

Back to the Basics: Spiritual Gifts

(1 Corinthians 12:1)

Do you know what your spiritual gift is? The most prominent spiritual gifts operative today are serving, leadership, exhortation, evangelism, giving, mercy, and teaching. Which one is your dominant gift?

In the beginning of three chapters dealing with spiritual gifts, Paul states bluntly in 1 Corinthians 12:1, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you to be ignorant." The word "ignorant" comes from a Greek word from which we get our English word "agnostic." An agnostic says, "I don't know if God exists." Paul was and is saying, "I do not want you to say, 'I don't know what my spiritual gift is.'"

A concise Biblical definition of a spiritual gift is found in 1 Peter 4:11: "the ability which God gives." What is implied in all these verses is that the Holy Spirit gave you this ability or gift at conversion. 1 Corinthians 12:4 says: "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit." When you were saved and received the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9) you also were gifted by the Holy Spirit. Notice these God given abilities are not called Spiritual Rewards but Spiritual Gifts. We do not earn nor deserve them. Like salvation, they are God given gifts.

The First Step to discover your spiritual gift is to take a spiritual gift test. You can go to Elmer Towns.com and take his Spiritual Gifts Questionnaire. This test will help you determine your spiritual gift. Another helpful source is Fred G. Zaspel's *Spiritual Gifts*. He gives 22 brief chapters on-line that thoroughly cover spiritual gifts. This leads to the next step.

The Next Step you can take to discover your spiritual gift is to understand the operative gifts for today's believers. Paul lists most of these gifts in Romans 12:6-8. As I briefly survey these gifts, ask yourself, "Which one or more of these gifts has the Holy Spirit given to me?"

The first gift Paul mentions is the gift of prophecy. Although this gift is not operative today **preaching** which was the purpose of prophecy in the Old Testament is a present day gift. Paul exhorted Timothy to "Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering" (2 Timothy 4:2). Preaching and teaching are synonymous. In 1 Timothy 3, when Paul is giving the qualifications for a pastor, he states that the pastor must be "able to teach." What is interesting in this list, Paul does not include preaching. Therefore the two must be interchangeable. In Ephesians 4:12, Paul is describing the different gifted men God has given to the church and he mentions apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors/teachers. Notice he did not say pastors/preachers. But as we shall see momentarily, it is possible for a believer to have the gift of teaching and not be a preacher. But this has to do with more of a difference in role than a difference in ability.

The next gift that Paul lists is "**ministry**." In 1 Corinthians 12:28, Paul calls this gift "helps." This gift by far is the most prominent gift in the church. The church needs more servants or helpers than preachers for example. An example of a believer with the gift of

helps is Dorcus in Acts 9:36-41. With her hands she made clothes for women in the church. She was said to be "full of good works and almsdeeds."

These gifted workers are the behind the scenes people who serve faithfully for the Lord without the need to be publically recognized: nursery workers, ushers, greeters, sound system technicians, Children Church workers, AWANA workers, Youth workers, Hospitality Committee workers, etc. This word is also translated "deacon" in other Scriptures. Deacons are servants of the Lord and the church who mostly serve unnoticed. Acts 6 describes these men as quietly ministering to the needs of widows.

Another gift in Romans 12 is **“teaching”** or the ability to make clear the meaning of Scripture. A believer could be a teacher in a church, say in Sunday school, but not the preacher. So there is a distinction between preaching and teaching in that one believer may be a teacher but not the pastor of a church. As far as the ability to communicate God's Word there may be no difference. Our teachers are knowledgeable instructors of God's Word who care for their students. Elmer Towns from Liberty University teaches that a Sunday school teacher is like the shepherd of a flock. He/she not only teaches but prays for his/her student, cares for them and visits them when they are sick physically or wayward spiritually. It is a worn out but still worth while saying: "People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care."

The believer with the gift of **“exhorting”** is like a counselor. He/she has the ability to apply God's Word to people's problems. Barnabas apparently had this gift which earned him the nickname "son of exhortation or encouragement" (Acts 4:36). Barnabas encouraged people with his words and actions. In Acts 4:32-36, Barnabas sold part of his land and gave the proceeds to the poor believers in Jerusalem. In Acts 9, Barnabas put his arm around the former persecutor of the church, Saul of Tarsus, who was newly converted and feared by the early church. In Acts 9:26-27, Barnabas introduced Saul to the leaders of the church and convinced them that Paul was genuinely saved and could be trusted. In Acts 11:22-26, we see Barnabas exhorting the new converts at Antioch. Barnabas, however, knew the church at Antioch of Syria needed a teacher to balance out his exhorting. So Barnabas recruits now matured Paul to come on staff at Antioch and serve as teacher. In Acts 11:23, Barnabas is exhorting and after Barnabas brought Paul on staff 11:26 says they "taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." We call this staffing to your weakness. In Acts 12:25, Barnabas and Paul encourage again the famine victims at Jerusalem with a relief offering. When people left Barnabas' presence they were uplifted and better off than before.

The gift of **“giving”** does not mean that only these believers give. All believers are to give tithes and offerings. But this believer loves to give beyond the tithes and offerings. When I was a dirt poor college student there was a older man in the church who would very often give me a \$20 hand shake at church. In 1972-75, that was helpful.

The gift of leadership is also called the gift of **“ruling.”** This person is gifted by God to

motivate others to do ministry for the Lord. In 1 Corinthians 12:28, Paul called this gift "governments." This gift can be divided into two areas: Management and Leadership.

Here are some differences between leaders and managers. Neither is more important than the other, just gifted differently by God.

Leaders focus more on dreaming the vision of the future like Joseph (Gen. 37). *Managers* analyze the details of today.

Leaders spend more time looking for opportunities. *Managers* smooth out current situations.

Leaders focus more on people like Barnabas the encourager (Acts 4:36; 9:27; 11:26; 15:37). *Managers* focus on accomplishing tasks.

Leaders prefer high risks environments. *Managers* prefer safety zones.

Leaders have a bias toward creativity, fluidity, and innovation. *Managers* have a bias toward preservation, protection, and procedure.

The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament says that the Greek word in 1 Corinthians 12:28 *kubernasis* translated "governments" means "to steer a ship." An example of this gifted manager is in Acts 27:11. On the ship sailing to Rome were both the captain or the pilot and the owner. The manager like pilot was concerned about the daily routine of sailing and the leader like owner was a risk taker who saw the opportunity of making money and had already charted the course to Rome.

Stephen R. Covey teaches *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* for leaders who want to improve their gift of leadership. The second habit is seeing the End from the Beginning. This is what the owner had done before his ship pulled out of the harbor. This is how leaders think. Leaders think, "What do I want to accomplish in the next 20 years of my life?" What are the four or five most important accomplishments or ministries that I should focus on?

The last gift that Paul mentions is the gift of "mercy." This believer will be found at the nursing homes, or the hospital, or the widow's or widower's house showing care and compassion. As you read about these spiritual gifts did one or two of them connect with you?

After taking the step of identifying and understanding the operative gifts for today **Another Step** to discover your gift is the confirmation of other believers. In Acts 13, God called Barnabas and Saul to be missionaries and the church at Antioch recognize these gifted men and laid hands on them. Later, Barnabas recognized Paul as a teacher. What do people recognize you for? What do you hear people thanking you for? What do people request you to do for them? Maybe these are indications of your spiritual gift. No one ever asks me to repair their car. They ask me not to come near their broken down car. I do not have the gift of helps. But that same person will ask me to teach their Sunday school class or preach in their church.

The Final Step which should really be the First Step. Where did Paul begin in his

discussion of spiritual gifts in Romans 12? He started where we need to start if we are going to discover our spiritual gift and use them: Presenting our bodies as living sacrifices to the Lord. What is interesting in the Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts in the New Testament is how little he writes about to discover your spiritual gift. The emphasis is on loving God and others and serving Him and others will automatically happen. Once we have surrendered our lives to minister for the Lord then Paul adds that we are also members of His Body, the church. We should not think more highly of ourselves than we ought but we serve the body where He has placed us as a member. If we make this total commitment to the Lord and His Church, He will make sure we will know how and where we are to serve Him.

When we use the spiritual gift God has given us, the church is edified and God is glorified. What two greater accomplishments could a believer in love with the Lord desire?

Arthur T. Pierson gave a great challenge to all believers concerning spiritual gifts:

"Everyone has some gift, therefore all should be encouraged. No one has all gifts, therefore all should be humble. All gifts are for the one Body, therefore all should be harmonious. All gifts are from the Lord, therefore all should be contented. All gifts are mutually helpful and needful, therefore all should be studiously faithful. All gifts promote the health and strength of the whole Body, therefore none can be safely dispensed with. All gifts depend on His fullness for power, therefore all should keep in close touch with Him" (J. Oswald Sanders. *The Holy Spirit and His Gifts*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970, 115).