

Knowing & Using Your Spiritual Gifts

We hunger for love. God made us for love. Our happiness is determined by how well we love. Through the gospel we find in Christ, “the way, the truth, and the life” to meet our love needs; and by our love relationship with Christ we are motivated, empowered, and gifted to share the gospel with others so in salvation they can also experience the joy of soul-quenching love. God’s strategy for us to accomplish this is through our knowing and using our spiritual gifts.

What Are Spiritual Gifts?

Spiritual gifts are God endowed aptitudes & abilities for the uniquely effective purpose of gospel work by Christians. The Greek word for spiritual gift is *charismata*, which means grace gift. Talents are also God endowed, but they may or may not be translatable into the unique focus of Christian ministry. Spiritual gifts are brought alive in people as each person believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. Every Christian possesses at least two spiritual gifts but no one possesses all the gifts. All of us, however, are given an aptitude for understanding each spiritual gift, and as needed, to use them as secondary gifts. (Most of the spiritual gifts are listed in three primary passages - Romans 12:3-8; Ephesians 4:11-13; I Corinthians 12-14).

The fulfillment of knowing & using one’s spiritual gifts requires time. Time well invested comes by the STARS approach of: 1.) Seeking biblical knowledge by studying the Scriptures related to spiritual gifts & the church; 2.) Taking a Spiritual Gift Analysis and trying short-term experiments with particular responsibilities to see if the required cluster of gifts fit you; 3.) Asking people you know & trust to tell you what spiritual gifts they think you have; 4.) Reflecting on experiences to determine which spiritual gifts brought you the most satisfaction & effectiveness; 5.) Studying spiritual gifts by researching available sources and interviewing knowledgeable people. Following is an overview of the major spiritual gifts:

I. RELATIONAL GIFTS

1. ENCOURAGEMENT

the gift of uniquely knowing when & how to “breathe in courage” for another person’s spiritual benefit.

2. HOSPITALITY

the gift of consistently & effectively making people feel at home with space to be and food to eat.

3. GIVING

the gift of joyfully contributing beyond a tithe to financially support gospel ministries.

4. VOLUNTARY POVERTY

the gift to live contentedly and voluntarily with only basic physical needs being met, and using one’s additional financial resources for Christian ministry.

5. MISSIONARY

the gift to feel comfortable in a culture different from one's own native culture, and to effectively do ministry in the adopted culture.

6. SHEPHERDING

the gift to spiritually guide and provide spiritual care for a group of believers.

The group may be small, like a New Testament house church, or large, like the size of a typical American congregation--80 people.

7. HELPS

the gift to provide support & assistance so other people may better use their spiritual gifts.

8. CELIBACY

the gift to live contentedly without having sexual relations and to transform that energy into other expressions of spiritual living.

9. MERCY

the gift empowered by a unique capacity to help people who have unusual levels of need, whether the needs be physical, emotional, cognitive, and/or spiritual.

II. ORGANIZATIONAL GIFTS

10. ADMINISTRATION

the gift to organize human & physical resources so the spiritual gifts of the church can be used most effectively.

11. APOSTLESHIP

the gift to lead several churches and/or at-large groups in ministry.

12. SERVICE

the gift of gracefully & consistently helping others to fulfill task needs in their life and/or work.

13. LEADERSHIP

the gift of effectively guiding people by creating a community consensus & direction to fulfill God's will.

14. HANDIWORK

the gift of using one's hands to make or repair items used for gospel ministry.

III. COMMUNICATION GIFTS

15. TEACHING

the gift of uniquely understanding & communicating biblical truths for spiritual living.

16. EVANGELISM

the gift of effectively knowing with whom, how, and when to share Jesus Christ with seekers.

17. WRITING

the gift to communicate consistently & effectively Christian truths through the medium of writing.

IV. WORSHIP GIFTS

18. MUSIC

the giftedness of one to communicate through the language and instruments of music so people may better worship God.

19. INTERCESSORY

the giftedness of one to pray with frequency, duration, and effectiveness for God's will to be performed in a particular matter.

20. PREACHING

the giftedness of one to communicate scriptural truths by making God--revealed as the Creator, Christ, and the Spirit--to be more spiritually experienced by worshipers.

21. ART

the gift to use the media of art e.g., drama, painting & interpretive movement, to communicate spiritual truths.

V. REVELATORY GIFTS

22. PROPHECY

the gift of uniquely bringing clarity from confusion by understanding & communicating God's will. The person is informed by Scripture and the Spirit; his or her prophecy should be discerned by the church.

23. EXHORTATION

the gift to stir up people into gospel actions by clarifying for them their God given potential & responsibility.

24. KNOWLEDGE

the gift to learn biblical truths that reveal profound insights for spiritual living, and to research information from society which help people to apply the gospel.

25. WISDOM

the giftedness of knowing how to clarify & communicate spiritual truths for the church during times of confusion and/or crisis.

26. FAITH

this gift is clustered with other gifts and is the unique capacity for trusting God to accomplish a Divine promise in a particular matter.

27. DISCERNMENT

the giftedness of one to perceive whether an idea or action operates with Christ-centered motivation.

28. MARTYRDOM

the giftedness of one to sacrifice his or her life and/or reputation in order to fulfill God's will during a time of crisis.

Re-discovering Spiritual Gifts

Through the years, most Christians in general and Baptists in particular have shunned spiritual gift language because of the stereotypical association of charismata with extremism. Fearing that if one talked of grace-gifts, then it meant that person: spoke in tongues, was spiritually arrogant, and probably under the influence of a cultic group. This caricature caused fear which produced prejudice and hindered Christians from discovering their God-given & biblically based potential. For a stretch in my life I was shackled by this fear.

Then I began to quest for more in my own spiritual experience and for the people of whom I was pastor. Like many in such a quest, I turned afresh to the New Testament for guidance. Then I unlearned my prejudices about spiritual gifts by understanding that I Corinthians 13, the favored chapter on love used typically for weddings, is actually a practical revelation about spiritual gifts being empowered by love.

Then, while serving as a seminary professor in church history, I used the privilege and challenge to teach through the full span of Christian History by noting what characteristics enabled churches to grow spiritually and numerically. Among the characteristics was a strong lay ministry of believers using their spiritual gifts. Later, when coming to the St. Matthews Baptist Church in view of a call to be their pastor, I shared these characteristics with the congregation. Consequently, they were woven into my covenant with the church.

Subsequently, I led our deacons through a retreat on the subject. With our joint initiative, we began to preach & teach the practice of spiritual gifts for our congregation. Members take the Spiritual Gift Analysis and are asked to give the Nominating Committee a copy of their profile. Functioning as a Ministry Placement Team, the committee and the ministry staff use the profiles as a way of helping church members to serve in a ministry best fitted for their giftedness. Along the way we have learned how to transform our 100 plus ministries into a gift-based approach.

Through the 21st century, God challenges us to reach new levels of New Testament ministry by following the commission of Ephesians 4:12-13. The Apostle Paul explained that pastors & teachers were to "prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."