been given the gift of healing, pray for the sick and see what happens. As you pray for people ask God to give you prophetic words to share with them. Growing in your gifts is like riding a bike; it is awkward at first, but the more you do it, the easier it gets.

Sometimes it will take a long time for a gift to be realized. Remember that it is not up to you what spiritual gifts you are given or when they are given, though we are encouraged to ask specifically.

It is a great idea to pray in community. This could be with your small group or friends. If you are comfortable ask them to lay their hands on you as you pray for you to be filled with the Spirit receive the gifts of the Spirit (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6). It is important to ask the group to affirm what gifts they see in you and encourage you to grow in them.

### **Are spiritual gifts the same as talents and abilities?**

Talents and abilities are things you are born with, such as being athletic or musical, or things you work to develop in your own strength, such as learning an instrument or building a house. These talents and abilities are to be used to demonstrate how great God is and serve others, but they are not the same as spiritual gifts.

Spiritual gifts are things that you cannot do in your own strength or power. They are only possible because of the power of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:19

Everything we do should bring glory and praise to God (Col 3:17). Both spiritual gifts and natural abilities are to be used to point to Jesus as Lord, but are not the same thing.

### **Where does the Bible talk about Spiritual gifts?**

Different spiritual gifts are listed in a handful of places in the Bible. The primary places are Romans 12:3-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. No one list contains all of the gifts and these lists are not exhaustive.

### **What about the gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:27-31?**

This seems to be a list of offices (roles) held in the church as well as spiritual gifts, and functional gifts.

- Apostles – an office, not a spiritual gift – 2 Corinthians 12:12; the apostles are ones who are sent out by the church (missionaries). They will have a variety of spiritual gifts, but there is no spiritual gift of apostleship.
- Prophecy
- Teaching
- Performing Miracles
- Helping (serving) – may or may not be a spiritual gift, listed nowhere else. Paul seems to assume that we all do this (See 1 Cor. 12:29-31).
- Leading
- Speaking in Tongues
- Interpreting Tongues

Paul deliberately puts these gifts and roles in this order to put speaking in tongues and interpreting tongues last. In Paul's day, as is the tendency in our day, speaking in tongues was over emphasized. It seems that people were saying that you had to speak in tongues to prove you were filled with the Spirit. Paul says there are all these other gifts and roles of people in the church that come above speaking in tongues. Speaking in tongues is fine, but we should desire the greater gifts that Paul lists here in 1 Corinthians 12.

### **Are spiritual gifts the same as the fruit of the spirit?**

No. The fruit of the Spirit is evidence of the Holy Spirit working in us to make our character more like Jesus. As we progress in following Jesus and living life more by the Spirit of God, we experience more and more of this fruit. The gifts are given by the Holy Spirit as he works through us for ministry.

### **Are all the spiritual gifts available for us today?**

Yes. Jesus promised us that we would do even greater things than He did (John 14:12-13). The gifts that we see demonstrated in Jesus are available for us today. We see all of the spiritual gifts present in the early church throughout the New Testament. There is no Biblical indication that any of the spiritual gifts have ceased. The same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is still at work and gives us power for those who believe (Ephesians 1:18-23). Spiritual gifts will cease when Jesus returns (1 Corinthians 13:8-13). We operate in the gifts to testify to the reality that Jesus is alive and that he is Lord over all!

### **What if I don't like or am afraid of the gift God has given me?**

God has given you that gift for a purpose. Being obedient with the gift God has given you often means you must step out in faith at the risk of looking foolish. The good news is that the outcome of the gifts is not up to you but to God. If we make comfort or our reputation an idol then we will cling to the gifts that we are comfortable with and avoid the others.

**Should I ask God for certain gifts?**

Yes, but that doesn't mean you will get those gifts. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:31, "But eagerly desire the greater gifts." And in 1 Corinthians 14:1, "Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy." We should ask for certain gifts, but it is up to the Holy Spirit to determine what gifts we are given.

**Once I'm given a gift do I have that gift forever?**

Not necessarily. This may be the case but gifts are given by the Holy Spirit as he determines. Some people have the same gifts for a long period of time. For other people, the Holy Spirit gives them different gifts at different times.

**How do I grow in my ability to use the gifts?**

We will grow in effectiveness in the gifts the more we keep in step with the Holy Spirit. When we are obedient and faithful with what he gives us, he will give us more. There is also a practical side to growing in the gift as you use it and become more familiar with it. It is also helpful to find someone who has the gift you do and ask them to teach you how to use that gift. You will make mistakes as you try but God is a gracious Father and will tenderly correct us.

**Isn't it better not to use certain gifts that have been abused or used wrongly?**

No. Paul is writing to the church in Corinth because they were using spiritual gifts wrongly. Paul doesn't tell them to stop using them but to use them correctly. Paul does the same in correcting the Corinthian church with the misuse of the Lord's Supper. He doesn't tell them to stop celebrating it but to do it correctly. We should be cautious to not use spiritual gifts for selfish reasons or to cause harm but we can't let fear prevent us from stepping out and using them. We need to operate in the gifts with grace and humility.

**What should I do if I see someone using a gift incorrectly?**

First make sure that it isn't just a stylistic difference but truly is a misuse of a gift. If a gift is being abused, have a conversation with them in love and grace. It could be that they are growing in that gift and are still learning how to use the gift correctly. At one point or another, we will all use a gift incorrectly should be open to correction as we grow in maturity.

# Further Reading

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## **On the Holy Spirit**

*Forgotten God* by Francis Chan (Beginner)

## **On Spiritual Gifts**

*Beginner's Guide to Spiritual Gifts* by Sam Storms (Beginner)

*Practicing the Power* by Sam Storms (Intermediate)

*Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* by Jack Deere (Intermediate)

*Surprised by the Voice of God* by Jack Deere (Intermediate)

## **On Prophecy**

*The Beginners Guide to Prophecy* by Jack Deere (Beginner)

*Basic Training for a Prophetic Ministry* by Kris Vollotton (Beginner)

*Growing in the Prophetic* by Mike Bickle (Intermediate)

## **On Healing**

*Performing Miracles and Healing* by Roger Sapp (Intermediate)

*The Power to Heal* by Francis McNutt (Intermediate)

*The Prayer that Heals: Praying for Healing in the Family* by Francis McNutt (Beginner)