



DEMONSTRATING THE GOSPEL

Understanding and Discovering
Spiritual Gifts



“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**

“For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them...” **Romans 12:4–6**

“And 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, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

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 4:11–16**



There is seemingly endless intrigue and even mystery surrounding the Biblical teaching on Spiritual Gifts. The “testing” of these gifts, popularized in the church growth movement during the late 20th century, largely served to create additional confusion. This booklet is designed with three primary purposes:

1. Clarify and summarize biblical teaching on spiritual gifts
2. Provide a systematic and straightforward way to determine spiritual gifts within the context of a healthy community.
3. Demonstrate why the active usage of each person’s gifts is so vital to life in the body of Christ.

Week One: A Theology of Spiritual Gifts

The bulk of the teaching regarding the gifts of the Spirit can be found within the writings of Paul in the New Testament, specifically in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4. There is also a shorter teaching found in Peter’s writings, in 1 Peter 4. While an in-depth study of each of these passages will prove extremely profitable, the following points can be seen as a summary of these passages:

- There are many different kinds of gifts given by the Spirit. While they differ in type and expression, they are all important and necessary for the body of Christ to operate effectively.
- The gifts are given specifically for the purpose of the edification of the body, not for the enjoyment or enrichment of the individual members of the church.
- Every disciple of Jesus has been given at least one gift that is intended to be used within the body at any given time.
- In some instances, the gift(s) will correspond and relate directly to the natural talents the disciple of Jesus possesses and operated within prior to conversion. At other times, the gift(s) will bear no relation to the natural talents and propensities of that person.
- Different gifts may be given at different times and in different situations according to the particular needs of the body at that time.
- No one person has all of the gifts, nor does one gift reside in all people. This results in the individual members of the body of Christ operating in dependence on one another.
- There seems to be a biblical distinction between spiritual *gifts* (“*charis*” in Greek) and the stuff of the Spirit (literally “*spirituals*,” or “*pneumatikos*” in Greek). Gifts (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12) are given in accordance with the principles above. Spirituals (1 Corinthians 14:1) can be sought by all believers at all times, also for the edification of the body.
- Ephesians 4 describes “*equipping*” gifts that seem to be given to some in order to develop and release other gifts within the larger body of Christ.

However, perhaps the most important teaching on spiritual gifts in the New Testament, and one that is often overlooked, is found in Ephesians 4:11-16 and can be summarized as follows:

- It is only when all members of the body of Christ utilize their gifts together for the edification of the body that we can all grow up into the love and maturity that Jesus, the head of the Church, intends for us.

When this concept is properly understood, it's easy to see the tragedy of our individualistic ways of engaging spiritual gifts. Popular level teaching is often focused on "which of the gifts I have" and "where I can best serve" rather than considering the needs of the community and the role that each individual plays within the larger group. In fact, there are times that our individualistic way of thinking can even push back on the truth of the Scriptures as we declare how "unfair" it is that my spiritual growth is, in some way, reliant on others! However, that would have been a very common and understandable concept for a 1st century Hebrew.

Discussion in Community

Read Romans 12:3-18 and Ephesians 4:7-16.

- What has been your understanding of spiritual gifts up to now? How does the teaching from this week change that?
- Does that change the way you approach the work of the Spirit in and through your life? In what way?
- How does the normal flow of our group reflect the idea that all of us have access to the work of the Spirit? What could we change about the normal flow of our meetings in order to recognize that?

Practice for the Week

This week we are going to begin the process of considering our gifts, but we'll do it in the opposite way that many choose to engage this exercise. Instead of thinking about what you like or would want to do, think about the community around you. It may be the larger YAC community, your Community Group, or people who are regularly part of your life. What do they need you to do? What gifting might be getting developed in you based on their need? Take time to ask the Spirit about this, and journal what you sense Him saying.

Week Two: Discovering and Discerning Spiritual Gifts

If, as we looked at last week, it is only when all members of the body of Christ use their gifts that we can grow up into the love and maturity that Jesus intends for us, then it is vital for us to have an understanding of our gifts and to be actively released to utilize those gifts within the body. This can happen within the larger corporate setting for some but will likely happen more readily and often within a smaller community such as a Community Group. These groups are designed to be small enough for each member to have a platform on which to exercise their gifting, and the structure of the group is intentionally flexible so that the group might take on the form and shape of the gifts of those within their group. These groups are also an ideal place for the discovery and discernment of individual gifts.

The most popular method of discovering spiritual gifts is through the various spiritual gift tests available for purchase or online. However, this method has several significant shortfalls. First of all, tests are only able to measure gifting based on past experiences. Therefore, if someone has not experienced something in the past, they will tend not to seek out that experience in the future because it's not their "gift." They also tend to be heavily weighted by someone's projected desire and perception of the gifts. Finally, there is no opportunity with an individualized test for specific feedback as to whether or not that person is truly gifted in that area. Spiritual gifts are given by God to the community for the building up of the body, so a method of discernment that can be engaged in such an individualized way is, at best, suspect.

The listing of gifts found in the Scriptures are intended to be representative, not comprehensive. The following list includes all of those gifts listed within the four passages noted above as a sampling of the kinds of gifts the Holy Spirit bestows upon individual believers.

Prophecy	Service	Teaching
Exhortation	Generosity	Helps
Mercy	Wisdom	Knowledge
Faith	Healing	Miracles
Speaking in tongues	Interpreting tongues	Discernment
Apostles	Evangelism	Shepherds
Speaking	Service	

However, these are only representative. It's quite possible that, given a proper method, one might discern a gift that is different than those on this list. It's only necessary that the gift lines up with the teaching of the Scripture for the edification of the body.

More helpful than an individual spiritual gift test is a method that is practiced in community and unfolds over time. Unlike the "test" it doesn't have the immediate gratification of results upon completion of the process, but it has the benefit of much higher accuracy, combined with encouragement and feedback throughout the process.

Practice in Community

Take some time during your meeting this week, and maybe over the next few weeks, to walk through the first three steps with each member of your group. (Depending on the size of your group, this may take more than one week!) Then, over the course of the next few months, practice the last two steps as a regular part of your gatherings. *Note: If you are not in a Community Group, this would be a great time to step into one! More details on the website, yorkalliance.org. However, if now is not the time, you might consider bringing a group of believers and friends (not only family!) together to engage this practice.*

Start with the P's: Personal Passions and Preferences

Very simply, what do you like to do? What are some activities in which you deeply feel the presence of Jesus? Are there things that you've seen others do that you would love to try? What are some activities or skills that seem to come far more easily for you than for those around you? While you could make a list of these on your own, it's a much more rewarding and interactive process to answer this question in community with those who know you and have had the opportunity to observe you so that they can give you feedback in the areas you identify. That leads naturally into the next step...

Move onto the O's: Observations of Others

Where do those in your community see you as being gifted? Ask those around you to help identify areas where they have observed you making an impact in the lives of others. A prayerful conversation in community will often unearth areas that you might overlook because they seem "simple" to you—this is often a sign of Spirit empowerment in an area!

WHAT: What are the needs of the group?

Spiritual gifts are given for the very practical purpose of the edification of the body. Creating a comprehensive list of my potential spiritual gifts only serves the purpose of satisfying curiosity—they are very rarely all engaged, and almost never at the same time. Instead, think practically: What specific needs does your community have? The Spirit will often bestow gifts based on specific needs at specific times. If the community has a need that sounds interesting to you, as you engage that activity you may find an unusual level of Spirit empowerment. That's a gift!

Now the E's: Evaluate and Engage it!

The discernment and discovery of spiritual gifts isn't an exact science, and it doesn't need to be. As you start to see a confluence between your personal passions, the observations of others, and the needs of the group, look for a way to step into that specific area of ministry, engaging what might be your gift. How does it feel? Do you feel joy as you minister in that way? When you've finished, are you exhausted or fulfilled (even if you're tired)? Don't just try it once—usually it will take multiple attempts before you get a feel for whether or not this specific area is a fit for you.

Finally, the R's: Report, Respond, and Repeat

The beauty of this process of discernment is that it begins and ends in community. After you've jumped into an area of ministry, take time to report back to the group: How did you evaluate your work in this area? What was their perspective? It's important to create dialog at this point, both in terms of fine-tuning your understanding of your gifting and how you can edify the group with your gift, and for your own encouragement and clarity. Through this process you should have increasing clarity in your gifting—and once you do, keep using it!

You might have noticed the acronym this process creates:

- **P** – Personal Passions and Preferences
- **O** – Observations from Others
- **W** – What are the needs of the group?
- **E** – Evaluate and Engage
- **R** – Report, Respond, and Repeat

All clichéd humor aside, there is great power in using the gifts that God's given to us! And remember, gifts change over time, just as groups and situations change. Revisit the process regularly!

Conclusion

It's important to recognize the goal in all of this. We can easily be sidetracked into thinking that our primary objective is to discover each person's spiritual gift set. If not discovering the gift(s), we can set our sights on each person using their gift with regularity and edifying the body. Both of those have good intentions, but by themselves, they aren't a worthy goal. What's the point of all of this?

*And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." **Matthew 28:18-20***

The discovery and discernment of spiritual gifts, and even the usage of those gifts, are means to an important end. The end, of course, is one of the few commands that Jesus gave to His church: to **make disciples**. For instance, a Community Group is a great place to connect with one another, to experience pastoral care, to worship and experience the presence of Jesus, to apply the Truth of God's Word, and to pray with intentionality for the world around you. However, if those things are all that happen, we've still missed the point! Our Community Groups are intentionally designed for one primary purpose: to help us to personally become like Jesus and to help others do the same!