

Principle #8

Spiritual Gifts 101

God loves diversity



Principles of Discipleship

A gift is something God gives you. God has given us salvation to secure our future. But to build up the body and make it work effectively He has also given us “spiritual gifts”. While people differ on exactly what the gifts are, all can agree they are given by the Holy Spirit so that the Body of Christ can carry out His work in our world.

“The church is primarily and fundamentally a body designed to express through each individual member the life of an indwelling Lord and is equipped by the Holy Spirit with gifts designed to express that life.”

Ray Stedman, Body Life

Romans 12

³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. ⁴ Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. ⁷ If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; ⁸ if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Main Passages: Romans 12 and 1 Peter 4

1. List all the gifts mentioned in these 4 passages...

<i>Romans 12:6-8</i>	<i>1 Peter 4:10-11</i>	<i>1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28-30</i>	<i>Ephesians 4:11</i>

2. Each of these 4 passages comes at the subject of gifts from a little different angle. Describe the approach of each, from the view point of what Paul or Peter was trying to say at the time:

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

1 Peter 4

⁷ The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. ⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹ Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

3. What does the dictionary say a "gift" is?

4. Does everyone have a spiritual gift? (*see 1 Cor 12:7 and 1 Peter 4:10*)

5. If gifts are given by grace (Romans 12:6) from the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:7-11), do you think we are born with these gifts, or given them when we believe in Christ?

6. According to the 1 Peter 4 passage, what 4 things should we be doing in light of the fact that "the end of all things is near"?

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7. Peter groups gifts into 2 basic categories: what are they?

The Function of spiritual gifts.

The grace gifts of the NT are always seen within the context of the Christian community. Although believers are called on to witness to, and to do good to, all people, the passages that explore spiritual gifts are focused on the shared life of members of the body of Christ. It is within the body that spiritual gifts function “for the common good” (1 Co 12:7).

It is important that we see spiritual gifts as spiritual endowments that function within the body, focused on the maturing of our fellow Christians and the believing community. God surely works through his people to serve and witness to him in the world. But spiritual gifts are in Scripture a family concern.

◆ Some Questions about spiritual gifts.

Many questions are asked about spiritual gifts, questions that cannot be fully answered here. But some observations are called for in response to major questions raised.



1. *Do the more obviously supernatural gifts of the Spirit operate today?* No decisive answer can be given to this much-debated issue. But surely there is not enough biblical evidence to say with certainty that the more spectacular gifts mentioned in the NT *cannot* operate today.

2. *Where do spiritual gifts operate?* The context defined in the Bible is relational. Spiritual gifts operate as we lovingly respond to others and seek to serve them. At times we mistakenly identify spiritual gifts with church offices or institutional roles. We should not assume that the spiritual gift of teaching is summed up by functioning in a Sunday school classroom.

3. *Can a person have more than one spiritual gift?* It is clear that Paul had more than one gift (1 Co 14:18; 2 Co 12:11-12). We know that each believer has at least one spiritual gift. There is no reason to believe that any individual is necessarily limited to one gift.

4. *What is the difference between the spiritual gifts and persons who are called God's gifts to his church?* Both 1 Co 12 and Eph 4 speak of such gifted persons: apostles, evangelists, etc. These persons were set aside in the early church to a full-time and probably itinerant ministry. They had to be gifted spiritually to fulfill their ministries. But the offices are not gifts in the sense of *charisma*.

- from Larry Richards' Expository Dictionary of Bible Words

Spiritual Giftedness in the New Testament

What do you think were some of the spiritual gifts of the following New Testament characters?

- Peter
- Paul
- Barnabas
- James (brother of Jesus)
- Aquila & Priscilla



To become aware that God himself has equipped you – yes, YOU – with a uniquely designed pattern of spiritual gifts and has placed you exactly where he wants you in order to minister those gifts, is to enter a whole new dimension of exciting possibility. In all the world there is no experience more satisfying and fulfilling than to realize that you have been the instrument of the divine working in the lives of others. Such an experience awaits any true Christian who is willing to give time and thought to the discovery and understanding of his pattern of gifts, and will submit himself to the authority of the Head of the body, who reserves to Himself the right to coordinate and direct its activities.

One of the important facts to get clearly in mind in an attempt to understand spiritual gifts is to realize that a spiritual gift is not the same as a natural talent. It is true that talents such as musical ability, artistic skills, athletic coordination etc., are also gifts from God. But they are gifts on a physical or social level only, given to benefit mankind in its “natural” life. Spiritual gifts, on the other hand, are given for benefit in the realm of the spirit, the realm of an individual’s relationship to God. The effect of the operation of a spiritual gift is to improve a person in his spirit’s enjoyment of life and love of God – to bless him, in other words. Moreover, since the spirit is the most fundamental part of in man’s being, from which all other relationships flow, it is clear that the exercise of spiritual gifts operates at the level of human existence, and strikes right at the root of all human problems. Talents, however, deal more with the surfaces of life and though useful or entertaining, do not permanently change men as spiritual gifts can do.

Talents obviously, are distributed to men and women quite apart from any reference to their spiritual condition. Non-Christians as well as Christians have talents and both can find many opportunities for useful expression of their talents in both religious and secular ways. But only Christians have spiritual gifts, for they are given only to those in whom the Spirit of Christ has come to dwell (1 Cor. 12:7).

It is quite possible, therefore, for a Christian to

have a talent for teaching, for instance, but not to have the spiritual gift of teaching. If that is the case and he were asked to teach a Sunday school class, as an example, he would be quite capable of imparting considerable information and knowledge of facts about the lessons to his class but his teaching would lack the power to bless, to advance his students spiritually. This fact helps to explain the many qualified secular teachers who do not do well at all as Sunday school teachers. On the other hand, many schoolteachers also possess, as Christians, the spiritual gift of teaching and are greatly used of God in Bible classes and Sunday school teaching.

It is also quite possible to exercise a spiritual gift through the channel of a natural talent. This is frequently seen in the ministry of Christian singers. We have all heard Christian soloists with great voices whose evident musical talents would have pleased secular audiences anywhere. But in addition they possessed great power to impart spiritual enrichment through their singing, leaving their audiences spiritually refreshed and strengthened. Most often it is the gift of exhortation that the singer is exercising, but it is being carried by his musical talent as man is carried by a horse. Of course we have all been treated also to the painful experience of listening to a Christian sing without exercising any spiritual gift and finding our hearts left cold and unmoved by a performance of technical excellence but without spiritual power. The lesson is clear: don’t try to use your natural talents to accomplish the work of God, for talents cannot operate in that sphere. But do use them as channels or vehicles for spiritual gifts and you will find they dovetail beautifully just as you might expect they would since they both come from the same God.

Perhaps the question most pressing upon you right now is how do I discover my spiritual gifts? If they are the doorway to a new world of fulfillment and challenge then I surely want to know what mine are, but just how do I go about it? The answer is really very simple. You discover a spiritual gift just like you discovered your natural talents!

How did you find that you were musically talented? Or artistically endowed? Or able to lead,

to organize, to run, or to paint? Probably it began first with some kind of desire. You simply liked whatever it is you are talented at, and found yourself drawn toward those who were already doing it. You enjoyed watching those who were good at it, and came to appreciate something of the fine points of the activity. That is the way spiritual gifts make themselves known at first too. Somewhere the idea has found deep entrenchment in Christian circles that doing what God wants you to do is always unpleasant; that Christians must always make choices between doing what they want to do and being happy, and doing what God wants them to do and being completely miserable.

Nothing could be more removed from the truth. The exercise of a spiritual gift is always a satisfying enjoyable experience though sometimes the occasion on which it is exercised may be an unhappy one. Jesus said it was his constant delight to do the will of the one who sent him. The Father's gift awakened his own desire and he went about doing what he intensely enjoyed doing. So, as a Christian, start with the gifts you most feel drawn toward. Study the biblical lists of gifts and try those which make special appeal to you.

Then, the next step is to watch for improvement and development. Do you get better at it as you go along? Do you find your quite understandable initial fears subsiding and a growing competence developing? Remember that's the way it was in discovering your talents, too. Gifts need to be exercised just as talents do and practice tends to make more perfect in one just as much as in the other. Paul wrote to young Timothy, telling him, Rekindle the gift of God that is within you (2 Tim. 1:6). As skill in the exercise of a gift develops, the spiritual blessing it brings will become increasingly evident. You will find yourself more and more seeking occasions in which you may manifest your gift, but never, of course, for your own personal advancement but always for the enrichment and profit of others. As Paul reminds us: to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (1 Cor. 12:7).

Do you have certain spiritual gifts, or don't you? A final test is this: do others recognize this gift in you? When someone says to you quite unsolicited, "We'd like you to take on this ministry, we think you have a gift for it," then you can be quite sure that you have that spiritual gift. It may well be that others will see it long before

you do. In fact one of the most helpful ways the members of Christ's body can minister to each other is to help one another discover spiritual gifts. It is much better for others to tell you what gifts they see in you than for you to lay pretentious claims to gifts you might not actually have. One great Bible teacher used to say it was a great pity to see someone who thought he had the gift of preaching, but no one had the gift of listening!

It is helpful, also, to realize that hardly anyone discovers all his gifts at the beginning of his Christian experience. Gifts, like talents, may lie undiscovered for years and then a certain combination of circumstances may bring them to light. It is wise, therefore, to be always ready to try something new. Who knows but what the Spirit of God has put you on the doorstep of a new endeavor for the express purpose of helping you discover gifts you never knew you had.

In the preceding chapter we mentioned the fact that the gifts, though only about 17 or 18 in number, are given in clusters or combinations which makes possible an almost infinite number of varying ministries. Judging from the analysis of the natural world it is highly likely that no two Christians have exactly the same pattern of gifts. Therefore no two have exactly the same ministry. No two faces in the world are precisely alike yet all are made up from the same basic features: two eyes, two ears, one nose, one mouth, two cheeks, one chin and one forehead. God gave you your face because it is exactly right for the expression of his life where you are. Likewise he gives you the precise cluster of gifts you possess because it is just what is needed for the ministry the Lord Jesus will indicate for you.

Do you see what this means? It completely eliminates all competition within the body of Christ! No Christian needs to be the rival of any other; there is a place for all in the body and none can take another's place.

SCRIPTURE

Which verses significantly impacted you and why?



ARTICLE

What did you personally glean from this article?



PRINCIPLE

Summarize the truth you've learned in a concise statement:



LIFE APPLICATION

1. *What could you do to begin discovering your spiritual gifts?*
2. *What role does the Holy Spirit play in the exercise of your spiritual gifts?*

