



# Spiritual Gifts

May 2011 Edition



# Spiritual Gifts

*What are they and what are they for?*

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God wants to give us spiritual gifts because he loves us and wants us to actively be part of what he is doing in the world. When we turn from our sin and follow Jesus we are given the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does the internal work of giving us a new heart that loves God and frees us from slavery to sin. The Holy Spirit leads us into a deeper relationship with Jesus by doing things like convicting us of sin, growing us in holiness by changing our character, and revealing the meaning of Scripture to us.

The Holy Spirit also gives us spiritual gifts to partner with God to actively and powerfully bring God's kingdom here and push back Satan's kingdom of darkness.<sup>1</sup> Jesus taught, healed, cast out demons, and proclaimed God's kingdom in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is that same Holy Spirit that is given to us when we follow Jesus. The same things Jesus did, we are empowered to do and even greater things through the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> God equips us with the gifts needed to fulfill what he has asked us to do. This means that he often gives gifts at different times for different tasks. This requires us to be open to new gifts and for our gifts to change as we journey with him.

When we use the spiritual gifts God has given us we point to how great and powerful God is and give people a preview of what things will be like when Jesus returns. There will be no more sickness, death, disease, demonic influence, injustice, and poverty. God has equipped us through the gifts of the Holy Spirit to be part of that story and actively invite others to join us in it.

A good place to start as you study spiritual gifts is reading 1 Corinthians 12-14.

## Purpose of Spiritual Gift

1. **To glorify God** – (1 Peter 4:10-11). The gifts are not to be used to point to the gift itself or to the person possessing the gift but to God.
2. **To opens doors for the gospel** - (Acts 5:12-16). People are often more receptive to the gospel when God has tangibly demonstrated his love, compassion, and power.
3. **To encourage and build up the church** – (1 Corinthians 12:7). They are not to be used to puff ourselves up or make us look good.
4. **Preview of what things will look like when Jesus returns** - (2 Corinthians 1:22). The gifts give us a small glimpse of what things will be like when Jesus establishes the New Heavens and New Earth.

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<sup>1</sup> John 16:11; Eph 2:2

<sup>2</sup> John 14:12

## List of Spiritual Gifts

This list is likely not exhaustive. Instead of picking ones you like off this list and deciding which ones fit you the best, ask God to show you the gifts He has given you.

- **Prophecy** (*Romans 12:6, 1 Corinthians 12:10*) – Telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind. These are messages from God to be shared for the strengthening, encouragement, and comfort of others (1 Corinthians 14:3). This can come through a word, a picture, or internal sense God gives you. God will often use this gift to bring specific Scripture to mind to share with someone you are praying for. It is important to ask God what he wants us to do with prophetic messages. He may want us to share them or He may just want us to pray for something specific he brings to mind. Prophetic words are not to be put on the same level as Scripture. The delivery of prophecy can be given in error, so it is important to test all prophecy (1 Cor. 14:29). Do not base your life around a word of prophecy but pray about it and see if it is confirmed and weigh against what Scripture says.
  - Example: Agabus prophesying that Paul would be arrested (Acts 21:10-14); Peter getting the message from God that the Gentiles are clean and part of salvation and sharing it with the people (Acts 10:1-11:18). The Spirit telling Philip to go to a specific chariot (Acts 8:29).
- **Message of Wisdom** (*1 Corinthians 12:8*) – this is not simply human wisdom. It is a supernatural amount of wisdom to make decisions in difficult situations. Ability to debate and persuade people to the way of Jesus by the words given by the Spirit (Acts 6:10).
  - Example: Those who argued with Steven’s message couldn’t stand up to the wisdom that the Spirit gave him as he spoke (Acts 6:8-10);
- **Message of Knowledge** (*1 Corinthians 12:8*) – where you are given information about a person, situation, or event that you shouldn’t normally know. Sometimes this comes in a dream or vision, or just an inner sense. This message should be shared if it is for the edification of another or for the building up of the church. This is to be used with caution as it can cause damage by telling someone difficult news they may not be ready to hear.
  - Example: Ananias knowing Paul’s conversion and that he was on his way (Acts 9:1-19); Jesus knew what they were thinking (Luke 5:22).
- **Teaching** (*Romans 12:7*) – the ability to clearly communicate the message of the Bible and God’s Truth to people. This is specifically applied to teaching the Bible and the truths of God, not other material.
  - Example: Peter addressing the crowd (Acts 2:14-41); Peter and John before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:1-22).
- **Performing Miracles** (*1 Corinthians 12:10*) – the ability to perform supernatural tasks and miraculous signs that are beyond your natural capabilities.
  - Example: Handkerchiefs and aprons that touched Paul were taken to the sick and their illnesses were cured and evil spirits left them (Acts 19:11-12).
- **Healing** (*1 Corinthians 12:9*) Praying for someone and healing them in the name of Jesus. This is often done by putting your hands on someone and healing them. This can be either physical or emotional healing.
  - Example: Jesus heals Peter’s mother-in-law (Luke 4:38-31); Jesus heals the man with leprosy (Luke 5:12-16); Peter heals a crippled beggar (Acts 3:1-12); Paul heals a man with crippled feet (Acts 14:8-10). Jesus drives out a demon that made a man mute (Luke 11:14). Peter casts out a demon from slave girl (Acts 16:16-18).

- **Giving** (*Romans 12:8*) - appears to be a supernatural gift of not just tithing or giving things to those in need. It is giving a great deal – sometimes all that you have - to the poor. This is also the gift of giving your body over to hardships as well to serve the Lord (1 Cor. 13:3).
  - Example: Paul gives himself to hardship for the sake of the Gospel (1 Thess. 2:8-9). Jesus tells the disciples to sell their possessions and give them to the poor (Luke 12:33).
- **Distinguishing between spirits (discernment)** (*1 Corinthians 12:10*) - knowing clearly what is good and evil. Being aware of evil spirits and determine whether a spirit is good or evil or knowing specifically what evil spirit is present.
  - Example: Paul knew the spirit within the girl who predicted the future was evil even though she was saying, “These men were servants of the Most High God.” Since he knew it was an evil spirit, he cast it out of her (Acts 16:16-18). Also *Luke 13:11; Mark 9:25, 29; 1 John 4:6; 2 Tim 1:7*.
- **Leading** (*Romans 12:8*) –The gift of the Holy Spirit working through you to lead the work of God. Just because you have the natural gift of leading doesn’t mean that is your spiritual gift as well. The spiritual gift of leading means you are leading not in your flesh or fleshly ability but in the Spirit.
  - Example: James leading the church in Jerusalem through the difficult task of determining what rules the Gentile believers needed to follow (Acts 15:1-21).
- **Speaking in Tongues** (*1 Corinthians 12:10*) – there are two different ways of speaking in tongues. The first one is a prayerful, heavenly language that you cannot understand, but it is a way of your soul connecting with God (1 Cor. 14:2, 14, 15). It is to be used in private prayer time or in worship, but only when there is an interpreter (1 Cor. 14:26-28). The second kind of speaking in tongues is speaking in another earthly language that you haven’t studied. This would be like speaking to a group of people in Africa and they understand you in their native language. Tongues are not required proof that you are filled with the Spirit, but a gift given by the Holy Spirit just like the other gifts.
  - Example: Speaking in other languages at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-8). Paul talks about human languages and angelic languages (Acts 13:1).
- **Interpreting Tongues** (*1 Corinthians 12:10*) – Interpreting what either you pray in tongues or what someone else says to a group of people. This is essential if someone is speaking in tongues in a public setting. If this gift is not present when tongues are spoken in public, then the person speaking in tongues should be asked to stop or pray quietly. This gift may be given to the person speaking in tongues so they may interpret or given to someone else in the body of Christ that they may interpret on behalf of the one speaking in tongues.
  - Example: Paul says that we should pray and ask the Holy Spirit to give us the ability to interpret what we pray if we pray in tongues (1 Cor. 14:13). Paul says an interpreter is necessary for someone to pray in tongues in public (1 Cor. 14:28).
- **Faith** (*1 Corinthians 12:9*) – All believers have faith in God. This is a gift all of us are given by God to receive salvation. However, the gift refers to a supernatural type of faith, a faith that we are not capable of in our own abilities. This is the gift of having faith in a very difficult situation that goes beyond natural faith. It is a deep sense of knowing God will prevail or do something in a specific situation.
  - Example: Steven proclaiming the Gospel as he is about to be stoned (Acts 7).
- **Mercy** (*Romans 12:8*) – We all have some level of mercy as followers of Jesus. This kind of mercy is a level of mercy that isn’t possible by our own ability or wiring.
  - Example: Stephan forgiving those who were stoning him (Acts 7:60).

- **Encouraging** (*Romans 12:8*) - All Christians are called to encourage one another (1 Thess. 5:11; Hebrews 3:13, 10:25). This is a supernatural ability to encourage those who deeply need encouraging. It is not simply encouraging them for their human ability but encouraging them in their faith and who they are as followers of Jesus. This is encouragement through sharing the truth of the Bible with them and reminding them of the Gospel.
  - Example: Paul sends Tychicus to the church in Colossae for the express purpose of encouraging them. Apparently they needed a deeper encouragement. This seems to be a more supernatural kind of encouragement (Col 4:7-9).
- **Serving** (*Romans 12:1, 1 Corinthians 12:28*) – All believers are to serve others, but this gift allows for the ability to serve beyond your natural human ability. This is serving others in very difficult circumstances where you naturally wouldn't be able to serve.
  - Example: Paul gathered firewood after he was shipwrecked for the other prisoners and the guards (Acts 28).

# Frequently Asked Questions

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## **Where do spiritual gifts come from?**

Spiritual gifts are given by the Holy Spirit. *1 Corinthians 12:11* “All these [spiritual gifts] are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.”

We do not get to decide which gifts we are given though we are encouraged to desire specific gifts and even ask God for them. What gifts we are given is determined by the Holy Spirit. He gives us the gifts He sees fit for us and they are given to us when we need them.

## **Who is the Holy Spirit?**

The Holy Spirit is a full and equal part of the Trinity. He works in the world to make all people understand their need for Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit lives inside every follower of Jesus from the moment they decide to follow Him. The Spirit is our power source for life, ministry and spiritual growth. To tap into that power, we must continually yield to the Holy Spirit.

*(Genesis 1:2; Judges 14:6; Psalm 51:11; 139:7ff.; Isaiah 61:1-3; Joel 2:28-32; Matthew 1:18; 3:16; 4:1; 12:28-32; Luke 1:35; 4:1,18-19; 11:13; 12:12; John 14:16-17,26; 15:26; 16:7-14; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4,38; 4:31; 5:3; 6:3; 8:39; 13:2; 16:6; 19:1-6; Romans 8:9-11,14-16,26-27; 1 Corinthians 2:10-14; 3:16; 12:3-11,13; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30; 5:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:19; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 1:13-14; 3:16; Hebrews 9:14-15; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 John 4:13; 5:6-7; Revelation 22:17)<sup>3</sup>*

## **Where does the Bible talk about Spiritual gifts?**

Different spiritual gifts are listed in a handful of places in the Bible. The primary places are Romans 12:3-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. No one list contains all of the gifts and these lists are not exhaustive.

### *1 Corinthians 12:1-11*

- Message of wisdom
- Message of knowledge
- Faith
- Healing
- Miraculous powers
- Prophecy
- Distinguishing between spirits (discernment)
- Speaking in different kinds of tongues
- The interpretation of tongues

### *1 Corinthians 12:27-31*

This seems to be a list of both offices (roles) held in the church as well as spiritual gifts. These are not all inclusive lists of Spiritual gifts.

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<sup>3</sup> Taken from Ridge Point's Statement of Faith.

- Apostles – an office, not a spiritual gift – 2 Corinthians 12:12; the apostles are ones who are sent out by the church (missionaries). They will have a variety of spiritual gifts, but there is no spiritual gift of apostleship.
- Prophecy
- Teaching
- Performing Miracles
- Helping (serving) – may or may not be a spiritual gift, listed nowhere else. Paul seems to assume that we all do this (See 1 Cor. 12:29-31).
- Leading
- Speaking in Tongues
- Interpreting Tongues

Paul deliberately puts these gifts and roles in this order to put speaking in tongues and interpreting tongues last. In Paul's day, as is the tendency in our day, speaking in tongues was over emphasized. It seems that people were saying that you had to speak in tongues to prove you were filled with the Spirit. Paul says there are all these other gifts and roles of people in the church that come above speaking in tongues. Speaking in tongues is fine, but we should desire the greater gifts that Paul lists here in 1 Corinthians 12.

#### Ephesians 4

These are different roles within the church and are not specific spiritual gifts. Those who hold these offices and roles can have a variety of spiritual gifts.

- Apostles
- Prophets
- Evangelists
- Pastors
- Teachers

#### Romans 12:3-8

- Prophecy
- Serving
- Teaching
- Encouragement
- Giving
- Leading
- Mercy

#### **Do all of us have spiritual gifts?**

The Holy Spirit wants to give all followers of Jesus spiritual gifts. You don't have spiritual gifts if you are not a follower of Jesus because you don't have the Holy Spirit. We don't appear to come preloaded with the gifts. God gives them to us at different times on our journey especially when we are open to receiving them. You may not know what your gifts are yet and should pray and ask God to show you what gifts He wants to give you. You may not have been open to receiving the gifts the Holy Spirit and

have actually been quenching the Spirit's activity in your life.<sup>4</sup> If that is the case, you should ask for forgiveness for not being open and tell God you are open to receiving the gifts of the Spirit.

#### **Can a nonbeliever have a spiritual gift?**

No, spiritual gifts are given by the Holy Spirit. You must have the Holy Spirit to have a spiritual gift. Since only believers have the Holy Spirit, it is not possible for an unbeliever to have a spiritual gift.

#### **Are spiritual gifts the same as talents and abilities?**

Talents and abilities are things you are born with, such as being athletic or musical, or things you work to develop in your own strength, such as learning an instrument or building a house. These talents and abilities are to be used to demonstrate how great God is and serve others, but they are not the same as spiritual gifts.

Spiritual gifts are things that you cannot do in your own strength or power. That is why they are called spiritual gifts. They are only possible because of the power and gifting of the Holy Spirit.

Everything we do should bring glory and praise to God (Col 3:17). Both spiritual gifts and natural abilities are to be used to point to Jesus as Lord, but are not the same thing.

#### **Are spiritual gifts the same as the fruit of the spirit?**

No. All believers have the fruit of the spirit. When the spirit is present in our lives we have all of the fruit, not just some of the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-24 – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. As we progress in following Jesus and living life more by the Spirit of God, we experience more and more of this fruit.

#### **Are all the spiritual gifts available for us today?**

Yes. Jesus promised us that we would do even greater things than He did (John 14:12-13). The gifts that we see demonstrated in Jesus are available for us today. We see all of the spiritual gifts present in the early church throughout the New Testament. There is no reason to believe that some of the spiritual gifts have ceased. The same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is still at work and gives us power for those who believe (Ephesians 1:18-23).

#### **What if I want a different spiritual gift than the one I've been given?**

Since it is the Holy Spirit who gives you these gifts, He has given specific gifts to you because He has determined your role in serving the church. We have all been given different gifts, but they all serve a valuable purpose. All parts of the body of Christ are valuable even if they don't seem important (1 Corinthians 12:12-31). Praise God for the gifts he has given you and ask for additional ones.

#### **What if I'm overwhelmed or afraid of the gift God has given me?**

God has given you that gift for a purpose. Being obedient with the gift God has given you often means you must step out in faith at the risk of looking foolish. The good news is that the outcome of the gifts is not up to you but to God.

#### **Should I ask God for certain gifts?**

Yes, but that doesn't mean you will get those gifts. It is up to the Holy Spirit to give you the gifts He chooses to give you. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:31, "But eagerly desire the greater gifts." And in 1

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:19

Corinthians 14:1, "Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy." We should ask for certain gifts, but it is up to the Holy Spirit to determine what gifts we are given.

#### **Once I'm given a gift do I have that gift forever?**

Not necessarily. This may be the case but gifts are given by the Holy Spirit as he determines. Some people have the same gifts for a long period of time. For other people, the Holy Spirit gives them different gifts at different times.

#### **How do I find out what gifts are given to me?**

We first have to realize that these are gifts. It is difficult to receive a gift you aren't willing to accept. The first step is realizing that the Holy Spirit desires to give us spiritual gifts because God loves us. The next step is to pray. Tell God you are open to receiving his gifts and want to live by the power of the Holy Spirit. Ask him to give you whatever gives he wants for you.

It is a great idea to pray in community. This could be with your small group or friends. If you are comfortable ask them to lay their hands on you as you pray for you to receive the gifts of the Spirit (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6). It is important to ask the group to affirm what gifts they see in you and encourage you to grow in them.

If you feel like God may have given you a gift, try it out. If you want to know if you have been given the gift of healing, pray for the sick and see what happens. Growing in your gifts is like riding a bike; it is awkward at first, but the more you do it, the easier it gets.

Sometimes it will take a long time for a gift to be realized. Remember that it is not up to you what spiritual gifts you are given or when they are given, though we are encouraged to ask specifically.

#### **When will spiritual gifts end?**

Spiritual gifts will cease when Jesus returns (1 Corinthians 13:8-13). We practice these spiritual gifts to give people a glimpse of the New Heaven and New Earth that we are promised with the return of Jesus.

#### **How are spiritual gifts to be used today?**

They should be used only to build up the body of Christ and glorify God. They should not be used in ways that bring division in the church. Paul repeatedly says that we are all different parts of the same body and need to use the gifts in a way that promotes unity in the body. We are to use the gifts in a fitting and orderly way (1 Cor. 14:40). We should not use gifts if it causes chaos or confusion. Paul gives specific instructions for how to use spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 14.

#### **How do I grow in my ability to use the gifts?**

We will grow in effectiveness in the gifts the more we keep in step with the Holy Spirit. We won't grow in the gifts if we don't allow the Holy Spirit access to the other areas of our lives and walk in repentance and obedience. When we are obedient and faithful with what he gives us, he will give us more. Our gifts also grow in proportion to the increase in our faith (Romans 12:6). It is also helpful to find someone who has the gift you do and ask them to teach you how to use that gift.

# Further Reading

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## **On Spiritual Gifts:**

*Beginner's Guide to Spiritual Gifts* by Sam Storms (Beginner)

*Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* by Jack Deere (Intermediate)

*Surprised by the Voice of God* by Jack Deere (Intermediate)

## **On the Holy Spirit:**

*Forgotten God* by Francis Chan (Beginner)