

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Definition: A God-given, spiritual motivation and special ability given to every member of the body of Christ to exercise in love for the purpose of serving and edifying the church, with the goal of unity and maturity in Christ. (To further your understanding and support this definition thoroughly, I recommend that you read Eph.4:1-16 and 1 Cor.12). Also, for the lists of spiritual gifts, you will find them in Eph.4:1-16; Rom.12:3-8; 1 Cor.12,13,14; and 1 Pet.4:7-11.

These gifts are not something that you will have completely attained. They are given to us to cultivate (II Tim.1:6 "stir up"), to improve and equip us, and stretch us into deeper commitment and service to the body of Christ. It's not something that you use for awhile and then sit back and rest, or retire. You excel in one gift and you are responsible to pour your life into it. You must develop it to the fullest - 100%. Other gifts may be relevant in your life and may be developed 30% or 40%, or even 75%, but you excel in one gift which God holds you responsible to be consistently engaged in. If you don't, you won't be the first one that God has had to set aside as "dead wood"- every member of the body is needed to function properly and effectively and God will take it away if it's not fruitful (John 15:6) and beneficial to the maturity of His Body!

SPEAKING GIFTS

PASTORING - shepherds, bishops, overseers, and elders (Acts 20:17-28), the motivating ability to feed, to guide, to protect and watch over the flock of God; to take the responsibility of the oversight in a local church with the concern of spiritual maturity and nourishment. One must have the gift before the office. I Pet.5:1-4.

PROPHECY - to tell forth, to declare, to preach (not foretelling the future). See 1 Cor.12:10; 14:1,4. This is distinct from the office of "Prophet". I Cor.12:28 (see sign gifts).

PASTOR-TEACHER - Eph.4:11 - the article in the Greek implies that both gifts are the ability of the one man (as a pastor-teacher) geared towards training, teaching, and developing the saints to do the work of the ministry.

TEACHING - the motivating ability to study and search out God's truth and then to learn it systematically, explain it clearly, and apply it effectively by bringing out the meaning personally and practically to the body of Christ. 1 Cor.12:28; Eph.2:20; 3:5.

EVANGELISM - although all believers are commanded (not suggested) by Christ to "preach the gospel" and "to be His witnesses" to the lost, this gift is the special ability to communicate the gospel to anyone, anywhere, all the time, with unusual effectiveness, so people respond to Christ in conversion and discipleship (Phillip, Timothy, Billy Graham, missionaries). Acts 20:32.

EXHORTATION - a special tactfulness "to come alongside" someone and to admonish, exhort, encourage, and urge someone to pursue a proper course of conduct. This is counseling - to instruct, strengthen, support, warn, rebuke, and to do whatever is necessary to bring one to change. It's used publicly as well as one on one (1 Thes.5:11-14).

WORD OF KNOWLEDGE - the ability to acquire insight into human needs from the knowledge of God's Word and to understand, retain, and explain theological truth so that the right usage of this "information" will bring successful application through the "word of wisdom." A unique ability to research, study diligently, and understand the facts of Biblical knowledge.

WORD OF WISDOM - the unique ability to discover and relate the knowledge, mysteries, wisdom, and ways of God to individual needs and problems, and to speak it wisely at the right time so it can be skillfully applied (skillfully utilizing knowledge by transforming the insight and appropriating it to the situation).

SERVING GIFTS

GIVING - the ability to obtain wealth and to share your substance with those who have need within the body of Christ; the motivation to give above and beyond what God requires and expects of every believer; graciously and joyfully giving one's personal assets and property in order to meet the needs of members as well as promoting the ministry of the body (II Cor.9:7). A special "sensing" of needs and the urgency to anonymously meet them.

HELPS - (ministry or serving gift) - the motivation to continually meet the needs of the body through serving in a practical way, joyfully and diligently wherever it's required, such as painting, mechanical, maintenance, housework without pay, etc... (Gal.5:13).

ADMINISTRATION - (ruling or governing) - the capability and motivation to plan, to organize, to lead, and to control the activities of others as you work toward the achievement of common set goals. Management is done fairly, confidently, efficiently, and as a humble example. (1 Thes.5:12; 1 Tim.5:17; Heb.13:7,17,24; 1 Pet.5:1-5).

SHOWING MERCY - a sensitive, loving ability to sympathize and empathize with the misery of another and do something about it. Genuinely identifying with them and manifesting practical compassion and comforting love and support toward those suffering members of the Body of Christ. This is carried out practically by visiting those in need.

FAITH - unlike the faith we need to live for God, this mountain-moving faith is a special ability to know what God wants to do and to be confidently and consistently trusting God for great things through the local church. To really pray with a vision and an unusual amount of confidence and consistency.

HOSPITALITY - a God-given motivation and ability to serve the body by continually providing an open home and warm welcome for those who need food and lodging and for those within the body to come in and fellowship regularly.

SINGLENES - yes, singleness! Read 1 Cor.7:7-8, 32-35. Also Anna, in Luke 2:36-38, a widow. One who has the motivation and ability to remain unmarried so as to devote their time to prayer, fasting and other areas of ministry without distraction of responsibility and obligation to a mate. This one is free to continually keep busy in the work of the Lord by redirecting their time, energy, money and life to wherever needed. A married person doesn't have this kind of availability. Start discipling younger Christians.

DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS - 1 Jn.4:1 tells us that we all need to test the spirits whether something or someone is of truth (God) or error (Satan), yet this gift goes beyond the surface evidences. This is an ability to distinguish between saved "possessing" believers and a phony "professing" unbeliever (false prophets and false brethren). Also, this is an ability to discern the motives, intentions, sincerity, and heart attitude of believers for the sake of determining who is right and who is wrong in order to minister and pray appropriately for them, not judging and gossiping.

SIGN GIFTS

The next section of gifts are all referred to in the New Testament as sign gifts, just as the others fit into speaking and serving categories. Sign gifts, according to Heb.2:3-4; II Cor.12:12; Mk.16:17, were to authenticate the apostolic ministry. "The signs of an apostle were wrought among you by signs, wonders and mighty deeds" (II Cor. 12:12). "The Word of the Lord was confirmed to us by them (the apostles) that heard Christ. God also bore witness with signs, wonders, diverse miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit" (Heb.2:3-4). The apostles had sign gifts because they were founding this new "program" - the church. They had direct revelation from God and needed the sign gifts to prove its validity to Israel and the world. It tells us in 1 Cor.14:21 that tongues were a sign to be used for the Jews "this people" who the prophet Isaiah interprets it to be (Is.28:11-12). And vs.22 tells us why the gift of tongues was given - (direct quote) "Therefore, tongues are for a sign NOT to believers but to them that believe not!" Tongues were a sign gift to the unbelieving Jew and every instance in which tongues are mentioned in the New Testament, Jews (unbelieving) were present, and it was to confirm the Apostolic authority and the new revelation. The apostles didn't remain forever. They passed off the scene when John died in 95 A.D.

APOSTLESHIP - the gift of being an apostle was only delegated to those directly and personally chosen by the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ Himself as told in Acts 1:2-3. Mark 16:17,18,20 commissions them and only them with sign gifts and the purpose - "to confirm the Word of God" (notice the other sign gifts mentioned with tongues in the text; you don't see them today). The apostles were therefore: (1) to establish and lay the foundational stage of the church (which has already been completed) (2) to receive direct divine authority and revelation or instruction since no New Testament had been completed (which today is completed with the Book of the Revelation) (3) to commit the divine revelation to writing (1 Pet.1:19) and (4) to authenticate and confirm this new revelation with sign gifts.

PROPHETS) :- Acts 21: 9-40 - the supernatural ability to foresee and predict the coming events with 100% accuracy everytime, (ex. Agabus John - Revelation). This sign gift also confirmed the foundational stage of the church and, along with the apostles, this was the channel by which God revealed and completed the Bible. No further revelation is needed.

HEALING - a temporary ability to immediately and totally restore one from physical sickness or ailments 100% of the time, used by the apostles (Matt.10:1-8) to confirm and proclaim the new revelation - the gospel of Jesus Christ! This was to prove to the Jews who needed a further confirming or establishing of revelation because it's already complete and the church's foundational stage is now into the "super structure" maturing state. This is not saying God doesn't heal today. James 5:15 tells us "the prayer of faith shall save the sick". But it is saying that there is no God-given healing gift ministry today given to a man or 100% of the people that went to be healed would be healed just like in the early church stage, and the same sickness wouldn't come back 2 days later; as in many recorded instances today!

MIRACLES - they are the same as signs and wonders - all temporary special abilities, supernaturally performed by the apostles (Heb.2:3-4; II Cor.12:12). Jesus also said that "a sinful and adulterous generation seeks after signs" (Matt.12:38-39), which simply means that people want the signs more that they want the truth! Seeking proof instead of faith!

TONGUES - clearly a sign gift (1 Cor.14:21-22) for unbelieving Jews which was only temporary because it has served its purpose and "ceased" (I Cor.13:10) when the Word of God was completed (only recently has this new "gift of a spirit" been around). This ability to speak in other languages was simply to give direct revelation to those Jews (Day of Pentecost and shortly after) who never heard the gospel because there was no written Word of God established, let alone in those languages. All other instances in the New Testament have the Jews and apostles present! The Greek word means literally, a known language and always was accompanied by an interpreter.

INTERPRETATION - always present when tongues were spoken - the ability to understand and explain the language used. Paul warned never to hear tongues that had no understanding or interpretation (1 Cor.14:27-28). Every New Testament tongue/language in Acts was of God, and interpreted. Today, there is no need for any interpretation of a tongue because that would be claiming further revelation and God's Word specifically warns against adding to the Scripture!!! (Deut.4:2; Rev.22:18-19). The Holy Spirit, after inspiring the completed Word of God (II Pet.1:19) would not contradict Himself. You can't disagree with God's Word - it's the final authority.

People that speak in tongues today claim to have direct revelation from God, since that's the secondary reason for the gift - the primary reason was a sign to the unbelieving Jew. God is no longer adding to His Word and He says "If any man adds unto these things, God will add unto Him the plagues that are written in this book", and that's from God's final revelation to man!

Therefore, all these "Sign" gifts were only temporary and used only at the foundational stage of the church with the apostles. These gifts "died" out with the apostles because they served their purpose in establishing and confirming God's new work and revelation. Now that the church is in it's "superstructure" stage and the Word of God, as we have it today, is completed there's no need or purpose for these gifts.

CONCLUSION

God has given every one of us a spiritual gift which is from the category of "Speaking Gifts" or "Serving Gifts." We are all responsible to fulfill these gifts to a certain degree, however, we will excel with one gift above and beyond the fulfillment of the others. The majority of the usage of your spiritual gift (not a talent) should be used for serving and edifying (building up) the local body of Christ, rather than in outside organizations. Remember their purpose (1 Cor.12). Ultimately, the overall purpose of these gifts is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ and to make Him know (not ourselves). To use your gift will equip you to do just that.

Don't squander the grace of God by unused gifts or letting your gift(s) cool almost to ashes. To such comes the reminder, "Stir up the gift of God which is in you" (II Tim.1:6). The verb stir means to rekindle slumbering ashes into a flame. Lukewarmness begins when one is only a sponge with a great intake of the Word of God but no output - be an active, wise doer of the Word! Discover and develop your spiritual gift(s) to the growth of the Body of Christ and the glory of God.

WHERE DO I BEGIN?

Since the general mission and purpose of the church today is "to edify in order to evangelize", our responsibilities will obviously fall in line with that. The following verses explain and amplify that purpose. Eph.4:11-16; Matt.28:19-20; Acts 1:8; John 15:26-27. In fact Acts 2:42-47 is the New Testament example of the practical outworking of this purpose).

Therefore, in order to bring this purpose about, God has gifted each member of the Body with a special spiritual ability or enablement called a spiritual gift. These are listed and explained in detail in I Cor.12,13,14; Rom.12:1-8; Eph.4:11-16; I Pet.4:7-11.

The following are some guidelines and principles to enable you in:

Discovering and Developing Spiritual gifts

1. Dedicate yourself to God - the prerequisite to victorious living and serving is commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.
2. Distinguish between the gifts - definition and understanding and what they are and how they bring maturity and unity to the Body.
3. Do the work of God - begin to do something for the Body of Christ.
4. Desire to be used by God to serve others in more specific areas of motivation - teaching, counseling, helping, giving...
5. Develop your specific abilities and gifts - education, experience.
6. Delight in the Giver - and the use of your gifts - you'll have true joy, fulfillment and fruitfulness.
7. Discernment from others affirms your gifts - others will definitely benefit from your ministry and tell you.
8. Discover your other gifts and the gifts in others - your involvement will enable you to notice other's abilities.
9. Deepening of your spiritual life will be the result - maturity not only to others but to yourself is inevitable.

AVAILABLE RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

The Church - The Body of Christ - Dr. John MacArthur

Body Life - Roy Steadman

The Holy Spirit - Dr. John Walvoord

What Is My Spiritual Gift? (A test to help you evaluate and assess your spiritual involvements, interests, experiences, and motivations)