

Spiritual Gifts

Before we begin to look at the specific Spiritual Gifts the Bible lists, we should first be familiarized with Spiritual Gifts, the concepts behind them, as well as how they are to function in the church. This is such a touchy topic in church, I have decided to give it an entire section. There are churches today who will tell you unless you have the “charismatic gifts” you are not a believer, and churches that say that the “charismatic gifts” do not exist anymore. I do not believe either of these. Before we go on though, let's define the word charismatic and its corresponding term “charismatic gifts.”

In his excellent treatment of 1 Corinthians 12-14, D. A. Carson states that the word *charism*, “at its simplest it refers to something grace has bestowed, a ‘grace gift’ if you will.”¹ He goes on to show that the Greek term used in these sections means gift. The term *charismata* is linked with this term *charism*, and refers to the individual gifts themselves. This is the root of the English word “charismatic.” It seems that all the gifts are called “charismatic” by Paul. Today the term “charismatic” tends to refer to a special subset of gifts; prophecy, healing, the working of miracles, tongues and the interpretation of tongues. These gifts have taken on special prominence in some theologies and have been relegated to non-existence in others. Typically if one refers to oneself as “Charismatic,” it means you believe that the charismatic gifts listed above still exist. Vita Nova is a charismatic church, although, as Mark Driscoll would say, we are “charismatic with a seat belt”- this will be explained more fully below.

Before we get into theologies of the individual gifts, we should first ask, “What is their purpose?” The New Testament is clear that the purpose of the gifts is to build up the body. They are meant to be

¹ Showing the Spirit, D.A. Carson, Pgs19-22

supernatural aids to ministry and to the church. Everyone has them. That is not to say everyone has every gift. It is also clear from the Bible that some people have certain gifts and others don't. The gifts are meant to make the church more effective, holy, and sanctified.

It also seems from 1 Corinthians that there is an order to the gifts- that is some are more important or prominent than others. At the same time, that does not mean that the other gifts are worse. The analogy Paul uses is that of a body. All parts are needed, though not all parts are as glamorous or meant to be shown. We don't walk around naked because we understand physical modesty. The gifts are to be understood in the same light. Some gifts need to be more modest and hidden, and some gifts are meant to be on display for the world to see. That does not mean the modestly treated gifts are less important, or the ones on show more common- they are both necessary and used by God in the building of His church.

Now that I have stated that all the gifts still exist and that they are to be used to build up the body of Christ, we can get to my personal theology and that of Vita Nova. As I said before, we are "Charismatic with a seat belt." If you are unfamiliar with Christian terms, this may seem confusing. Let me unpack it. Sometimes when someone says they are Charismatic, what they mean is that they not only believe that all the gifts exist, but that everyone must speak in tongues to be a real Christian. I do not believe that. It is not in the Bible. What is in the Bible is that the gift of tongues exists and some people have it. This is what I believe. This is the seat belt. I do not subscribe to the Charismatic theology that says we all need the "charismatic" gifts.

On the other side of the fence is a camp called Cessationist. This theology holds that all the "charismatic gifts" stopped either when the Apostles died, or shortly thereafter. I do not believe this either. That is why I am Charismatic- but with a seat belt. The gifts are real, they exist, but not everyone has the charismatic gifts, and that is ok. I have seen and heard too many supernatural things to be Cessationist, and have seen and heard too many false supernatural things to be fully Charismatic. I think the Bible is neither, and we should follow it to the best of our ability.

That being said, there is freedom to be both Cessationist and Charismatic in theology at Vita Nova, and I have heard good arguments for both. Ultimately you will have to decide where you stand on this issue. D. A. Carson's book, already referenced, is a wonderful resource,

and I would direct anyone to read it before they made a decision on either side of the theological fence. (It is hard to understand at points, but working through it will pay off.)

It is hard in a few pages to do justice to the issue of Spiritual Gifts. Churches had been destroyed over it. My prayer is that each of us will approach these next few weeks with open minds and a willingness to be taught by God and others. I also do not pretend to be an expert in this matter, or others. The following weeks will expound upon the theology of gifts. Included is a chart of the gifts I believe are listed in the Bible, but even this list is controversial. There are some that would say “evangelism” is not a gift. There are some that think there are more gifts than those listed in the Bible. And there are people at all points in between these two extremes. I have tried to list all the possible gifts that the Bible lists. I may be wrong, there may be less, there may be more. Again, you will have to read, pray, and research this on your own. My prayer is that each of us will approach this matter humbly and patiently. If you disagree with anything taught or said, that is ok. I hope the following section helps.

On the chart in the following pages you will see a section containing a “starting definition” for each gift. This is not meant to be all inclusive, but as Tom Westbrook states “it is a first sentence, a place to start.”² Please add to the definition through your own thoughts, conversations, and research. After that, there is a box for you to fill in asking how you have seen this gift in yourself or others. Don’t feel like you “have” to fill this in. It is meant to get you thinking about whether you or someone you are in community with has this gift. If you or they don’t, you don’t need to fill it in. I would also caution you that telling someone they have a spiritual gift is a big responsibility. If they have a gift and don’t know it, you have helped their spiritual journey, and allowed them to step more fully into the plan God has for their life. You are helping them to identify what part of the body they are, and how they can serve Jesus better. If, on the other hand, you tell them they have a gift they do not have, you may be doing some damage. You will be guiding them down a path where they may find it hard to serve Jesus and his church, or become puffed up, or be crushed under the weight of the new responsibility they think comes with the gift, a gift they do not have

² Unwrapping Your Gifts A Life-Changing Conference on Spiritual Gifts, Tom Westbrook., 2000

and a responsibility they can't live up to because were never meant or created to.

As I have seen people tell others what their spiritual gifts are, I see the tendency in each of us to want to make another person feel good. This can lead us to telling people they have a gift they don't have because we don't know what gifts they actually do have. In the end though, this is more damaging and dangerous than just keeping silent. It is ok to not know what yours or others gifts are. I don't want to just warn against telling others about the gifts you see in them because I have also seen people come alive when their gifts were identified and they were allowed to live in them. We need to remember that this is a huge responsibility, but also a great gift.

The task of identifying gifts can be very daunting, especially when it comes to self evaluation and identification. The questions at the back of this cart are meant to help guide you into figuring out what your gifts are. It is not that these questions are magic, they aren't. They are just question I have found useful in the past for people to identify their gifts. Feel free to use other resources and questions.

There is one more pitfall I want to talk about before we move on. There can be a tendency to compete with others when it comes to gifts. This is exactly why the section in 1 Corinthians was written. People were fighting about their gifts, boasting in them, and trying to create a spiritual hierarchy based on them. Don't do this. As stated earlier, they are all from God, all good, and all needed. The other place I see people competing is not just in the possession of certain gifts, but in the number of gifts possessed. It seems that some people have but a few gifts, and others have a plethora. I do not know why God chooses to do this, but it seems He does.

If you have only a few gifts, don't feel bad. They are from God, and He in His sovereign wisdom chose to only give you a few. I would implore you to use them fully. The benefit to having only a few gifts is that you can work on them, cultivate them, and become something of an "expert" in them. This is a huge blessing, even though it may seem the opposite. People with many gifts rarely master them all, and what I have seen happen is that some are cultivated, and the others left to wither. The person with fewer gifts does not have this problem. If you only have a few, don't feel bad, rather thank God for His grace and learn to master the gifts God has given you. I promise there is enough depth and width in each gift, that even if you only have one, you will never be fully done with it.

I also want to warn the person with many gifts. Don't become prideful because God has blessed you with a number of gifts- He expects you to use them all! This is a huge responsibility. You will not be able to master them all like the person with only a few gifts, but you need to try to cultivate them nonetheless. Instead of becoming spiritually prideful at the gifts you have, humbly ask God to show you how to use them to the best of your ability, and how to promote a harmony between them. At the same time, do not despair because the person with a few gifts is excelling and you are still figuring out how to use your gifts. I do not think God expects the same learning curve for you as the person with one gift. Just as before, I ask that we would come to this section on gifts with fear and trembling, humility and teachability.

After you have identified your gifts and some other peoples' gifts as well, the chart asks the question, "What is possible?" I encourage you to ask God this question before you ask yourself. This question is essentially asking, "What would life look like if this gift was one hundred percent cultivated?" For example, a person with the gift of knowledge could probably read and write many books, become a star theologian and guide the church into the next era. A good teacher could take the theologians books and make them so appealing and approachable that everyone in the congregation could understand them- even the little kids. Think about what a full gift would look like and dream about how you could use your gift to the fullness that God could grow it into.

Finally, I would add that this discussion of gifts, along with the identifying of them in yourself and others should be done in community. The first reason for this is to make sure our theology stays sound. The second reason for this is that others often see us and our gifts better than we see ourselves. The third reason is that we can see others gifts and build them up by telling them what they are. And the fourth reason is that we are all part of one body, and the gifts are meant to be used in the context of community.

I hope this gives you some basic guides and context for the following part of the 1 Corinthians study. Enjoy.

Starting Definition	As I've seen this gift in myself or others	What is possible?
<p>Administration / Governing / Leadership – (1 Corinthians 12:29; Romans 12:8) This is the Spirit's gift to organize and lead a church, institution, or denomination to function effectively, orderly, efficiently, and wholly. One with this gift will set at liberty all of the Spirit's gifts to function freely within the body to apply the Spirit's fullness to administrating both the Kingdom's work and workers.</p>		
<p>Apostleship/Missionary – (1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11) This is the Spirit's gift to introduce Christ and the gospel where it has never been preached and leave indigenous churches. It is the gift to beachhead with the gospel, to be a pioneer missionary such as Paul, Carey, Judson, or Livingstone.</p>		
<p>Celibacy - (1 Corinthians 7:7) Paul does not include this in his lists of spiritual gifts in Romans 12, 1Corinthians 12 or Ephesians 4. It is doubtful that he considered it an enabling gift of the Holy Spirit. He used the term 'special gift' to describe his unmarried status. Celibacy is the special gift of God to a man or woman to live without sexual relationships without hazard of perversion.</p>		

Starting Definition	As I've seen this gift in myself or others	What is possible?
<p>Discerning of Spirits – (1 Corinthians 12:10) This is the Spirit's gift to discern the Spirit of God from the spirit of Satan, the angelic from the demonic, a human servant of God from a human servant of Satan, a work of the Spirit from a work of Satan, or a work of the flesh. This is God's spiritual discernment and perception.</p>		
<p>Evangelism/Evangelists – (Ephesians 4:11) This is the Spirit's gift of compassion for those without Christ and the ability to preach the gospel of redemption so that many will be saved. It may also be the gift to witness with power to individuals so that they may be saved.</p>		
<p>Exhortation / Encouragement – (Romans 12:8) This is the Spirit's gift to strengthen, encourage, and move others to action in the Spirit's power. It specifically encourages what is best and must be brought out in the believer, or what is hurtful and must be confessed away from the believer.</p>		

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<p>Faith – (1Corinthians 12:9) This is the Spirit's gift enabling one to believe God to act supernaturally at given times of special need or opportunity. All persons can receive faith unto salvation (supernatural birth). But this special gift is unto supernatural works. Manley Beasley says, "It is the gift to believe to be so that which is not so in order that it may be so." Hebrews 11:2 "For by this, or through this, the men of old gained approval." Robert Tuttle says, "The gift of faith is at its best when things are their worst."</p>		
<p>Gifts of Healing – (1Corinthians 12:9) This is the Spirit's gift to believe God to heal a person who is sick (spiritually, mentally, physically, sexually, relationally, psychologically, emotionally) and to be Spirit's instrument to mediate that healing. A part of the Spirit's gift of healing is the gift of compassion for those who are sick.</p>		
<p>Helps/Serving – (1Corinthians 12:28, Romans 12:7) This is the Spirit's gift to see people's needs, care for them, and meet the needs in Jesus' name. This gift of practical and applied love is a most valuable spiritual gift.</p>		

Starting Definition	As I've seen this gift in myself or others	What is possible?
<p>Tongues – (1 Corinthians 12:10, 14:2, 13-6) This is the Spirit's gift of a special or ecstatic language to speak to God in other than human language. It is a special way of praise or praying to God, not for communicating with people. It seems also to liberate a believer's spirit to praise and adore God in exalted worship of Him.</p>		
<p>Interpretation of Tongues – (1 Corinthians 12:10) This is the Spirit's gift to interpret what is spoken in ecstatic utterances to the rest of us. In 1 Corinthians 14:26-28 Paul writes that tongues in public must be coupled with interpretation for edifying Christ's Body, or it is precluded from worship.</p>		
<p>Knowledge – (1 Corinthians 12:8) Knowledge is the Spirit's gift to know WHAT God does and says. Utterance of knowledge is the gift to tell others with authority what God does and says. This is the gift to know what God is doing or going to do and declare it with faith. Think of wisdom as understanding and knowledge as information.</p>		

<p style="text-align: center;">Starting Definition</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">As I've seen this gift in myself or others</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">What is possible?</p>
<p>Liberality / Giving – (Romans 12:8) This is the Spirit's gift to give with grace, liberality, without holding the recipient in your debt. This is the ability to give without owning or controlling, to give like God gives, without demanding that the person in need be deserving, subservient, or indebted.</p>		
<p>Mercy / Compassion – (Romans 12:8) This is the Spirit's gift to give love and yourself to the needy, undeserving, and ungrateful. It is the gift to sense needs and bring peace and comfort to the needy. Persons with this gift make good intercessors and good helpers.</p>		
<p>Pastor / Shepherd – (Ephesians 4:11) This is the Spirit's gift to shepherd a congregation of believers so that they function as Christ's Body and grow in faith, knowledge and fellowship of the Spirit.</p>		
<p>Prophecy Preaching – (1 Corinthians 12:10, 31, 14:1, 3, 5; Ephesians 4:11) This is the Spirit's gift to preach God's message with clarity and power, to be God's spokesperson to His people, both forth-telling and foretelling. It is the gift to receive and deliver God's message to people.</p>		

Starting Definition	As I've seen this gift in myself or others	What is possible?
Teaching – (1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11; Romans 12:7) This is the Spirit's gift to interpret God's word to believers, new and old, that they may understand and grow.		
Wisdom – (1 Corinthians 12:8) Wisdom is the gift to understand the WHY of God's acts, truths, and doctrines. Utterance of wisdom is the gift to tell others with authority the why of God's acts, truths, and doctrines. Wisdom trusts and believes god. This is the gift to know why God is working and tell others why.		
Working of Miracles – (1 Corinthians 12:10) This is the Spirit's gift to be God's instrument of working miracles. These miracles are used by God to validate the truth of the Gospel.		

These starting definitions were adapted from Dr. Jack Gray, past Spiritual Foundations for Missions Professor at Southwestern Baptist Seminary.

Discovering the gifts that God has placed in you is an exciting journey., one that you will be on for the rest of your life. Start by writing down some of your own thoughts about your gifts as we've looked at the definitions.

Use the following questions to help you think further about how God has gifted you:

What things do you do well?

What things do others think you do well?

When no one is around, what things do you dream of doing as a way of following Christ? Do you have any abilities in doing those things?

What things do you enjoy doing, or get a sense of fulfillment from, or experience the belief that you have met a real need when you do them?