

Identifying Spiritual Gifts Within The Congregation

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The subject of spiritual gifts, important in the life of the Early Christian Church but too often neglected through the centuries, has recently risen into prominence in many areas of Christianity.

Apostolic believers learned early in their Christian lives the truth about gifts. When the young church at Jerusalem faced the complaint of discrimination in the administration of daily welfare, the apostles urged believers to seek out godly and gifted men to handle the problem. So the congregation chose men with the gift of wisdom. The result was an increase in the ministry of the Word and in the number of believers. The Apostle Paul wrote about gifts in his letters to the Romans, Corinthians, and the Ephesians. In fact, these letters give us three major lists of spiritual gifts.

Sadly, too often through the years, the church has failed to encourage its members to utilize their gifts. Pastor has done much, but people little. Perhaps we unwittingly discourage the development of spiritual gifts by feeling that as pastors we've got to do everything. All the while spiritual gifts lie dormant in laymen who could and should be sharing in the ministry by teaching, leading, counseling, evangelizing and in many other ways.

The author of this paper certainly cannot speak for those who will read or hear it, but it is his hope that he is not alone in his feeling of having more questions than answers in setting out to write a paper on this subject. What is meant by the term "spiritual gift?" How are gifts related to talents? How many gifts are there? What are they? How are the gifts of the Spirit related to the fruit of the Spirit? Do gifts differ from offices? Does the average Christian have just one gift or several? How may a Christian discover and develop his gift? Which are the gifts that we see in the church today as compared with the Early Christian Church?

As we seek to "identify spiritual gifts within the congregation," it would seem to be the better part of wisdom to review for ourselves the answers to some of these questions.

No Ungifted Believers

Every child of God has a gift or gifts. They are given to us when we become members of God's Kingdom through regeneration. Though gifts may lie dormant for months or years, they are given at our spiritual birth; they are ours because we are children of God. Paul emphasized the universality of gifts. "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Eph. 4:7). "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal" (1 Cor. 12:7).

Even those with wicked backgrounds are allocated gifts immediately upon repentance. Though Paul had been a violent persecutor of the church, even to sharing in the death of saints, the Spirit gave him gifts the moment he was brought to faith. The Corinthians possessed gifts in abundance, despite being only a short time removed from flagrant sinning (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Though not every believer is exercising his gift, nor even knows what it is, nevertheless every child of God has received one or more gifts to be used for the upbuilding of the church, and for which he will one day render account.

Gifts Are Varied

Just as many notes are needed to make harmony, and many colors to make painting, so many gifts are essential for the functioning of the body of Christ. Paul wrote, “For the body is not one member, but many” (1 Cor. 12:14).

We are not born equal. Though we share in the same Holy Spirit, who enables all believers to confess Jesus as their Lord and Savior, and who has baptized all believers into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:3 & 13), we are given different spiritual gifts for service. More than once Paul uses the analogy of the human body with its many members—eyes, ears, hands, feet—to illustrate the varied gifts in the church of Christ. “Ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular” (v. 27).

How many gifts are assigned to each believer? At least one, likely more than one, perhaps several. Can this not be inferred from Christ’s parable of the talents in which one man was given one, and another two, and another five? Though one fellow had only one, the other two had a total of seven talents between them.

Why do we get differing gifts? And why do we get the particular gifts we do? The Holy Spirit simply assigns to every man individually as He wills (1 Cor. 12:11; Eph. 4:7). “God set members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him” (1 Cor. 12:18). Distribution of gifts is by divine plan.

Therefore, no one should boast of his gifts. Paul asks, “Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why cost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?” (1 Cor. 4:7). Because our gifts come through the gracious working of the Holy Spirit, and not through any merit of ours, they should offer no occasion for bragging on our part.

Neither should we follow, nor idolize, nor become the devotees of any human leader out of admiration for his gifts. Paul warns against this error in 1 Corinthians 3, pointing out that those who exercise the gifts must not be allowed to overshadow Him who gave them. Leaders are only fellow-servants, gifted by the Holy Spirit for a particular ministry.

Your Gift Is Not For Your Sake

The story is told of a man who showed up for compulsory military service in Argentina objecting, “What good would I be? I have no arms.” They put him in the army anyway. At basic training camp, his commanding officer said, “See that fellow up there on the hill pumping water? Go tell him when the pail is full. He’s blind.” Gifts are given us to build up one another and to enable us to serve and glorify God together. The eye cannot say it has no need of the ear. If all were hands, how would we walk? Each part of the body is needed to serve the whole. The exercise of our gift is needed to strengthen other saints, and we, in turn, will be helped toward maturity through the gifts of others.

Gifts are for the common good, not individual glory. Paul put it this way: “The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit, withal” (1 Cor. 12:7). Spiritual abilities are for the benefit of others, the upbuilding of the church. It behooves us to discover and develop our spiritual abilities. Writing to the Romans, Paul listed seven gifts, urging their faithful exercise, and then added that we should be “fervent in spirit, serving the Lord” (12:11). Peter wrote, “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10).

A gift has been described as a special qualification granted by the Holy Spirit to every believer to empower him to serve within the framework of the body of Christ. Someone called a gift a divinely ordained spiritual ability through which Christ enables His church to execute its task on earth. Another definition terms gifts “extraordinary endowments bestowed by the Holy Spirit sovereignly and undeservedly on believers as instruments for Christian service and church edification.” These definitions point up certain facts and gifts, including their

source - the special gift of the Holy Spirit;
nature - spiritual ability, endowment, power;
purpose - service, or ministry, to edify saints.

In short, a gift is a Spirit-given ability for Christian service.

Gifts may be distinguished from talents. Non-Christians have talent, present from birth. Many unbelievers play the piano well, paint beautifully, sculpture realistically, master languages easily, orate eloquently, write effectively. But these are talents rather than gifts. No unbeliever has a spiritual gift.

Talents have to do with techniques and methods; gifts have to do with spiritual abilities. Talents depend on natural power, gifts on spiritual endowment. Speaking of gifts, Peter urges, “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth” (1 Peter 4:11). Talents instruct, inspire, or entertain on a natural level. Gifts relate to the building up of the saints.

Talents and gifts are often related. Literary, oratorical, artistic, musical, or linguistic talents may be avenues through which the Holy Spirit will use a person’s gifts. But writing, speaking, or vocal abilities are talents, not gifts.

One might use another example to clarify the distinction. Is teaching a natural talent or a spiritual gift? For a non-Christian it’s a talent. But when that person becomes a Christian, the Holy Spirit may intensify that talent with special power, heighten, reinforce, and strengthen it with a divine plus, to the edification of the saints.

Gifts may also be distinguished from offices. Many offices are mentioned in the New Testament—apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, teacher, elder, and deacon. These offices pertain more to the person, whereas gifts relate to the endowments given the person by the Holy Spirit. A believer would not hold a divinely-appointed office without possessing the corresponding gift. But it’s likely many Christians possess a gift without appointment to that office. Someone may well have the gift of shepherding (pastoring) without being called to the office of pastor. One may well have the gift of leading without holding the office of deacon or elder.

Also, the gifts of the Spirit differ from the fruit of the Spirit. Gifts have to do with service; fruits have to do with character (love, joy, peace, etc.). The possession of gifts does not indicate godliness of life. Though the Corinthians excelled in gifts (1 Cor. 1:7), their church was riddled with problems including divisions, fornications, and drunkenness at the Lord’s Table. It is possible for a church to be endowed with an abundance of gifts, yet be full of envy and discord.

The fruit of the Spirit is more important than the gifts of the spirit. Notice that the apostle Paul positioned his love chapter (1 Cor. 13) right in the middle of his long section dealing with gifts (chapters 12-14). Without love, gifts are but wounding brass, tinkling cymbal, profitless, nothing. Paul also wrote of the danger of exercising his gift of preaching to others, then himself being lost (1 Cor. 9:24-27). An analysis of the qualifications for the offices of elder and deacon

(1 Tim. 3:1-12; Titus 1:6-9) reveals an emphasis on the fruit of the Spirit, not gifts. The only gift qualifications seem to be aptness to teach and hospitality. Overwhelmingly necessary are spiritual graces (fruit) like patience, goodness, self-control, humility, love.

In summary, then, gifts are Spirit-given abilities for Christian service. There is not just one gift, but many. Because of their super-natural source, nature, and purpose, gifts are to be distinguished from natural talents. They are also to be distinguished from offices. They differ from the fruit of the Spirit, and rank lower in importance.

Which Are the Gifts?

In three different chapters in three separate epistles, Paul makes a list of gifts. These gifts vary from list to list, though with some repetition.

Romans 12:3-8	1 Cor. 12:8-10, 28-30	Ephesians 4:11
Prophecy	Word of wisdom	Apostleship
Ministering (Helps)	Word of Knowledge	Prophecy
Teaching	Faith	Evangelism
Exhorting	Healing	Pastoring
Giving	Miracles	Teaching
Government (Ruling)	Prophecy	
Showing Mercy	Discernment	
	Tongues	
	Interpretation	
	Apostleship	
	Teaching	
	Ministration (Helps)	
	Government (Ruling)	

Prophecy and teaching are the only gifts to appear in all three lists. Apostleship, ministration and government are found in two lists. Thirteen gifts are mentioned in only one list. A total of 18 different gifts are cataloged.

Many believe that that catalog is far from complete. They add various other gifts. If we are to stay with those listed by the apostles, there is perhaps one other which is identified as a gift which could be added to this listing. When Peter urges every believer to minister his gift, what led him to that exhortation was the concept of hospitality. There is close proximity between hospitality and gift in the text, "Use hospitality one to another without grudging. As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another" (1 Peter 4:9-10).

The list of gifts have been classified in many ways. One which seems to make sense characterizes the function of all the gifts under ministering. But under the general function of ministering, the gifts divide into two major types, speaking and serving, as stated by Peter, "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" (1 Peter 4:11 [NIV]).

Ministering

<u>Speaking</u>	<u>Serving</u>	<u>Signifying</u>
Apostleship	Ministration (Helps)	Miracles
Prophecy	Hospitality	Healing
Evangelism	Giving	Tongues
Pastoring	Government (Ruling)	Interpretation
Teaching	Showing Mercy	
Exhorting	Faith	
Word of Wisdom	Discernment	
Word of Knowledge	Miracles	
Tongues	Healing	
Interpretation		

Four gifts, the last two in each of the speaking and serving groups also qualify as sign gifts. The New Testament frequently speaks of miracles, wonders, and signs. The gifts of miracles, healing, and tongues all possessed sign value in apostolic times. The sign gifts are not catalogued in either the Roman or Ephesian epistles, only in the first letter to Corinth, where one of the sign gifts was causing problems. Also, the sign gifts have an authenticating relationship to the apostles, “The things that mark an apostle – signs, wonders, and miracles – were done among you with great perseverance” (2 Cor. 12:12 [NIV]).

Gifts overlap. This makes it difficult to separate some gifts completely from others. Certainly, prophecy incorporates some teaching. Evangelism also has some content of teaching. The gifts of ministration and of showing mercy are related. Several gifts seem to shade into each other.

No gift is restricted to either sex. All gifts are for both men and women. Even though a woman is not to hold the office of pastor, some women need the gift of pastoring in order to shepherd other women and children who might need their care. Women also require the gift of teaching to instruct other women and children. The gift of government is essential for those in places of leadership in women’s groups.

An absence of gifts does not excuse disobedience to God’s commands. Many gifts operate in the area of clear-cut commands. For example, the Christian is commanded to liberality in giving. Because a believer does not have the gift of giving, he cannot say, “Never pass me the plate any more; I don’t need to give, for I do not have that gift.” All believers are ordered to support the Lord’s work financially. Though some may be given a special ability to donate generously to the Lord’s work, all are to share.

All are commanded to witness. Because a person does not possess the gift of evangelism is no excuse for failure to evangelize. Some will be given a special endowment for evangelism, but all are enjoined to share their faith.

Because a believer has not the gift of prophecy, he cannot refuse to spread the Word as opportunity arises. When the saints were scattered out of Jerusalem throughout all the region of Judea and Samaria, they “went everywhere preaching the Word” (Acts 8:4). Many doubtless did not have the gift of prophecy, but all spoke forth for Christ.

Though a Christian may not have the gift of discernment, he is commanded to “prove all things,” to “hold fast that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:21).

If a saint does not possess the gift of showing mercy, he is not exempt from comforting the feeble-minded (1 Thess. 5:14) and assisting widows and the fatherless (James 1:27).

Though commands cover most areas of gifts, they do not seem to pertain to the signifying gifts. A pastor was asked why he did not encourage miracles, healing, and tongues in his congregation. After honest heart-searching he concluded that he should not promote these sign gifts because, as he read the New Testament to practice its commands, he had not found any specific orders to do these things. He could not think of any definite verse urging the believer to perform miracles or healings or to seek to speak in tongues.

The Holy Spirit knows which gifts are needed, and when and where. The church cannot prosper unless those needed are functioning in their place.

A Description of the Spiritual Gifts

As we seek to offer a brief description of each of the spiritual gifts let us follow the classification mentioned above, speaking first of the speaking gifts, then the serving gifts, and finally of the signifying gifts.

The Speaking Gifts

Apostleship: First on our list is the apostolic gift. The word apostle occurs approximately 75 times in the New Testament, in 19 of the 27 books. Because it refers to an office that died out when the apostles passed away, many exclude it from the list of gifts. On the other hand, many believe the gift did not die out. If “apostle” has a two-fold sense, in its restricted usage, the office has finished; in its broader sense, the gift still functions. Officially the apostolate ended with the apostles; unofficially, the apostolic gift persists to our day as the missionary gift.

The dictionary describes a missionary as a person sent by a church into an area, especially a newly-settled region or foreign country, to carry on evangelism or other activities. A missionary, then, is one sent to minister transculturally with church-planting goals. Linguistically, missionary and apostle are equals. Both are “sent” ones (Latin and Greek, respectively).

The missionary gift never comes alone. Other gifts are needed for effective overseas service, like teaching and evangelism and helps. But the missionary gift will enable the person to use these gifts transculturally. If no missionary gift exists, the person will have to employ his gifts in his own familiar culture. To witness competently across cultural lines mandates the missionary gift. Wherever a cultural gap exists, the missionary gift is needed if that person is to survive the strange environment, remain on the field, and do an effective piece of work.

Prophecy: A prophet of God was God’s spokesman. The Old Testament includes the writings of prophets, from Moses to Malachi. These men didn’t merely foretell the future, but rather did forth-tell God’s message, which concerned past and present as well as future. In the first century AD, before the New Testament writings were completed, revelation and special messages containing predictions concerning coming events were given people with the prophetic gift. But what about since the apostolic message has been recorded in Scripture for us?

God’s revelation has been finished. The Bible is our all-sufficient guide today. Until the completion of the New Testament, during the apostolic age, prophets gave necessary special revelations and reliable guidance. Since the completion of the Bible, in which divine revelation

is once-for-all written, the gift of prophecy is now identified with proclamation based on God's Word.

After the apostles founded the churches, the gift of prophecy was vital in the continued edification and correction of the church. Thus, it is not surprising to find apostles and prophets linked. A prophet proclaims the revelation of God's Word.

Evangelism: Though all believers are to witness, the gift of evangelism is a special ability in communicating the Gospel message in relevant terms to unbelievers. Though the evangelistic gift should be distinguished from the teaching gift, true evangelism must embody some teaching. There must be a doctrinal content to the evangelism. This gift is not restricted to the pastor or the professional. Philip, the only person called an evangelist in the Bible, was a deacon.

Teaching: The gift of teaching is the supernatural ability to explain clearly, and apply effectively the truth of the Word of God. The gift will find outlet in a variety of ministries. Some will be able to teach the little children. Other will be able to rap with teen-agers. Some communicate best with adults.

Since growth in truth is so basic, so vital, and so continually essential for all believers from the newest to the most mature, it would seem the gift of teaching must be given to many believers. Teaching and prophecy are the only gifts listed in all three catalogs of gifts.

Exhortation: The word exhort in the original does not imply being bombastic, vociferous, thunderous. It may be translated comfort, console, entreat, beg, implore, counsel. In essence, it is encouragement. The gift of exhortation involves the supernatural ability to come alongside to help, to strengthen the weak, reassure the wavering, steady the faltering, console the troubled, encourage the halting. The ability to exhort is a gracious ability. It uses not so much sharp admonition as healing words. It works with compassion, not throwing a confessed sin back in the confessor's face. Without condoning the wrongdoing, the possessor of the gift of exhortation will help the victim see how he can overcome. The gift is not so much exercised through public discourse, though this may be involved, as through personal counseling when one is called alongside in moments of misery. It may take time to encourage new believers, comfort the ill, counsel the perplexed, and strengthen the backslider.

Word of Knowledge: The gift of the word of knowledge is the gift which enables the believer to search, systematize, and summarize the teachings of the Word of God. Through it, the Christian is enabled to acquire deep insight into divine truth. Since knowledge helps others only when communicated, Paul speaks of the word or speaking of knowledge. This ability is closely related to the gift of teaching. However, in the gift of teaching, emphasis is on communication or utterance; in the gift under discussion, emphasis is on knowledge.

Word of Wisdom: Knowledge stored in the mind is useless unless it is applied. This principle pertains to divine knowledge, too. It's not enough to be able to grasp and systemize the deep truths of God's Word. Also needed is the ability to relate those truths to the needs and problems of life. This is the area in which the gift of the word of wisdom operates. The ability to apply knowledge to difficult situations, to weigh their true natures, to exercise spiritual insight into the rightness or wrongness of a complex state of affairs calls for the gift of wisdom.

Four major areas are suggested in which wisdom uses knowledge to achieve proper ends.

1) Defense before hostile courts. When Stephen disputed with Jewish leaders, “they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake” (Acts 6:10). Later before the Sanhedrin, his defense was characterized by such wisdom that the only answer the council could give was stoning.

2) Answer to unbelievers’ arguments. All believers are commanded to “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15). However, some have a special ability to meet attacks and to refute the arguments of unbelievers. Ability to answer critical attacks helps remove stumbling blocks which might hamper non-Christians from serious consideration of the claims of Christ. This discipline is called apologetics. The field of apologetics, which helps Christians subdue doubts, may have more value for confirming the church than for converting the world.

3) Solution to problem situations. Though all who lack wisdom are told to ask for it (James 1:5), some have special ability to resolve dilemmas. When Solomon was faced with the dilemma of choosing which of the two women was the rightful mother of one surviving baby, he certainly required the divine wisdom with which God had just endowed him.

4) Application to practical conduct. Both knowledge and wisdom do not necessarily reside in the same person. A person may be able to perceive the system of truth in the Word of God, yet lack the ability to apply these insights to life. Wisdom involves the gift of putting knowledge to work in daily experience.

The Serving Gifts

Ministration: Helps or Serving. The gift of helps carries the meaning of assistance, lending a hand. Its verb form was used by Paul when he told us to support the weak (Acts 20:35). A form of the same word was spoken by exasperated Martha, left alone to prepare dinner, when she asked Jesus, “Dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me” (Luke 10:40). Help here means literally, “to take one’s turn with.” Martha wanted Mary to do her stint in the kitchen. The gift of helps is the spirit-given ability to serve the church in any supporting role, usually temporal, though sometimes spiritual. The gift enables one to serve joyfully and diligently wherever and whenever required. Those served have more time and energy for the ministry of prayer and preaching, resulting in the blessing of others. This gift is not for helping the poor, sick, aged, orphans, and widows (which is really the gift of showing mercy), but for lending a hand wherever it will release other workers in their spiritual ministries, and to do it in such a way that it strengthens and heartens.

Hospitality: Peter commands us, “Use hospitality one to another without grudging” (1 Peter 1:9). Amplification might read, “Gladly open up your homes and welcome each other as guests, especially those who need a meal or a room overnight - and don’t complain about the inconvenience.” The gift of hospitality is that supernatural ability to provide open house and warm welcome for those in need of food and lodging.

Giving: Paul says, “He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity” (Rom. 12:8). Simplicity is an interesting word and has been translated in many ways. Literally, it means “without folds”—as a piece of cloth unfolded—and is rendered simplicity, singleness of mind, singleness of purpose, mental honesty, without pretense. When one gives from such openness of heart, one donates freely, with delight. He gives generously, with liberality. The person with this gift will give with a single purpose. No ulterior motive will ruffle the cloth of his mind as he gives.

Government: This gift is the Spirit-given ability to preside, govern, plan, organize, and administer with wisdom, fairness, example, humility, service, confidence, ease, and efficiency. It is significant that the names of the major offices of the church denote service. The word deacon is the word for minister or servant. Pastor is a shepherd, who certainly serves. The title minister really means servant. Genuine Christian leadership serves, not bosses. The teaching of the universal priesthood of believers places leader and people on the same level.

Showing mercy: The gift of showing mercy is the Spirit-guided ability to manifest practical, compassionate, cheerful love toward suffering members of the body of Christ. Paul included the gift in his Romans list, “He that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness” (12:8). Speaking words of strength in a sick home evidences the gift of exhortation, but going into the kitchen to cook a meal displays the gift of mercy. The gift of mercy is directed toward the saint in distress, the outcast, the poor, the underprivileged, the ill, the deprived, and handicapped, the retarded, the unlovely, the shut-in, the hungry, the alcoholic.

Faith: The gift of faith, listed by Paul in 1 Corinthians is more than saving faith. No one can enter the Christian life without exercising genuine faith. “For by grace are ye saved through faith” (Eph. 2:8). To continue the Christian life also requires faith. “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). However, not all believers possess the faith to remove mountains. The inclusion of mountain-moving faith in the list of gifts distinguishes it from saving faith. The gift of faith is the God-given ability to see something that God wants done and to sustain unwavering confidence that God will do it regardless of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Stephen, full of faith, was enabled to perform miracles. The possessor of this gift will limit his asking to only those things God wants. His desire will correspond with God’s desire. Faith is firm conviction that God wishes to do something remarkable. Faith thinks big—but thinks the kind of big God wants. The gift of faith cannot be demand, for like all gifts, it is spirit-given as the Holy Spirit wills. Also, the gift must be used, not boastfully, but lovingly, for though one has mountain-moving faith, but not love, he is nothing (1 Cor. 13:2).

Discernment: Though every believer is responsible for discerning the spirits, some have a particular power to do so. This is the gift of discernment—a special ability to distinguish between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. A person with the gift of discernment can discriminate between that which is raised up by God and that which pretends to be. He has the ability to unmask Satan’s trickery, to detect false teachings, and to ferret out false teachers. He has the ability to spot a phony before others see through his phoniness. Certainly necessary in every age, this gift helps protect the church against the wiles of Satan who in every age transforms himself into an angel of light, in the person of false teachers.

The Signifying Gifts

Miracles: The definition of a miracle as the term is used in scripture would be an event of supernatural power, palpable to the sense, accompanying the servant of the Lord to authenticate the divine commission. Our definition of a miracle, which involves the setting aside of the laws of nature by supernatural power, is quite restrictive. In this limited, technical sense, miracles seem a rarity today, though we admit their possibility any time God wills. However, the denial of miracles as customary today by no means rules out wonderful occurrences, remarkable answers to prayer, extra strength, abundant provision, and timely protection. These marvelous happenings cannot be considered miracles in the narrow view because the laws of nature are not upset. But in the broader sense we call them miracles because of unusual and timely providential interference in human affairs.

Let us remember that the Lord's dealings in the spiritual realm are much more significant than his workings in the natural domain. Calming the sea was remarkable, but not so important as stilling the tempest that storms in the heart of an anxious soul. Feeding the 5,000 was wonderful, but how much more beneficial to feed the multitudes the Bread of Life. Giving sight to a blind man was marvelous; but how much more exciting for a sin-blinded man to see. Raising the dead was amazing, but beyond description is the joy of seeing a person dead in trespasses and sins receive eternal life.

Jesus' promises to his followers, "They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark 16:16-18) were fulfilled in the miracles of apostolic days. But Jesus' promise that his disciples would do "greater works than these" (John 14:12) is being fulfilled today. The deaf-to-the-Word begin to hear. The lame start to walk in paths of righteousness. The purposeless become motivated to fruitful Christian living. The selfish make sacrifices. Those who wronged others make restitution. Those of whom it is said, "It would be a wonder if they ever believed," find Christ. These are the greater miracles.

Healing: This gift is the ability to intervene in a supernatural way as an instrument for the curing of illness and the restoration of health. The topic of healing receives minimal mention in the epistles. If we were obligated to seek this gift of healing which Jesus and the apostles had, certainly the New Testament writers would have so informed us in their letters. The gift was witnessed in the days of the apostles since it authenticated their ministry.

Certainly worse than body sickness is soul sickness. One can afford to live and die with an ill body, but to go out into eternity with a sin-laden soul is tragic. A body with crutches thrown away or wheelchair discarded is great. But a soul with sins gone, removed as far as east is from the west, is much greater.

Tongues and Interpretation: Tongues are referred to three times in Acts and also in 1 Corinthians. In Acts, tongues seem to refer to a foreign language. Many, who would agree that tongues in the three episodes in Acts refers to definite languages, hold that tongues-speaking in Corinthians is of a different nature. Many think these tongues to be ecstatic utterances which do not correspond to any known language. Scholars differ on the issue.

The gift of interpretation, when the tongue was a foreign language, would be the ability to translate by someone who did not know the language. In the case of ecstatic utterance, the gift would be to interpret the non-linguistic sounds.

The major purpose of glossolalia (speaking in tongues) in Acts seems to have been evidential; that is, to authenticate the Gospel messengers. At Pentecost tongues-speaking attracted a crowd, provided a springboard for Peter's sermon, and helped win 3,000 souls. After the Gospel was preached to Jews at Pentecost, the next major step in its spread was preaching it to Gentiles at Cornelius' house. This major innovation needed divine authentication. Tongues were used to convince the skeptical Jewish believers that the Gospel was for Gentiles too.

Again at Ephesus when Christ's finished work was declared to the dozen followers of John the Baptist, who had heard only of the forerunner, tongues offered evidence of the reality of Paul's new message. Tongues, "a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not" (1 Cor. 14:22), gave divine endorsement to this new line of apostolic action. Thus, tongues deserve a place among the sign gifts.

However, if at Corinth tongues were ecstatic speech, their value was directed inward, toward the speaker, for others did not know what was said. To qualify as a gift a Spirit-given ability must be directed outward, to others, edifying the church. Thus, uninterpreted tongues-speaking, though some sort of a spiritual exercise, falls short of being a gift, for it, edifies only the speaker. "He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church" (1 Cor. 14:4). Thus ecstatic speaking fails to reach the status of a gift, unless interpreted and thus edifying.

Identifying Spiritual Gifts in Ourselves and Our People

The story is told of a man and his wife on an around-the-world trip who arrived in Switzerland for a three-day stay. Checking tired into their hotel in late afternoon, they decided to eat in the hotel dining room. The evening dinner was excellent, but expensive. When they asked the waiter to add the cost to their hotel bill, he nodded consent, smiling in a knowing way. To save money the couple ate most meals out, but never had as fine food as that first evening. Receiving their hotel bill at the end of their stay, they noticed they had not been charged for that fine dinner. They learned, to their chagrin, that payment of advance reservations had included not only room but meals as well. They could have eaten every meal for all three days in the hotel dining room at no extra cost.

Isn't that a lot like many Christians? Unaware of what wealth the Holy Spirit has given them in the form of spiritual gifts, they go through life without using their resources. Is it not expected of us by our Lord to use faithfully the gifts He has given? If so, doesn't it behoove every believer to endeavor to earnestly discover and diligently use those gifts? But how?

Dr. Leslie B. Flynn, whose book "19 Gifts of the Spirit" was very helpful in the preparation of this paper, makes seven suggestions: Delineation, Doing of Service, Desire, Dedication, Development, Delight, and Discernment by others.

Delineation - The Christian must be informed about the many New Testament gifts if he would hope to recognize his own. Many probably have more than one gift. We don't want to overrate the nature of gifts by thinking of them as something impressive when in reality they may be quite ordinary. Instead of flamboyant, grandstand abilities, they may be silent, steady workings of the Holy Spirit, who does not come in earthquake, storm, or wind, but in the still, small voice and soft, simple way.

Any individual gift may be channeled into a multitude of ministries by different people. The gift of teaching may be used by one person to teach children, by another for youth, by

another for college students, or seminary students. Discovery of our own combination of personal gifts and particular ministries may lead us into a specific, even special pattern of service.

Doing of Service - Even if we thought we had no gifts, or were unaware of our responsibility to discover and develop our gifts, we do possess hundreds of New Testament commands which operate in the area of gifts. Everyone, without possessing the following gifts, is enjoined to evangelize, exhort, show mercy, and help. As begin to obey in these or other spheres, the Holy Spirit gradually unveils certain gifts. So we should get busy in Christian service.

Willingness to try something new may uncover a gift we never knew we possessed. Urging by fellow believers to some different Christian service may suggest a hitherto hidden spiritual ability.

Desire - Note your inclinations. How does a person discover his singing talent? He finds he is drawn toward singing, and toward those who have vocal ability. If a person has piano-playing talent, he probably is drawn toward the keyboard and bangs out a few songs. So with spiritual gifts. A person is drawn toward a certain area of service. Desire for a gift may well point up the existence of that gift. Desire for a specific gift suggests that an outlet will be provided for the ministry of that gift. To a degree, gifts shape our future. With a God of order, desire, gift, and calling are related.

Looking at the relationship in reverse, when God wants some ministry performed, he will certainly equip His chosen child with a corresponding gift. And along with the gift, he will incline that person's heart in the direction of that gift. Strong desire for a gift may well signal its possession. Or, to state it another way, a gift will usually be preceded by desire and followed by opportunity to use it.

However, we must be aware that desire in an individual for a gift does not guarantee it. The overriding factor is the will of the Holy Spirit. Final assignment belongs to him who allots to every individual believer as he chooses. Strong desire for a gift we never discover in ourselves should lead us to conclude that other motives have somehow clouded our hearts. We must place ourselves under the hand of the Spirit, assured that he will entrust to us that gift he desires us to use.

Dedication - Most of Paul's Epistles break into two main divisions; first doctrinal, then practical. His usual procedure is to lay a basis of belief on which to urge beauty of behavior. Romans, following this pattern, contains first a solid foundation of teaching on the theme of salvation, then appeals to dedication and devotion of life commensurate with this wonderful redemption. His appeal at the start of the practical section is "I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:1-2).

Then immediately after this appeal for dedication, Paul turns to the subject of gifts (v. 3-8). How appropriate it is that as one begins to discover a gift or gifts, that he dedicate them to the Savior.

Development - We are to be instruments, not ornaments. Consecrating a gift should lead to its cultivation. Desire for a gift should lead to its dedication, then to its development. The existence of a gift is a call to exercise it. Eyes are purposeless unless they exercise the function of sight. Paul advised Timothy, “neglect not the gift that is in thee” (1 Tim. 1:14). Paul also told Timothy to make full proof of his ministry (2 Tim. 4:5). Disuse of a limb results in paralysis or atrophy, so doctors order patients up soon after surgery. Similarly, exercise is the only way to prevent a gift’s lapse or collapse. If you don’t use it, you lose it.

Delight - When a member of Christ’s body is rightly related to the Head, that member should enjoy ministering his gift. Conversely, endurance instead of enjoyment, frustration instead of fulfillment, suggests your task is not aligned with your gifts. How wrong to assume that because we enjoy some particular service that this ministry cannot be God’s will for us. Or to deduce that because something is distasteful, this must be God’s plan for us. Wouldn’t God more likely assign us gifts the employment of which bring pleasure, not misery? Like Jesus, in doing the Father’s will we should find delight, not drudgery. It’s not surprising that the word for gift (*χάρισμα*) is related to the word for joy (*χαρά*). Joy comes through employing our gifts.

Discernment by Others - The crowning confirmation that we do possess a gift is recognition of this gift by others. As we are doing Christian service in obedience to the commands of Christ, others may see a gift in us long before we ourselves are aware of it. In fact, the joy and preoccupation of ministry may make us temporarily oblivious to the special abilities which the Spirit has given us. Thus there is the need of discernment by believers who surround us. A very important duty of Christians is to encourage a fellow believer when they observe a gift. We should also listen when our fellow believers tell us that we don’t have a certain gift. “Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift is like clouds and wind without rain” (Prov. 25:14). Others frequently recognize that we don’t possess a gift we think we have. Frank discussion with fellow believers will help identify our gifts.

An Interesting Case of Spiritual Gifts Analysis

In 1974, when Rev. Wayne Pohl began his ministry at St. Paul Lutheran Church LC-MS in Trenton, MI, St. Paul had a highly inactive membership. “People hesitated to commit themselves to church involvement for many reasons. Pohl said, “Most of which boiled down to one word—fear.”

After an evaluation by an outside group, which probed St. Paul’s purpose, philosophy of ministry, growth history, and local community they made a key decision. Each member’s spiritual gifts must be discovered and used in order to make St. Paul’s a growing committed healthy body of believers. To help that happen, the church chose Art Beyer, a former schoolteacher with a master’s degree in educational administration, to fill a new position: minister of spiritual gifts.

As a first step to helping members discover their spiritual gifts, Beyer drew up a questionnaire, which pinpointed the probable gifts of an individual. They call it the “Spiritual Gifts Analysis.” After taking the Spiritual Gifts Analysis, a person checks each area of service he or she wants to be involved in and is later invited to experiment in some area of involvement that directly makes use of the discovered gift.

Largely as a result of this systematic discovery and employment of spiritual gifts, the congregation has a strong and growing ministry. The statistics are dramatic

	<u>1975</u>	<u>1982</u>
Sunday Morning Attendance	318	896
Church Budget	\$118, 000	\$603, 000
Sunday School Attendance	210	800+

They feel that the church is growing because members are getting involved. For Rev. Wayne Pohl and St. Paul Lutheran Church, it is a sign that their approach to using members' gifts wisely and systematically has been blessed by God.

Conclusion

The well-known English preacher, Charles H. Spurgeon, visiting an elderly lady in an almshouse, noticed on the wall a frame encasing a piece of paper with some writing on it, so he asked about it. The lady replied that it reminded her of an aged invalid man she had nursed many years before, who, appreciative of her kind care, had written his name on it in his final days. So she had framed it. After much persuasion Spurgeon was able to borrow the paper. When he took it to the bank, they exclaimed, "We've been wondering to whom the old gentlemen left his money." Hundreds of pounds were standing idle to his credit which now were transferred to her name. Living in poverty for years, she had actually been worth a great deal.

It's possible for believers to live many years unconscious of their wealth of spiritual gifts. No wonder so much Christian service remains undone. If sufficient qualified workers seem to "be missing from the Lord's work, blame cannot be attributed to the Holy Spirit, but to those who neglect His gifts. How much hidden treasure might there not be in every one of our churches?

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