

GOD GIFTED: SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND LEADERSHIP

“We must no longer be children....but speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.” Ephesians 4:14–16



Every Christian is called to discipleship and we’ve been given all that it takes to do the job. God’s inexpressible love and grace assures us we are a cherished part of God’s on-going story of creation and salvation. Our master teacher and mentor, Jesus Christ, shepherds us and illustrates the most perfect ways to give glory to God and to serve one another. The job description is clear (Matthew 28:19–20.) And, each Christian has been given special gifts for ministry—gifts of the Holy Spirit working through us.

These gifts known as spiritual gifts are different and distinct from other God-given gifts and talents. New Testament Greek uses the word *charismata* (meaning *grace-gift*) when the writer is speaking specifically about spiritual gifts. There are more than 20 spiritual gifts *charismata* listed in four primary scripture references:

- Romans 12:1–8
- 1 Corinthians 12
- Ephesians 4:1–16
- 1 Peter: 4



The following list is one way of ordering our understanding of spiritual gifts:

Gifts for Shepherding:

Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. Acts 20:28

Apostle, evangelist, leader (administration), pastor, prophet, and teacher

Gifts for Service:

Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. 1 Peter 4:10

Giving, helping (serving), and hospitality

Gifts for Strengthening:

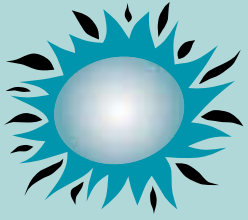
Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Encouragement (exhortation), healing, mercy (compassion), and prophecy (discernment)

Gifts for Spiritual Insight:

First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. 2 Peter 1:20–21

Faith, knowledge, prayer (intercession), prophecy, and wisdom



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Spiritual Gifts are...

- a gift given to every Christian. (Ephesians 4:8)
- given for one purpose—to build up the church, the body of Christ. (Ephesians 4:12)
- never earned or deserved. Through God’s abundant love and grace, gifts are freely given. (John 1:16)
- focused on the unifying Source and Giver, rather than on the gift. (1 Corinthians 2: 1–12)
- equally cherished. There is no gift more important than another and there is no gift the Body is better off without. (1 Corinthians 12:21–22).
- for serving. (1 Peter 4:10)
- the embodiment of diversity. In fact, the word “measure,” when read from the Greek translation, suggests a broad diversity rather than a quantity of giftedness. (Ephesians 4:7)
- meant to be used in community. One’s gift is fully expressed when it complements another and is used interdependently to unify and bring wholeness to Christ’s mission on earth. (1 Corinthians 12:14–26)

Spiritual Gifts are not...

- a ticket to the private inner circle. They are given to each person for the communal edification of the Body of Christ and not for personal gratification or acclamation. (Romans 12:3–8)
- the Holy Spirit’s shopping list. While it is important to discover and use the gifts of the Spirit that we have been given, we must remember the Holy Spirit comes to us in many ways especially through Jesus, scripture, the sacraments, and through God’s on-going action in our lives as creator and redeemer. (1 John 1:1–3)
- our choice. We can’t select our favorite from the menu. God has a much greater plan in mind. (1 Corinthians 12:11)

- the same as talents or tendencies. A talent is a natural attribute given at birth. A spiritual gift is a supernatural attribute given at baptism (new birth in the body of Christ)!
- the same as fruits of the Spirit— love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Gifts relate to ministry and service. Fruits relate to character and attitude (Galatians 4:22–23).

Gifts-Based Ministry

The use of spiritual gifts is in fact the oldest way of being the church. Spiritual gifts are not a fad or a program, and they are not a reinvented “time and talent” approach to ministry. The very first church was established on the spiritual gifts God gave believers to do the work of ministry in order to grow the Body of Christ.

St. Paul uses “body language” in his letters to paint a picture of the church and help us understand the importance of being a part of a whole. In the body each part contributes, not by its own steam or initiative, but by the equipping and empowering of the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual gifts produce unity through diversity as they call forth a sense of mission and stimulate a shared vision for ministry. In the midst of the articulation of each diverse gift, God intends for us to complement one another’s gifts by relying on each other to equally contribute to the whole. Like parts of a body or members of an outstanding team, the intricate interrelationship of many parts and roles function as a unified body. Thank God we are not asked to go it alone or do it all. Thank God for the promise that each one of us has distinct purpose and empowerment, through the Holy Spirit, to make a difference and bring help and wholeness to our congregation and to our community.

Some congregations lament they have found themselves in an 80/20 situation. 20% of the people do 80% of the work while the 80% sit back and watch the 20%. Gifts-based ministry moves congregations beyond this scenario. A gifts-based congregation encourages all

of its members to discover their gifts so no one is left on the sidelines and no one is overextended. A congregation that knows the gifts of its members is a community that thrives on everyone doing what they are gifted to do. There are no more “warm bodies” serving out of a sense of guilt or obligation. A gifts-based church understands the purpose is not to be served, but to serve with joy, on-fire passion, and grateful hearts.

Suggestions for Beginning a Gifts-Based Ministry

Resist the temptation to ONLY use a spiritual gifts assessment tool.

The rich, deep, and complex exploration of spiritual gifts warrants attention especially in assisting individuals and congregations grow to embrace the theology of a spiritual gifts-based ministry. Spiritual gift theology is NOT a new-age “time and talent approach” to ministry or a passing fad. It is biblical truth that requires teaching.

Educate and train individuals in small groups.

Gifts are typically discovered in relationships. Use small group settings to create a learning and doing environment where spiritual gifts are explored, identified, celebrated, and where individuals are supported and encouraged for ministry. (see page 13)

Form a spiritual gifts ministry team.

This team will help carry the vision of giftedness and set in motion plans for the many ways gifts will be used in the congregation and in the community. An ideal team includes the pastor, a gifted teacher of the faith, a visionary leader, a person gifted in wisdom, a person gifted in helps/servanthood, and dedicated intercessors who will pray faithfully for both the leadership team and the individuals in the small groups as they are learning about and discovering their gifts.

Encourage exploration and experimentation of spiritual gifts.

Foster an atmosphere where creative restlessness is encouraged. Help one another self-assess the method and effectiveness each individual is exploring. Spiritual gifts bear fruit. Keep in mind assessment tools are just that—tools to use along with other resources and inspiration for ministry. Another way we come to learn about our own spiritual giftedness is by what others observe and tell us.

Adopt an attitude of patience and persistence.

Decide from the start you are in it for the long haul, no matter what! Changing a culture is hard work and may be resisted. Take heart in knowing others have gone before and survived! It often takes several years of persistent, steadfast prayer and teaching for the culture of a congregation to shift its mission and identity to one based on spiritual gifts.

Learn to use spiritual gifts language.

Help members of the community to talk about their gifts. Seek servants for specific ministries who have been given specific gifts—but avoid being too narrowly focused. For example, all Sunday morning teachers need not have a teaching gift. The nurturing gifts of leadership, knowledge, and servanthood are wonderful gifts to have when working with children and youth. On the other hand, wisdom and discernment gifts, though valued in all ministries, are considered absolutely essential gifts to have represented on congregation councils or leadership boards.

Celebrate the gifts of God’s people.

Be quick to praise God publicly for the spiritual gifts of the brothers and sisters in Christ, articulating specific gifts used to perform specific ministry. Regard diversity as a positive and help the congregation delight in God’s diverse creation.

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This section of the planner is taken in part from “Spiritual Gifts,” by Debbie Heierman. Download the entire article, and other suggested resources including on-line Spiritual Gift Inventories at

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