

Discovering Spiritual Gifts

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Why investigate spiritual gifts?

This paper is intended to help us learn about spiritual gifts, to guide us in discovering which gift or gifts we may have, and then to facilitate deploying those gifts in service to the body of Christ in our local church.

Much of the Bible's teaching on spiritual gifts is found in the writings of Paul. The topic is of such importance that he devoted space to it in the letters of Romans, 1 Corinthians, and Ephesians. Paul's purpose behind teaching on spiritual gifts is given to us.

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.

1 Corinthians 12:1

May this study help each of us become informed on the crucial subject of spiritual gifts. May we be motivated to discover our gift and use it for God's glory.

God has a purpose for my life.

The account of Moses and his burning bush experience in Exodus 3 is familiar to many believers. God had an assignment for Moses, yet Moses determined to excuse himself and worked to convince God to call someone else. Moses asked such questions as “Who am I?” and “What is your name?” Moses raised the concern that his eloquence was not sufficient for the task. God did not accept the excuses nor did He relent on His call.

God has a purpose for the life of every believer, not just Moses, and to fulfill that calling He asks that we show up with a willing heart and follow Him. He will do the rest.

David marveled at the intricate plan for his life, a plan God had completed long before David took his first breath.

*Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book
were written, every one of them, the days that were
formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.*

Psalm 139:16

God called Jeremiah to represent Him as a prophet to the nation of Israel and spelled out that His plan for Jeremiah’s life was in place before the prophet-to-be was conceived.

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

Jeremiah 1:5

Paul informed the believers at Ephesus that God held a plan for each life.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:8-10

Later Paul encouraged Timothy by reminding the younger man of God’s purpose.

for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,

2 Timothy 1:7-9

Rick Warren writes in *The Purpose Driven Life* (page 227), “You were put on earth to make a contribution...God designed you to make a difference with your life.”

The challenge is to invest ourselves for Christ as we uncover and pursue that purpose. God is not baking identical gingerbread

believers. Each of us is a unique being designed God's way for God's plans.

God provides spiritual gifts so I can serve His purpose.

Our fear may be that God will ask something of us for which we are unprepared, a task for which we do not have the necessary skills. Jesus made clear that is always true. We can do nothing apart from the power He provides.

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

John 15:5

God adds believers to a local church so the church can grow into a functioning body with all the necessary parts for doing His kingdom's work. Each person has a unique contribution to make in helping the church grow into that healthy and whole organization.

The provision to accomplish the work of God comes to each of us as spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are Holy Spirit given abilities that a believer uses in ministering to the body of Christ.

Charles C. Ryrie defines spiritual gifts in the *Ryrie Study Bible* (page 2064) as, "a God-given ability for service."

Charles R. Swindoll writes in *He Gave Gifts* (page 3), "A spiritual gift is a God-given ability that enables each Christian to perform a function in the Body of Christ with ease and effectiveness."

Spiritual gifts are not the same as the natural talents we are born

with such as the ability to sing or play an instrument, the creativity to draw or paint, or the capacity to excel at sports. While the two are not the same quite often one's natural abilities and his spiritual gifts may complement one another. God is the One who designed us. We should not be surprised when He raises our potential contribution to His kingdom work by blending spiritual gifts with our natural abilities.

How do we get spiritual gifts?

Spiritual gifts are given to us by the Holy Spirit. Many believe this gifting happens at the moment of our salvation as we are born into the family of God. We are born physically with our natural abilities, and we are born spiritually with our spiritual abilities.

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith;

Romans 12:6

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

1 Corinthians 12:7

All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

1 Corinthians 12:11

But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Ephesians 4:7

No single spiritual gift is given to everybody, and no one gets all the gifts. Every believer has at least one, though.

We do not pick our spiritual gifts and we cannot exchange one gift for another. God makes the choice for each of us. In His omniscience He knows exactly which gifts we need to plug in and do the work He has planned for us.

*But as it is, God arranged the members in the body,
each one of them, as he chose.*

1 Corinthians 12:18

Where can I find a list of spiritual gifts?

The truth of spiritual gifts is taught in four primary passages in the New Testament. Three are found in the writings of Paul and one is in Peter's first letter.

- Romans 12
- 1 Corinthians 12
- Ephesians 4
- 1 Peter 4

The lists are not identical, and the variation raises questions. Why the differences? Are these all the gifts, or can God give new gifts as needs arise in the church which did not exist in Paul's day? Are the gifts ordered with some out-ranking others in importance? Pause and consider these words from Paul.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7

God is a God of infinite creativity and that creativity shapes spiritual gifts. The gifts as named in Scripture describe a broad spectrum of possibilities, abilities, and skills. For example the gift of teaching may be active in communicating God's Word to various age groups and in many settings such as a formal classroom or a relaxed home Bible study. A teacher might use the gift in writing as well as speaking. Likewise the gift of helps may be evidenced in the believer who prepares refreshments or the one who operates the audio and video equipment.

Why would God not give a definitive list of gifts? The emphasis on spiritual gifts in Scripture is never about identifying and glorifying the particular gift but always about the use of the gift to benefit the body and glorify God.

New needs have arisen in the church since Paul wrote his letters. Today a growing church may sense a need for computer skills, multimedia design abilities, financial management, legal awareness, and so on. God provides people to the church with these skills, and while some of these endeavors rely on natural abilities or knowledge obtained from an education, it is also possible that the Holy Spirit empowers certain people to excel here through spiritual gifts.

We would do well to let God manage the categories and labels for the gifts. Allow Him to bring into the church the lineup of people He desires for the work at hand as well as the work ahead.

While we may observe someone who seems adept at a part of the ministry and ask, "Is that person using a spiritual gift or is he naturally talented?", the answer does not matter. God is at work through him, and God is being honored and glorified by the results.

Across the landscape of evangelicalism we will find lists that identify and organize spiritual gifts. While these lists may benefit discussion, they also introduce some level of uncertainty due to the differences. We must allow God to work in and among us as He sees fit rather than tripping over man-made gift groupings or labels. To be complete in our analysis let us consider some of these examples.

Table 1 is borrowed from Charles R. Swindoll's Bible study guide, *He Gave Gifts* (page 5). Note that Swindoll suggests six reference passages for spiritual gifts in the New Testament.

Table 1 – Borrowed from *He Gave Gifts* by Charles R. Swindoll

New Testament Lists of Spiritual Gifts		
1 Corinthians 12:8-10	1 Corinthians 12:28	1 Corinthians 12:29-30
Word of wisdom Word of knowledge Faith Healing Miracles Prophecy Distinguishing of spirits Tongues Interpreting tongues	Apostleship Prophecy Teaching Miracles Healing Helps Administrating Tongues	Apostleship Prophecy Teaching Miracles Healing Tongues Interpreting tongues
Romans 12:6-8	Ephesians 4:11	1 Peter 4:11
Prophecy Serving Teaching Exhorting Giving Leading Showing mercy	Apostleship Prophecy Evangelism Pastor-Teacher	Speaking Serving

Table 2 was adapted from material provided by Chip Ingram and Living on the Edge ministries to accompany the course, *Your Divine Design*. Note that Ingram does not include 1 Peter 4:11 in his chart.

Table 2 – Adapted from *Your Divine Design* by Chip Ingram

“Gifts”	”Service”	“Workings”
Motivational	Ministry	Manifestation
Romans 12	Ephesians 4 1 Corinthians 12:28	1 Corinthians 12:8-11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prophecy • Service • Teaching • Encouragement • Giving • Leadership • Mercy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apostles • Prophets • Evangelists • Pastor/Teacher • Teachers • Working of Miracles • Gifts of Healing • Helping • Tongues • Administration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word of Wisdom • Word of Knowledge • Faith • Healing • Miracles • Prophecy • Discernment • Tongues • Interpretation of Tongues

A third example will demonstrate the wide variety we can find as organizations prepare their lists of spiritual gifts. Table 3 is a compilation of spiritual gifts as outlined by AssessME.org

Table 3 – Spiritual gifts list from AssessMe.org.

Administration	Faith	Pastor
Creativity	Giving	Prayer
Discernment	Helps	Prophecy
Disciple Maker	Leadership	Stewardship
Encouragement	Musical Worship	Teacher
Evangelism	New Ministry Development	Wisdom
Exhortation		

Please do not allow these variations in gift-labeling to derail your search for your spiritual gift lest that gift, which God has provided for the benefit of the church, remain undiscovered and unused. We must accept the variations in identifying the gifts and press on toward the higher cause of serving others with what God has provided to us.

Descriptions of some spiritual gifts

How do we describe the individual gifts? We will consider general descriptions of some of the common spiritual gifts to serve as an aid in helping us discover our individual gift. Keep in mind that God is not limited in His creativity and may amplify a specific gift in ways not shown here.

No attempt is made to describe every possible gift or to reconcile all the gift lists scattered across evangelicalism into a single “approved” collection.

Administration

The word *administration* is found in one New Testament passage, 1 Corinthians 12:28. The word refers to a helmsman who pilots a ship to its destination. Administrators usually have strong organizational skills and are adept at managing people, resources and time. These are the ones who understand the church’s immediate and long-range goals and can create and put into place plans to achieve those goals.

Acts 6:1-7 presents a problem that arose in the rapidly-growing church at Jerusalem in relation to the care for the widows. The apostles recommended that the church select seven men full of the Spirit and of good reputation to organize and oversee the task. The seven men, some of who likely had the gift of administration, stepped up to address the issue and the problem turned into an opportunity

for continued growth in the fellowship.

Creativity

The gift of creativity is the ability to worship God and communicate His truth through a variety of methods including speaking, drama, writing, craftsmanship, and certainly music. One only has to look to the sky or nature to recognize God's creativity. Creativity as a spiritual gift takes many forms.

Psalm 150 is a call to worship God, and the reader is urged to "Praise him" with trumpet, lute, harp, tambourine, dance, strings, pipe, and cymbals. Music plays an important role in the worship of God and in preparing the hearts of His people to join in that worship.

As Moses organized the children of Israel to construct the tabernacle he needed special talent, craftsmen who could take the raw materials and fashion the furniture and utensils to be used there. God provided men to lead that effort, Bezalel and Oholiab, and filled them with creativity through the Spirit of God (Exodus 31:1-11).

Encouragement

Encouragers are positive and optimistic. They help others gain spiritual perspective and work to instill courage to persevere in those who are struggling with sin or overwhelming circumstances.

The book of Acts introduces one with the gift of encouragement, Joseph from Cyprus (Acts 4:36-37). Joseph's generosity in meeting the needs of others earned him the nickname, Barnabas, which means "Son of Encouragement". Barnabas stepped up (Acts 9:26-27) to embrace a new convert, Saul of Tarsus, who once persecuted the church. Later as Barnabas ministered in the church at Antioch to reach new converts and encourage them to remain faithful to the Lord he realized his need for help and invited Saul to join him. Saul became Paul and went on to travel the known world spreading the Gospel. What if Barnabas had refused to use the gift of encouragement?

Evangelism

Does the spectrum of spiritual gifts include the gift of evangelism or is evangelism a commission for all believers? That debate lives on in the church. Every believer has the responsibility to share his faith (Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 1:8), but some in the body of Christ have an exceptional capacity in this area. People with the gift of evangelism demonstrate boldness in working their faith and the message of the Gospel into their conversations and experience great joy when an unsaved person comes to Christ. The evangelist will reach out to others across the human spectrum. Cultural, social, or economic differences do not deter those with this gift.

Philip was chosen in Acts 6 to address an administration issue in the Jerusalem church, and by Acts 8 he was evangelizing the city of Samaria. The crowds paid attention to Philip's words and many souls came to know Christ. God moved Philip away from the flood of converts to a lonely spot along a desert road (Acts 8:26-40). A man of Ethiopia was traveling along that road trying to understand the book of Isaiah, and Philip introduced him to Jesus. Philip eventually became known as Philip the evangelist (Acts 21:8).

Exhortation

The gift of exhortation is the ability to show how Scripture is relevant to life and conduct. The exhorter may work one-on-one or in a group to strengthen and challenge others on the journey to spiritual maturity. Exhortation may involve counseling, cheerleading, coaching, and even confrontation when necessary. Exhorters explain the truth of Scripture with the goal of motivating others to embrace God's expectations and live accordingly. An exhorter is often willing to share his past failures to help others see truth.

Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:24-28) used the gift of exhortation to help a gifted speaker, Apollos, acquire a more complete knowledge of Jesus. The husband/wife team took Apollos aside and explained the missing pieces in his message. Apollos went on to become a powerful voice who declared Jesus as Christ.

Faith

Those with the gift of faith display confidence in the purposes of God and trust Him to provide the way to accomplish those purposes even if the present circumstances may appear to be contrary. The one practicing faith exhibits calmness and gives others a sense of peace and assurance. Those with the gift of faith move forward with their ministry even though the provisions to accomplish that ministry remain obscured. They speak and act as though God had already provided.

Paul wrote that he suffered shipwreck more than once on his missionary journeys (2 Corinthians 11:25). Acts 27 gives the details of one of those mishaps, and Paul spoke from his heart of faith to encourage others on the voyage that every person would make it to shore. His words demonstrate the gift of faith.

So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told.

Acts 27:25

Giving

God empowers some believers with the gift of giving which moves them to give sacrificially of time, talents, and finances to further the work of the Lord. The level of this giving rises far above the responsibility to tithe, and the act of giving is done as quietly as possible. Recognition is never the goal. The giver seeks only to meet needs and glorify God. Those with the gift of giving may see financial needs in the church body that the majority can often overlook. The giver then moves at the Holy Spirit's prompting to meet that need.

The churches in Macedonia, though in deep poverty themselves, determined to collect an offering and send it to the saints in Jerusalem who were suffering intense persecution (2 Corinthians 8:1-7). Paul stated that the Macedonians experienced an abundance of joy which overflowed in a wealth of generosity. That is the gift of giving.

Helps/Serving

This gift is tagged under various names such as helps or serving. It is the initiative to meet the practical needs in the church. Some mistakenly downplay the gift as the one you get when you can do nothing else, but the gift of helps is as important as any other spiritual gift and is vital to a well-functioning body.

The one with the gift of helps asks himself continually, “What can I do to help? How can I improve this situation?” He then sets out to find a need and meet it. The one with this gift serves in practical and often behind-the-scenes ways that make the ministry run smoothly. He does not wait to be asked; he simply jumps in and does. People gifted in helps have a whatever-it-takes attitude and their service make the church experience better for all.

While the apostle Paul accomplished much for the cause of Christ he was careful to give credit to several who made his ministry possible. Phoebe’s name appears in Romans 16:1-2 where Paul commends her as one who helped many. Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25-30) risked his life to minister to Paul so Paul’s ministry could continue. Onesimus was a runaway slave Paul witnessed to in prison. Onesimus trusted Christ, and Paul sent him back to his owner, Philemon, with the testimony that he had ministered to Paul in his imprisonment.

Hospitality

The gift of hospitality is the ability to make others feel welcome and at home in ministry or social settings. Those with this gift create a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere for both familiar friends and guests. While we often think of hospitality in terms of providing food or lodging, believers with this gift open not only their homes but their hearts to minister to others with whatever resources they have at hand.

Lydia, a new convert to Christ from the city of Thyatira, opened her home for Paul and his companions to use as a base of operations during their church planting activities in Philippi (Acts 16:14-15). The last chapter of Romans provides a list of people who befriended Paul and helped with his ministry. One of those friends was Gaius (Romans 16:23) who hosted not only Paul but the entire church in

Corinth.

Leadership

The gift of leadership is the spiritual ability to cast a vision, recruit people to the team, and then move that group in ministry to accomplish the goal. The focus is equally on creating the vision as well as leading the people to increasing levels of spiritual growth in pursuit of that vision. Leaders are motivators who can communicate effectively to generate in others the zeal and excitement that should mark ministry in the body of Christ. Those with the gift of leadership are all about accomplishing tasks for the glory of God to further His purposes.

The early church based in Jerusalem worked through several growing pains including the hotly debated issue of whether one had to become a Jew first before becoming a Christian. Acts 15 records the events of the council convened to address the conflict, and in that text we find both Peter (Acts 15:7-11) and James (Acts 15:13-21) rising to address the assembly. In their words and by their example they demonstrated the gift of leadership in a manner that preserved the unity of the church and furthered the spread of the Gospel.

Mercy

People gifted with mercy recognize when a person is hurting or suffering and reach out to minister to that person. While others may be uncomfortable rushing into the situation the mercy-shower, moved by compassion and empathy, comes alongside immediately with care, tender words or a listening ear. Those with the gift of mercy are often pleasant, usually easy to approach, and most always great listeners. They sense people's needs and desire to ease the suffering. Actions are guided by the question, "How can I make this person feel better?"

In the Parable of the Good Samaritan Jesus shared an example, now widely known, of one who demonstrated the gift of mercy (Luke 10:30-37). A second example of mercy is found in Acts 11:28-30 when the church at Antioch under the leadership of Barnabas and Saul (Paul) heard about the famine ravishing the land of Judea. The believers at Antioch sent a contribution to relieve the suffering of

their brothers in Judea.

Paul and Silas were arrested for their faith in Philippi, beaten with rods, and fastened in the stocks in the local jail. God released them from their imprisonment in a way that resulted in the jailer and his entire family becoming believers. That jailer, a brand new believer, put into practice the gift of mercy by ministering to the wounds of Paul and Silas and providing food to address their hunger (Acts 16:33-34).

Shepherding

A person with the gift of shepherding is prepared to lead, train, protect and care for an individual or group of believers. His focus is on nurturing others in their walk of faith, and his desire is to see their knowledge of God's Word increase as they grow spiritually. The role of the shepherd takes him beyond leading and teaching into ministering to the personal needs of the "flock" under his care.

As Jesus joined his disciples for a beach-side breakfast after His resurrection, He drew Peter aside for a personal conversation (John 21:15-19). Jesus tasked Peter with this role, "Feed my sheep." In his first letter, written years later, Peter shared the insight he had gained in practicing the gift of shepherding (1 Peter 5:1-3). Others gifted to serve as shepherds can learn from Peter's example.

Teaching

The gift of teaching allows a person to clearly explain and apply God's Word in such a way that listeners "get it" and as a result grow spiritually. The one with this gift invests much time alone with God to foster his own spiritual growth. Dr. Howard Hendricks once stated, "The effective teacher always teaches from the overflow of a full life. You cannot impart what you don't possess. If you stop growing today, you stop teaching tomorrow." The one with the gift of teaching may use many creative methods in the presentation, but the purpose of his ministry is to teach the Word practically so that listeners understand the truth.

Paul's ministry in Corinth brought him into friendship with fellow tentmakers, Aquila and Priscilla. When Paul's responsibilities took him on to Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla traveled with him and

set up shop. Paul's journeys then took him on to other places, but Aquila and Priscilla stayed in Ephesus to serve God in the church there (Acts 18:24-28). An eloquent teacher named Apollos came to Ephesus and Scripture records that he "spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John." Apollos had incomplete knowledge and Aquila and Priscilla took him aside and "explained to him the way of God more accurately." In this example we find teachers ministering to teachers.

Paul shared in Acts 20:17-21 that the gift of teaching enabled him to teach in public as well as house to house. The size of the group was never the issue. Paul had vital truth to impart and spoke to anyone willing to listen.

How do I discover my spiritual gift?

My spiritual gift may lie dormant and unused just as natural talents and abilities can. One day I pick up a paint brush and swipe some paint on a canvas and discover something I never knew I could do. The same can happen with my spiritual side. I may have the potential to do things in God's kingdom work that I never imagined. Through a volunteer opportunity I step up, and I discover a leaning toward a particular area of service. With a sense of wonder and excitement I start using that ability for God's glory as His Spirit empowers me.

Rick Warren writes in *The Purpose Driven Life* (page 250), "The best way to discover your gifts and abilities is to experiment with different areas of service...Just start serving!"

There is no substitute for involvement which can be defined as the choice to and the action of stepping in to serve God. Find a need or an open spot in the church and volunteer. Keep active in prayer seeking God's help and direction as you minister, and allow Him to direct your steps. He will reveal to you the giftedness He has placed within you.

Pay attention to the impact your service may be having. Ask questions such as:

- What thoughts are in my heart as I serve in this way?
- How are my prayers being shaped by this work?
- Do I find myself praying for those on my team and those to whom we minister?
- Am I growing closer to God as I serve and rely on His guidance?

- Is there evidence that God is at work in hearts around me?

What about spiritual gift surveys and tools designed to help believers discover their spiritual gifts? Do these work? Certainly the tools can help determine an informed starting point for your ministry. The results of such a survey may be better understood in a discussion with a leader or mentor who can help direct you to a position that will utilize your unique makeup.

Such a working relationship will provide added benefit as you gain experience and need counsel for taking on additional responsibilities. The leader or mentor may be a great resource for guidance through challenges you may face in serving and will join you in praise as you share how the Holy Spirit has worked through you to touch other lives.

If you've never taken a spiritual gifts assessment survey (or it has been several years since you did) realize that the results of a survey may give confidence that you are on the right track as you serve within the church. The results may also reveal a gift you never knew you had.

Be open to God's guidance and direction. Make yourself available and show up with a willingness to try various ministries. Don't be afraid to change assignments, but be certain to allow enough time for an accurate assessment of each role you take on.

A believer who refuses to serve until he can state with surety his spiritual gift misses the greatest investigative opportunity for finding that gift. Just start serving.

And finally, understand that the greatest ability a believer can deploy in the cause of Christ is availability.

How do spiritual gifts operate?

Spiritual gifts are not collector's items to be stored in their original wrappings and saved on the shelf for future use. God's expectation is that each member will plug in and use his gifts to benefit others in the church.

Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you .

1 Timothy 4:14

Our spiritual gifts are only effective when we give them away. The gifts must be directed toward others in the body. The greatest happiness, the fullest joy, and the most complete sense of belonging for a believer happen when he is focused on meeting the needs of and ministering to another in the name of Christ. Christianity is all about giving. How do we know this? John 3:16, a well-known verse, tells us. God gave His Best, His Greatest Treasure, His only Son.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16

Spiritual gifts are given to each individual in the body of Christ for the benefit of others in the body. A believer utilizes his gift to minister to others for the purpose of improving the health of the body. Note the highlighted words in these verses.

*So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in **building up** the church.*

1 Corinthians 14:12 (Emphasis added)

*What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for **building up**.*

1 Corinthians 14:26 (Emphasis added).

Paul's passage on the makeup and operation of the church, including his analogy of the church as a body, can be found in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14. These verses are sandwiched around his famous description of love that is often used in wedding celebrations. The Holy Spirit's choice in organizing the text in this manner is significant. Without love the internal workings of the church fizzle. Our service proves fruitless.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

Love is the key to effective use of spiritual gifts.

*Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, **when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.***

Ephesians 4:15-16 (Emphasis added)

How does love apply to the operation of spiritual gifts? Review Paul's words.

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Now consider these aspects of love which should be in evidence as we practice our spiritual gifts.

- Love is patient with people no matter their maturity level.
- Love is kind even under stress.
- Love gives others the benefit of the doubt.
- Love does more than is expected.
- Love serves and keeps on serving.
- Love operates with confidence in God's power.
- Love does not envy the success of others.
- Love does not boast of personal achievements.
- Love is courteous and respectful to everyone.
- Love does not demand its own way.
- Love is not easily irritated.
- Love does not resent the giftedness of others.

Envy over spiritual gifts became a hot topic in the Corinthian church as some members considered certain gifts as preferable to others. Some gifts by their nature make the gift-holder visible in the body while other gifts are exercised in relative obscurity. Paul reminded his readers that the spiritual gifts are for service. Envy of the gifts of others neither demonstrates love nor builds up the body. Rather that envy represents an infection that can lead to serious health issues for the body if left untreated.

Paul made clear in his lengthy discussion of church operation that gifts are for the common good.

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

1 Corinthians 12:7

Peter added that the goal of using the gifts to minister to others is to ultimately bring glory to God. The motivation for our service should always be to bring glory to God.

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.

1 Peter 4:10-11