

Understand Your Church's Spiritual Gifts

Basic guidelines for using spiritual gifts are explained in Paul-Timothy booklet #85 for shepherds. If you have not read that study, then please do so now.

Anchor command. "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." *1 Peter 4:10*

Anchor story.

Anchor verse. "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."
1 Corinthians 12:7

Learning goal. Know the New Testament lists of spiritual gifts.

Growth goal. Serve others by gifts that the Holy Spirit has given you.

Skill goal. Help believers to discover their gifts and to employ their gifts in serving one another.

Outcome goal. Congregations become ministry centres where all believers serve by the Spirit's grace.

1. Examine Bible Passages that Describe Spiritual Gifts

The New Testament letters reveal that God gives to all Christian believers special abilities to serve one another.

Find in **1 Peter 4:10 & 11** two basic kinds of gifts that God gives to believers:

"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen"

[Answer: The two basic gift functions mentioned by Peter are:

Speaking (telling God's truth to others).

Serving (showing God's love to others).]

Ephesians 4:10-12 reveals that God also gives people to churches to equip believers for various ministries. Find in **Ephesians 4:11** five kinds of gifted people:

"He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ."

[Answer: These five kinds of people are:

- 1. Apostles (who plant new congregations in neglected communities).*
- 2. Prophets (who strengthen God's people with God's truth).*
- 3. Evangelists (who announce the Good News to the unsaved).*
- 4. Pastors (who shepherd congregations).*
- 5. Teachers (who help others learn to obey the Lord's commands).]*

Romans chapter 12 teaches that believers have spiritual gifts with which to serve others, in love. Find in **Romans 12:6-8** seven examples of spiritual gifts that some believers have:

“Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”

[Answer: The seven kinds of gifts are:

1. Prophecy *(to speak God’s truth one to another as in 1 Corinthians 14:3 & 24).*
2. Serving *(to do practical work that helps others).*
3. Teaching *(to equip believers to serve one another).*
4. Exhortation *(to encourage obedience, and to change bad behaviour).*
5. Generous giving *(to meet real needs).*
6. Diligent leading *(to start or oversee flocks or ministries, helping believers work together in harmony).*
7. Acts of mercy *(done cheerfully).]*

1 Corinthians chapter 12 shows how to use the different gifts in harmony within a local body. Find in **1 Corinthians 12:8–10 & 28** more gifts that are not listed above:

“Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.”

[Answer: Other spiritual, prophetic gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 are:

8. Words of wisdom *(helping others to apply God’s truth)*
9. Words of knowledge *(helping others to understand God’s truth)*
10. Tongues *(praying, singing or prophesying in another language)*
11. Interpretation of tongues *(explaining what someone has said in another language)*

Other spiritual, serving gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 include:

12. Faith *(strong belief that God will keep His promises)*
13. Healings *(praying for God to heal sick folks)*
14. Miracles *(praying that God will provide what someone urgently needs)*
15. Discerning spirits *(recognizing bad spirits and deceit that they produce)*
16. Administration *(managing projects and coordinating details)]*

Sometimes speaking and serving gifts serve as signs of God’s power, to help people to believe. This is especially true when believers pray to heal the sick and to deliver the oppressed from evil spirits.

Although they are not explicitly identified as spiritual gifts in the New Testament, some teachers consider the following also to be gifts:

17. Celibacy *(chastity and abstinence from marriage, Matt. 19:10).*

18. Marriage (*1 Corinthians 7:7*).

19. Hospitality (*Romans 12:13*).

20. Martyrdom (*grace to be killed for the sake of the Good News, Revelation 20:4*).

In conclusion, we can classify God's spiritual gifts in three **general categories**:

- Gifts that help believers to speak the Word of God.
- Gifts that help believers to serve with strength from God.
- 'Sign' gifts that reveal God's miraculous power to help people to believe.

Test: To which of the above three categories do the following gifts normally correspond?

- 1) Teaching
- 2) Showing mercy
- 3) Helps
- 4) Exhortation
- 5) Healing
- 6) Hospitality

[Answers: 1=speaking. 2=serving. 3=serving. 4=speaking. 5=sign. 6=serving.]

In addition to the spiritual gifts that are mentioned in His Word, God may give other gifts that are not mentioned, when unique circumstances create special needs.



Some congregations appoint as deaconesses women who are gifted for good works.

2. Prepare to answer common questions about spiritual gifts.

Please find the **answers to these questions** in your Bible, unless you already know them:

| Common questions & misunderstandings | Find answers in |
|---|------------------------|
| 1) Does every believer have a spiritual gift from God? | Romans 12:6 |
| 2) Can a believer have more than one spiritual gift? | Acts 6:3, 8 & 10 |
| 3) How does God decide which gifts to give to a believer? | 1 Cor 12:11 |

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|---|------------------|
| 4) Did the apostle Paul, who wrote to the Corinthians, expect every believer to speak in tongues? | 1 Cor 12:30 |
| 5) Which of the gifts or virtues do elders need? | 1 Timothy 3:2 |
| 6) Which gift would deacons most likely have, if they fulfil their biblical responsibility? | Acts 6:1-6 |
| 7) Should we seek the greater spiritual gifts? | 1 Cor 12:31 |
| 8) Which of the 'greater' spiritual gifts did Paul urge the Corinthian believers to use? | 1 Cor 14: 1-4 |
| 9) What is the three-fold purpose of prophesying in the New Testament? | 1 Cor 14:3 |
| 10) What is more important than any of the spiritual gifts? | 1 Cor chapter 13 |

[Answers: 6=serving or helps.
1=yes. 7=yes.
2=yes. 8=prophecy, provided it is used to edify, exhort or console.
3=through His Holy Spirit. 9=to edify, exhort and console.
4=no. 10=love.]
5=hospitality and teaching.

3. Seek to fulfil the specific purposes of the various spiritual gifts.

God gives spiritual gifts to all believers. It is not always necessary for believers to know what their spiritual gifts are, but it is necessary for all believers to serve one another in love (Romans 12:10). Some believers become trainers in congregations. Some speak the Word of God effectively, while others serve the practical needs of people, and yet others perform miracles.

A. Each kind of gift has its purpose.

Speaking gifts ("prophecy") for speaking God's truth to help people believe and obey:

Teaching. Teachers explain to people how to obey the Word of God.

Exhortation. Exhorters encourage, strengthen and build up people.

Faith. People with this gift inspire others to believe and have a vision of what God will help their congregation to do, moving people forward.

Serving gifts ("ministry") for showing kindness to people, with God's strength:

Giving liberally. Givers meet material needs of others.

Leading and administration. Leaders help people to work together.

Showing mercy. Merciful persons meet the needs of others in a practical way.

Sign gifts (Miracles) for showing God's power to people to help them to believe.

Discerning of spirits. Discerners distinguish truth and error.

Healings. Healers bring people to physical or emotional health.

Tongues and interpretation of tongues. Some people speak or pray in a language unknown to them. And, if they speak to a group of people, others are to interpret their message into a language known to them.

Prophecy. Prophecy, although spoken, is also a sign to believers (1 Corinthians 12:22).

B. Each kind of gifted person has work to do.

Apostles. Apostles are sent to other places to form new congregations and to train their leaders.

Prophets. Prophets proclaim messages that build up people.

Evangelists. Evangelists announce the Good News about Jesus.

Shepherds. Shepherds lead and edify congregations and cells.

Teachers. Teachers provide instruction in how to obey Jesus' orders.

C. Leaders are to help every believer to use their gifts.

As people serve one another in small groups, their spiritual gift will become apparent, and others will recognize it. Let new believers serve in some way.

Provide opportunities for all believers to use their spiritual gifts in serving one another. This is best done in small groups. Do not limit the work of the Holy Spirit by only listening to talented people.

Continually remind believers that they must have love for people when they use their spiritual gifts. When a believer is angry or unloving, his gift can harm people.

Let people take responsibilities, offices and ministries in congregations and cell groups, according to their spiritual gifts. Do not assign jobs to people for which they are not gifted.

Elders should have a speaking gift, and deacons should have a serving gift.

Small groups and ministry teams should have members with different gifts that the Holy Spirit can harmonize. Avoid simply grouping persons who have the same gift.



In small groups, believers quickly discover their spiritual gifts and those of the others.

To help believers to discover the gifts that God has given them, let them compare themselves to Bible characters who modelled God's Gifts. Help them to identify a Bible character whose abilities or virtues they strongly desire to imitate. Tell the stories about them to the believers, and ask them with which persons they most readily identify, and why. Here are some examples:

Bible Models

Serve, as those did who rallied to repair the wall around Jerusalem in Nehemiah chapter 3 and 6:15-16. (Do you identify strongly with them?)

Give, as Abigail did, generously, to David's needy men, 1 Samuel 25. (Find guidelines on giving in 1 Corinthians chapter 9)

Encourage (exhort), as Paul did the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:17-38.

Show mercy, as the Good Samaritan did in Luke 10:30-35. (Find guidelines to use this gift in Matthew 25:31-46 and Acts 6:1-7.)

Prophecy, as Jeremiah did with stirring messages, calling God's people back to Him, Jeremiah Chapter 1. (Find the purpose of this gift in the New Testament at 1 Corinthians 14:3-4.)

Teach, as Ezra explained God's Law to the people in Nehemiah chapter 8. For the true purpose of teaching see Ephesians 4:11-16.

Lead (servant leadership) as Moses did to help others minister, and Joshua with his troops: Exodus 18:13-26 and Joshua 4-6.

Counsel with **wisdom**, as Solomon did in 1 Kings 3.

Knowledge, act on facts as Nehemiah did after examining the walls, or the Bereans with the Word, Nehemiah 1:11-20 and Acts 17:10-12.

Help, as Aquila and Priscilla did for Paul and Apollos (Acts 18:1-5, 24-28).

Go, as an **Apostle** ('sent one' or missionary), as Jonah was after his underwater training, likewise Paul and Barnabas (Acts chapters 13-14). Find Paul's main, guiding, missionary principles in Romans 5:20-21.



*Gifted leaders help others to serve with spiritual gifts
as the bible instructs us.*