

Identifying and Developing Spiritual Gifts in the Congregation

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“Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant,” is the way the Apostle Paul begins the twelfth chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians. He encourages knowledge, not ignorance, about these things he calls “spiritual gifts.” From there on he spends the next three chapters instructing the Corinthians so that they would no longer be ignorant about this subject.

The subject of spiritual gifts is one that was quite important in the early Christian church but has too often been neglected and almost rejected in the church today. There is a great deal of ignorance in the church—our church—about spiritual gifts. Among the laypeople and the clergy (pastors and teachers) of the WELS and ELS there is little or no knowledge about this subject which Scripture treats at great length. The common response of our laypeople to the mention of spiritual gifts is probably much like the one I received when I told the Church Council the title and subject of this paper: a blank stare, followed by a puzzled look and the question, “What’s that? Sounds real interesting.” The response by many of our fellow pastors is perhaps even worse than the outright ignorance of the laypeople: “Spiritual gifts? No, we don’t believe in any of that tongues speaking kind of thing.” Even our own WELS Catechism (1982 “Blue” edition) doesn’t give the right answer. There, in question 225, we read, “What are some of God’s *gifts* which the Holy Ghost enlightened me to see by faith?” The answer, while it could be understood correctly (putting the best construction on everything), is at best misleading if not wrong. It says, “The Holy Ghost enlightened me to see by faith such wonderful gifts of God as forgiveness, peace, hope, joy, and comfort.” There seems to be much ignorance about this subject in our circles. Even I had not given it any serious thought until this paper was assigned even though time and time again I had read the portions of Scripture which deal with spiritual gifts.

On one hand it is quite surprising that our church bodies have so little knowledge on this subject. After all, we do pride ourselves as church bodies which hold and teach the whole Word of God in its truth and purity. But on the other hand, such a lack of knowledge might not be all that surprising. If I were to say that a group of highly gifted people were assembled in front of me today, all of you would sit up and smile (very humbly, of course) and feel quite good. However, if I were to say that this was a charismatic group assembled here for a conference your reaction would be quite different. The word “charismatic” has been misused and abused so much in the last years that the hair on the back of our necks stands up at the very mention of the word. Our lack of knowledge is perhaps the result of an over-reaction on our part. For whatever reason, there does seem to be ignorance where Paul says there should be none.

This paper on identifying and developing spiritual gifts in the congregation grew out of a paper entitled “Dealing Gently But Firmly With Delinquent Members” given at this conference last year. In that paper the author suggested that the subject of spiritual gifts be presented to this group as a preventative measure to the “dead wood” problem in the church. However, before we begin to figure out how to identify and develop the spiritual gifts within our congregations, it is a good idea to spend some time eliminating the lack of knowledge which exists by answering the question, “What are spiritual gifts?” That’s where we will begin.

What Spiritual Gifts Are

There are four main sections in Scripture which deal in depth with the subject of spiritual gifts. They are Romans 12:1-8, I Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:1-16, and I Peter 4:10-11. It is from these sections that we shall discover what spiritual gifts are.

The Bible uses two different words when it talks about spiritual gifts. The most common term is *charisma* (I Peter 4:10) or its counterpart *charismata* (Rom. 12:6; I Cor. 12:4) from which we get our English word “charismatic.” Both are translated in our Bibles as “gifts.” You will recognize the word *charis* (which means “grace”) in both of those words. Spiritual gifts, then, are first of all gifts given by God’s grace, a favor we receive from God without any merit on our part. The second word, used by Paul in I Corinthians 12:1, is *pneumatikos*. Literally, this word means “spirituals.” These gifts, then, are something given to us by the Holy Spirit himself.

The purpose of these spiritual gifts is also spelled out for us by Paul in I Corinthians 12:7. “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” In other words, God has given us our gifts to use for service within the church to benefit our fellow believers. That’s why Paul in Romans, I Corinthians, and Ephesians compares the church to a human body which has many parts, each one doing its function for the good of the entire body. Gifts are given so that we can all work together to get our Lord’s work done in the best possible way. As we will see shortly, every gift, every individual is needed, otherwise the work of the church will not get done satisfactorily.

We also note from the above verse (I Cor. 12:7) the important fact that every Christian is gifted, each one has at least one gift; most likely more than one. It is really a misnomer to speak of certain individuals in our congregations as “gifted” people, implying that some are gifted and others are not. Each Christian has been endowed with spiritual gifts. It’s true, not everyone may know what his/her gift may be. Gifts may lie dormant for long periods of time only to be discovered later in life. But every Christian, from the moment of regeneration, has been given at least one spiritual gift. Please note, too, that the gifts are varied; no two members have the exact same gifts. This means that every individual in the congregation is unique, specially made by God himself.

Every member of the Church has his/her own function within the Church just as the parts of our bodies all are different and have their own special function. None can be eliminated without expecting the Body to suffer somewhat. Everyone makes a distinctive contribution. Everyone is essential.

In short, a spiritual gift is a special ability given by the Holy Spirit to every member of the Body of Christ (the Church) according to God’s grace for service within the Church.

We will also note that gifts are given without regard to the sex of the individual. Men and women alike may have the gift of pastor, teacher, prophet, etc. Scripture may restrict the *use* of the gift, but not the gift itself.

Before we look at the individual gifts themselves, it would be good to look at a few distinctions. First of all, *gifts* of the Spirit are different from the *gift* of the Spirit. Every Christian has the same gift of the Spirit (faith) which brings him/her into the body of Christ. The gifts of the Spirit each one has for service will not be the same.

Secondly, gifts of the Spirit are different from natural talents. Natural talents are given to every person, believer and unbeliever alike. Of course, God is also the giver of these, but he often does so through human parents. They are given for the benefit of society as a whole. But while they are to be recognized, developed, exercised, and dedicated to God for His use and glory, they are not the same as spiritual gifts. These are given only to believers at the time of

their spiritual birth (not before), and they are to be used for the benefit of the Church. It is true that God may use a natural talent and turn it into a spiritual gift, but they're not always the same. That helps us understand why the person who is a very talented typist works excellently as the Church Secretary. But on the other hand we've all had the experience with the individual who was a superb teacher at the local public school but turned out to be a bomb in the Sunday School. He/she had the natural talent of being a teacher but not the spiritual gift of teacher. This is important to note later on as we begin to identify and develop the gifts within our congregations.

Spiritual gifts are also different from the *fruits* of the Spirit, (cf. now our Catechism question #225). The fruits of the Spirit are listed by Paul in Galatians 5:22,23 as "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control." Every one of these is produced in every Christian and has to do with our Christian *character*. Spiritual gifts are given in differing amounts and combinations and have to do with *service* in the church.

We also distinguish between spiritual gifts and our Christian responsibilities. Every Christian has the responsibility to serve, exhort, teach, give, witness, etc. But it is only to some that the Holy Spirit has given the gift of serving, exhortation, teaching, giving, evangelism, etc. This helps us and our people to realize that some times we are going to have certain limitations or greater abilities in the different areas of service in the congregation. At the same time, this will help all of us avoid the problem of "ducking" our Christian responsibilities.

Finally, there is a difference between a gift and an office. For example, men and women alike may have the *gift* of pastor, but only men are allowed to hold the *office* of pastor. In general we would think that a person would have the necessary spiritual gift when he/she takes that corresponding office. But a person may have the gift with out ever holding the office. Again, this will be very important to remember as we identify and develop the spiritual gifts in our congregations. Unless we realize this, we may overlook someone's gift simply because he/she may not hold the office. In short then, this is what spiritual gifts are and are not.

In developing the gifts which exist in the members of our congregations, it would be wise for us to first take a brief look at each of the spiritual gifts listed in Scripture and get a short definition of each one.

The Individual Spiritual Gifts

There is the old story about the conference of the Carpenter's tools. Brother Hammer presided. Several suggested he leave the meeting because he was too noisy. Replied the Hammer, "If I have to leave this shop, Brother Screw must go also. You have to turn him around again and again to get him to accomplish anything." Brother Screw then spoke up. "If you wish, I'll leave. But Brother Plane must leave too. All his work is on the surface. His efforts have no depth." To this Brother Plane responded, "Brother Rule will also have to withdraw, for he is always measuring folks as though he were the only one who is right." Brother Rule then complained against Brother Sandpaper, "You ought to leave too because you're so rough and always rubbing people the wrong way." In the midst of all this discussion, in walked the Carpenter of Nazareth. He had arrived to start His day's work. Putting on His apron, He went to the bench to make a pulpit from which to proclaim the Gospel. He employed the hammer, screw, plane, rule, sandpaper and all the other tools. After the day's work when the pulpit was finished, Brother Saw arose and remarked, "Brothers, I observe that all of us are workers together with the Lord" (Flynn).

It is remarkable that God has given many different gifts to His Church to equip them all for service. In four different sections of Scripture (those mentioned earlier) we have six lists of

spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:6-8; Eph. 4:11, I Pt. 4:11, I Cor. 12:8-10; I Cor. 12:28, I Cor. 12:29,30). In general, the list given by Peter seems to give two classifications of gifts rather than two specific gifts. Some are speaking gifts and some are serving gifts. To these two classifications we would also add a third category, sign or signifying gifts, because of the nature of those four particular gifts. All the gifts, of course, come under the main heading of serving or ministering. We would list them this way:

Ministering

Speaking	Serving	Sign
(Apostleship)	Service (Helps)	Miracles
(Prophecy)	Giving	Healing
Evangelist	Administration (Ruling)	Tongues
Pastoring	Showing Mercy	Interpretation
Teaching	Faith	
Exhorting	Discernment	
Word of Wisdom	(Miracles)	
Word of Knowledge	(Healing)	
(Tongues)		
(Interpretation of Tongues)		

At times it is difficult to separate some gifts completely from others because gifts tend to overlap. Certainly, prophecy incorporates some teaching; Evangelism also has some teaching connected with it. The gifts of serving and showing mercy are quite similar. The nature of some gifts shade into the areas of others.

As we describe the gifts which are listed for us in Scripture, we are bound to define them in light of (1) the terms used in the original text, (2) the examples seen in Scripture, and (3) the context in which they occur. We cannot define the gifts on the basis of present-day usage of words or current practices. With this in mind, we will now attack the job of giving a definition of each of the above 18 gifts.

Apostleship

The gift of apostle, together with that of prophecy, forms the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:19,20). The apostle, then, is the “bones” of the Body of Christ. It is what gives the entire structure support and makes mobility and activity possible. Apostle literally means “one who is sent out.” Scripture gives us a more definite description of an apostle. (1) In Acts 1:21,22 we are told that an apostle was one who had been with Jesus from the beginning (“beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us”). (2) He also had to be one who had to be an eyewitness of Jesus’ resurrection. (3) He had a personal call from Jesus Himself to preach the Gospel (John 20:21). And most importantly, (4) he was one who had the authoritative word by virtue of his intimate knowledge of Christ’s teachings and direct revelation through the Spirit. Based on this definition, it is my opinion that the gift of apostleship no longer exists in the church today. As there are none with the authority of the ancient apostles and as direct revelation ceased with the completion of Scripture, we would conclude that the gift of apostleship was a temporary gift in the first-century church (McRae).

There are those, however, that say that the apostleship gift still exists in the church today

in the sense of a pioneer missionary gift. Such a person has the ability to be sent to plant new churches in a culture different from his own; he has the ability to work transculturally. We would think of such men as Paul or Barnabas in this connection. This, however, is dealing with the word “apostle” in a rather loose sense of the word, dealing only with the “sent” aspect of the word. It does ignore the other qualifications of being an apostle. But since Scripture does seem to speak of an apostle in broad or narrow terms, it is possible that the missionary gift might be the same as that of apostleship.

Prophecy

Again, the prophets, like the apostles, form the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:19,20). The prophets were those who were God’s spokesmen, receiving direct revelations from God and speaking forth that truth to the people. Their task involved both *forth*-telling (exhorting the people for the present) and *fore*-telling (predicting the future). The main difference between the prophets and apostles seems to be that the prophets were not physically with Jesus nor were they eyewitnesses of the resurrection. Because there is no further revelation from God and since the canon of Scripture is completed, it is again my opinion that this gift no longer exists.

But again, there is some disagreement. Many suggest that the gift displays itself in people who can unfold the Spirit-given Scriptures to God’s people, making it relevant to a particular situation in a current context. He can grasp and explain clearly and effectively the broad, sweeping themes of Scripture. Here we would think of men such as Martin Luther, or perhaps, in a more current setting, the late Dr. Becker. But again, this is stretching the definition of a prophet.

Evangelist

Every Christian has been given the command to be a witness for Jesus, but not all have the gift of an evangelist. One with this gift has the ability to present the Gospel to unbelievers in relevant terms and with exceptional clarity. The end result is that people become Jesus’ disciples and responsible members in the body of Christ. Such people are rare. He/she must have a clear understanding of the Gospel—all of it. More than that, the evangelist has the ability to present the message clearly, telling of the overwhelming grace of God. In the Bible, we would immediately think of Philip—the only one in Scripture ever actually called an evangelist. In our own circles, we would perhaps think of men such as Rev. Stadler who narrated our WELS TCW Evangelism tapes.

Pastoring

The word “pastor” in Scripture literally means “a shepherd” and often refers to our Lord Jesus (John 10:11ff, I Peter 2:25, etc.). It does not refer so much to the *office* of pastor (which in the New Testament is called an “elder” or a “bishop”) but rather the act of shepherding people. It is the ability to guide (not drive!), feed, nourish and guard people by means of the Word of God so that people are led in their walk with God to a deeper faith and a more vital Christian life.

While it is almost necessary that someone holding the office of pastor have the pastoring gift, it’s important to realize that the gift itself is not limited to the office. Many Christians, men and women alike, may have it. Such people with this gift are extremely helpful in the Sunday School or youth programs of our churches—people who can guide and counsel the younger members to Christian maturity. Elderly Christian women can shepherd younger wives in family problems and domestic situations (Titus 2:3-5). People with this gift can help with counseling in

the church or in leading new Christians through home Bible studies to deepen their faith.

Perhaps more Christians than realize it possess the gift of pastoring. If more Christians would guide, feed and guard their fellow-believers, not so much counseling would have to be done by the pastor.

Teaching

The gift of teaching could simply be described as the special ability to explain clearly and apply effectively the truths of God's Word. Such a person would be able to take the whole body of God's truth and communicate and apply it in such a clear manner that the students themselves know the truths taught and are moved to apply it to their own lives—their faith is strengthened through the lessons.

This is one of the most important gifts as can easily be seen from the Bible. Jesus, in the Great Commission, said that teaching is one of the ways to bring people to discipleship. We are told (Acts 2:42) that the early church "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching." The gift of teaching is one of the basic requirements for one who would hold the office of pastor (I Tm. 3:2). And the gift is one that is repeatedly mentioned in the lists of spiritual gifts (four times!). Truly, those who have this gift are God's gifts of grace to His church. They will be able to serve in every area of the church, instructing the little children, rapping with the youth, and communicating with the adults. These people are most important to the life of the church. We will want to discover and use them.

Exhorting

The gift of exhortation is one of the most needed and most useful gifts God has given to the Church, yet it is also one of the most neglected and unused. Basically, the word "exhort" comes from the Greek word *parakaleo*, which means "to call alongside." A person with this gift has the ability to bring words of comfort, consolation, encouragement, awakening, and counsel to other members of the church.

In his book, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Gifts*, William McRae points out that the gift may either be prospective (exhortation) or retrospective (consolation). In the prospective aspect of the gift, the person will be able to urge someone to some course of conduct. He gets the person to say, "I'll do that." He/she will be useful in encouraging new believers or strengthening the backslider. In the retrospective aspect of the gift the person will be able to effectively encourage or comfort another in view of a past tragedy or trial.

The outstanding example of a person with this gift would be a man in Scripture named Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus. He was so gifted in this area that the apostles nicknamed him Barnabas, which means "Son of Encouragement."

A believer with this gift is very useful in the church. He/she has the basic quality to be an elder or a general "encourager" in the congregation giving the members the words of encouragement they need at just the right time.

Word of Wisdom/Knowledge

These two gifts we take together since they are closely related. Simply stated, the gift of knowledge is the ability to perceive, take to heart and systematize the truths of God's Word. The gift of wisdom is the ability to take that knowledge and relate and apply the truths of the Word to specific needs and problems of life. A good comparison would be the difference between a medical researcher and a good doctor.

Those with the gift of knowledge have the ability to absorb and remember large amounts of information, research the facts and put them into a systematic order. We would think here of a man like Melancthon who wrote one of the first Lutheran dogmatics textbooks.

Those with the gift of wisdom on the other hand, generally have a “practical” mind. He is a problem solver, able to get to the heart of a situation quickly and make a good, wise decision with little difficulty. Solomon immediately comes to mind.

Both gifts are still needed in the church today. Precious, indeed, is the person who has both gifts. He/she would be a gem on a board or committee within the church.

Service/Helps

As we move into the Serving Gifts, the first we come to is the gift of serving or helps. Many who have this gift see themselves as the winners of the consolation prize in the awarding of spiritual gifts. How tragic that they, and many others, take this dim view of such a marvelous gift. In many ways it is one of the most important. The church could hardly function without it.

The gift of helps is the ability to serve the church in any supportive role. Such a person is not the leader, but the doer. These people are the backbone of the church, serving joyfully and diligently (but very quietly) wherever and whenever needed. With their help, those in the ministry of teaching and preaching have more time to carry out their God-given abilities.

How unfortunate that we tend to look down on this gift! Without such gifted people we could not carry out a worship service in an orderly manner—they are the ushers, those who care for the altar and put up the hymn numbers. Without them our coffee hours, potluck meals and suppers would not be held. They are the people who provide free babysitting service for the choir members. If it were not for those with the gift of helps, our church properties would fall hopelessly into disrepair. A host of other small but greatly needed tasks would remain undone. It is one of the most important gifts of all!

Giving

All Christians are commanded to give freely and generously. It is a Christian responsibility. But there are those with the spiritual gift of giving. This is the ability to contribute one’s material resources sincerely and generously without any ulterior motives. Such people see a need in the church and supply it, doing so cheerfully without any fanfare. They usually request to remain anonymous. We all have probably known such a person, perhaps in our own congregations. Dorcas in the book of Acts may have been such a gifted person, for we are told that she “was always doing good and helping the poor” (Acts 9:36).

Administration/Leadership

The gift of administration is one of the most necessary gifts for the day-to-day functioning of the church. A congregation could not efficiently operate without it. This gift is the God-given ability to plan and organize an event and lead others so that the project or event can be completed. The gift enables individuals to see to it that everything is done in a fitting and orderly way.

Such leadership is done in a spirit of humility. The one with this gift will never act as a boss. Instead, he/she will always lead or guide people by means of the Gospel, motivating people to do the work out of their love for their Lord Jesus.

In the Bible we have good examples of people with the gift of administration. We think of people like Joseph, Daniel and Nehemiah. In our congregations today this gift qualifies one to

serve as the head of a Committee, direct the Sunday School or Vacation Bible School, or organize church functions.

Showing Mercy

Two Greek words are used in the Bible to describe this gift. They are *eleeo*, meaning “to have mercy, feel sympathy, have pity or have compassion;” and *antilempsis*, meaning “to take someone’s part, to help, to come to someone’s aid.” The gift of showing mercy is the God-given ability to feel genuine compassion for others and to take that compassion and put it into cheerful deeds to take care of the suffering. Such people give undeserved aid to those in need, to people who may not even be able to repay the kindness. The gift of showing mercy is more than just saying some comforting words to those in distress. It is taking those words and putting them into action. This gift is directed toward the saint in distress, the outcast, the poor, the underprivileged, the ill, the deprived, the handicapped, the retarded, the unlovely, the shut-in, the hungry, the alcoholic.

Faith

Every Christian has justifying or saving faith, for “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (I Cor. 12:3). There are those, however, who have the spiritual gift of faith. In comparing this gift with Jesus’ words in Matthew 17:20 (“I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you”), we see that this is the “mountain moving” kind of faith which God gives to people. This gift is the ability to see something that needs to be done and to believe that God can and will do it, even though it looks impossible. This faith thinks the big things God wants and asks for them. This was the faith of Joshua and Caleb who wanted to attack Canaan against overwhelming odds. Such people today dream great dreams and tackle great tasks for God firmly believing that they can and will be done. Such people are a great asset to a church council.

Discernment

The gift of discernment is the Spirit-given ability to distinguish between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. Obviously, this was a very important and necessary gift in the early Christian church. Because the canon of the New Testament had not yet been completed and because there were so many false prophets, this gift was imperative. Certain individuals were needed to determine whether a revelation was really from God or not.

With the completion of the New Testament canon as the divine norm for all doctrine and practice in the church, it would seem that this gift, while needed by the early church for its protection, is not in existence today. However, we dare not become too dogmatic on this. The gift may still be present in those who are able to quickly pick out an error in a book, a sermon or some other writing. Such people do exist and we thank God for them.

The Sign Gifts: Miracles, Healing, Tongues, Interpretation of Tongues

Because of their nature, I will deal with the sign gifts as a unit. Due to the Pentecostal movement, they have become the most well-known and controversial of the spiritual gifts. They deserve our attention, though not in great detail. First, a brief definition of each.

The gift of miracles is the ability to perform powerful acts that alter the ordinary course of nature, designed to authenticate the person and his/her message as coming from the Lord.

The gift of healing is the ability which God gives to certain members of the Body of Christ to serve as a human intermediary through whom God cures illness and restores health apart from the use of natural means.

The gift of tongues is the Spirit-given ability to speak in another real language, but one not known by the speaker.

The gift of interpretation of tongues is the ability to interpret the words of a person with the gift of speaking in tongues.

All these gifts fall under the grouping of “sign” or “signifying” gifts. As we encounter them in Scripture they only appeared at certain times when the messenger or his message needed to be certified as coming from God Himself. They do not appear on a regular basis throughout the Bible, but only at crucial times in the life of the church. Because of this, it is my firm opinion that these gifts no longer exist in the church. True, the Holy Spirit gives them as he determines, and we dare not try to limit His power or will. But since both the messenger or his message can be confirmed by the Word of God itself, it seems highly unlikely that the Holy Spirit gives this gift any longer. Add to this the fact that none of these four gifts is ever commanded as a Christian responsibility (as is the case with the other gifts). These four were simply temporary gifts.

These are all the spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament. We might ask, “Is this a complete list, or are there more?” Some do add more, such as hospitality, celibacy and martyrdom. But in looking at the list of eighteen gifts given to us in I Corinthians, Romans and Ephesians, we see that the list is surprisingly complete. God has provided all the necessary gifts to accomplish all the work in His Church from winning new souls for Christ to pouring coffee at a reception. Any other “gifts” which people would mention seem to already fall under the umbrella of gifts we have already studied.

This now brings us to our next task: identifying and developing the spiritual gifts which God has given to us.

Identifying and Developing the Spiritual Gifts in our Congregations

After the usual Sunday evening service, usual in that it was rather dull and boring, a young boy walked to the rear of the church with his father. Mounted on the back wall of the church was a large bronze plaque. Somehow, it had never caught the boy’s eye before. When he asked his father about it, he was told, “It’s in memory of those who died in the Service.” After a moment’s thought the perceptive youngster asked, “Which one, the morning or the evening?”

What a shame, what a sin, that people are bored with the truth of God! Christ’s Body, the most dynamic organization in the world, is crippled because gifted people are either being wasted or misused. One of our highest priorities as leaders in the church is to help our members identify and develop the spiritual gifts God has given to them. These gifts are an important and vital part of their Christian life of sanctification.

Given a 3x5 card, I would suspect that many of us would have difficulty listing our own spiritual gift or cluster of gifts. Being quite truthful, most of us would probably have to admit that we’ve never given it much thought at all. As pastors and teachers, we generally assume that we possess the spiritual gifts of pastor and/or teacher. One would think we have those gifts since we hold those offices. But just what are our spiritual gifts? How do we discover them? How do we go about identifying them in the people in our congregations? (All of them have gifts.) How do we go about developing the gifts which we and our members have? (For after all, as Paul points out in Ephesians 4:11, one of our main tasks as pastors and teachers is “*to prepare God’s*

people for works of service”.

The process of identifying your own spiritual gift is one that is to be initiated by prayer. This step is so obvious we often overlook it. Remember, the Bible tells us to pray about everything. So that’s the first place to start. And also remember to follow up each of the other steps with prayer. Keep in mind that the One who answers prayer is the same One who gives us our spiritual gifts and gives us the power to develop and use them.

The next five steps are really quite simple. Professor David Valleskey has called them the “five E’s” in a Bible study course which he wrote on this very subject of spiritual gifts.

The first “E” is to *Explore the possibilities*. Study the biblical list of spiritual gifts, taking some time to define and illustrate each gift. There are a number of good books on this subject (some of them are listed in the bibliography of this paper)—read them. Keep in mind that as you do your study, you have at least one and probably more than one gift.

The second step is to *Experiment with as many as you can*. Start with the gifts that seem to appeal to you the most. After all, that’s how you discovered your natural talents. Try the ones you like. But don’t stop there. Keep trying as many as you can. You may find that in some areas you may not have the gift at all. Keep trying, because you may find later on that you may be very gifted in some other area that you never thought you could be.

The third step is to *Examine your feelings*. After trying each gift think about how you felt as you tried the gift. Did you enjoy it? Did you find some satisfaction in doing it? Or did it make you feel totally uncomfortable or frightened every time you attempted it? Examine your feelings.

Fourth, *Evaluate your effectiveness*. When you’ve tried a gift, give yourself an *honest* self-evaluation. If it is in an area in which you are gifted, the Lord will confirm it by the ability you display. Keep in mind that you will need to be patient with this step. Just as natural gifts usually take some time to develop, it’s the same way with spiritual gifts. Don’t make premature judgments about yourself. Watch for some improvement. Sure and steady progress will be a reliable indicator of a gift.

The last step is to *Expect confirmation from the body*. This is a very important step. Gifts are not given for our own personal profit, but “*for the common good*” (I Cor. 12:7). It is the right and responsibility of our fellow Christians to judge our abilities. More than that, Scripture tells us, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9). We may think we are very gifted in some area when really we aren’t. A professor once noted, “It’s so strange to meet someone who claims to have the gift of preaching when no one has the gift of listening.” We may also think that we have no gift at all in a different area, when in all reality we just might have it. Listen to the honest evaluation and criticism of others. There are many times when they can see us even better than we see ourselves. Frank discussion with our fellow Christians may help us to identify the gifts we have or don’t have.

Identifying the gifts which our people have is quite similar to identifying our own gifts. That means that you and I must start with prayer. Pray that the Lord of the Church would give us people who are gifted in all the areas of the Church’s ministry. Pray that He would bless them as they discover, develop and use their gifts. Start with prayer!

After that comes the obvious task of making them aware of spiritual gifts—what they are and what their purpose is. Here I would strongly encourage a sermon series or a Bible class on the subject of spiritual gifts. Devote a sermon or class each week to each of the individual spiritual gifts. Describe and illustrate each gift to the people so that they clearly understand what each one is.

Next use some kind of a spiritual gifts interest finder (usually called a “Time and Talent

Worksheet”) or analysis chart. Samples of each are appended to this paper. These simple forms are invaluable tools to help our people realize just what different types of gifts are needed to make the whole ministry of the church function effectively. You’ll probably be amazed (if you haven’t been already) that a lot of our people simply aren’t aware of the different needs (gifts) the Church has. How often haven’t we heard a member say, “I didn’t know you needed that kind of help here. I can do that.” In using charts like these our people can be assisted in identifying their own gifts.

Another simple but very effective way to identify the gifts your members have is to watch and listen to them. If someone seems to have an ability in some area, notice it. If a member makes some kind of a comment like, “I’d sure like to try teaching in the Sunday School sometime,” that’s a good indicator that this individual may have some gift in the area of teaching. Along with that, it’s also wise to listen to what others say about their fellow members. When they speak either positively or negatively about the work or abilities of their fellow Christians, they might be identifying a gift you hadn’t noticed before.

We need to put our members to work. One of my own members has always contended that every member of the congregation should be on some board or committee. Even though he doesn’t have the faintest idea of what spiritual gifts are (he was the one who gave me the odd look and said, “What’s that?”), he’s saying the right thing. Instead of you and I trying to do everything ourselves, let someone else do it. They have the gifts for it. This will obviously call for some training on our part. We’ll have to teach them what and how they are to do the task. And we’ll also have to encourage them along the way. They may fall down now and then. It’s part of our responsibility to help them get up and get going again. So provide the opportunities for service and plug people into them.

Throughout this whole process we’ll have to continue watching our people and listening to what they and others are saying about the job they are doing. We or they may discover that a person is very gifted in one area or a group of areas. Then we’ve identified that individual’s gifts. Then again, we may find out that someone has totally flopped—and everybody recognizes it. That means that we, in a loving and evangelical way, will have to point out to the individual that he simply does not have that particular spiritual gift. But then get them active and working in some other area of ministry. Sometimes trial and error is the only way to discover a person’s gift.

Developing the gifts of our members falls hand in hand with the process of identifying those gifts. It calls for prayer, teaching, training, listening, encouraging, evaluating and confirming. Perhaps the most important part of helping our people to develop their spiritual gifts is by doing something we are already doing: faithfully preaching and teaching all of God’s holy Word, both Law and Gospel. For it is only through the Word that people are going to see the tremendous grace of God and will be motivated to put their lives in service to Him. And it is only through the Word that our people will know what the good and gracious will of God is for their sanctified, Christian lives—making use of the third use of the law as a guide. It is the truth that melts, softens and heals hearts, causing individuals to grow in grace and power. Faithfully continue to preach and teach the whole counsel of God. Without that, all our other efforts at identifying and developing our members’ gifts will be fruitless.

In this connection, one very important warning is also in order: Seek the Giver, not the gifts. If there is one place where many of the Pentecostal/Charismatic groups have fallen into gross error it is this: They have become so obsessed with the gifts themselves (especially the sign gifts) that they have made the Giver of the gifts, the Savior-God and His Son, Jesus Christ, of secondary importance. As a result, they have lost the truth of the Gospel. In identifying and

developing the gifts of our members it is of utmost importance that we continually hold the cross of Christ before them. Again, without that, all our efforts directed at identifying and developing their gifts will be misguided and fruitless.

The Value of Identifying and Developing Spiritual Gifts in the Congregation

To a certain extent, we, in our church body, have been making use of the teaching of spiritual gifts for a long time, perhaps without ever realizing it. We have looked for and appointed qualified men to serve on the boards and committees of our congregations. We have encouraged those individuals who seem to have some teaching ability to serve in the Sunday School and Vacation Bible School. We have searched for people to take over the youth programs within the congregation. When we find someone who really does the job well, we try as hard as we can to hang on to them and keep them in their positions. The congregation seems to function smoothly and efficiently with these people. We are making use of the spiritual gifts which God has given to them, and we've even made good attempts to help those members develop those gifts.

But at the same time there are many of God's people in our pews whose gifts are not being used—or even identified and developed. They are doing little more than worshipping. As a result, they begin to drift. There is also a lot of work in the congregation that simply is not being done. The pastor, teachers and a few hard working laypeople are not meeting the goals set for them by the rest of the congregation. As a result they become discouraged and even “burned out.”

Here then, is where we begin to see the value of identifying and developing the spiritual gifts in the members of our congregations.

As mentioned earlier, this paper originally grew out of the need to find a preventative measure to the “delinquent” problem within our congregations. There are many people who have wandered from the faith and left themselves shipwrecked on the shores of unbelief. What is it that causes this disastrous problem? Certainly, part of the problem is that the seed of the Word of God did fall on rocky or thorny soil where the roots of faith had no real opportunity to grow and develop. Closely related to that problem, however, is that many of those plants never reach maturity because they are given little or no chance to exercise and grow strong. We are giving our people the necessary nourishment they need for their faith to grow—we are faithfully preaching and teaching both Law and Gospel. But in many cases we are not giving them the spiritual exercise they need. Going to Sunday School/Bible Class and a worship service once a week simply is not enough for people to reach any kind of a spiritual maturity. We know all too well that if the people in our churches are not being fed and exercised properly, they will either go looking somewhere else in another church that seems to have more life, or they will leave their Savior altogether. It is wise for us, as the called workers, to keep in mind that a main part of our work is to help God's people reach maturity in their faith. Paul makes that clear in Ephesians 4:11-15, “It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.” Identifying and developing the spiritual gifts in the members in our congregations is

one of the ways we help them reach spiritual maturity, for through, those gifts, people are being given the opportunities for service which their faith so desperately needs. Then they stop drifting. The church grows instead of shrinks.

Hand in hand with that, other problems which tend to plague churches also are cured. The church that seems dead from inactivity comes alive again. God's people, using the gifts God has given to them, begin to practice the responsible stewardship of their lives. And with more people involved in the work of the ministry of the church, more gets done with less work and frustration for everyone. No longer do we have the problem of a few doing everything and getting worn out in the process.

There are two other important values that come along with identifying and developing our spiritual gifts. First of all, an understanding of one's spiritual gifts enables the Christian to set proper priorities in life. We've always been told (and we've been telling our people) to "put first things first." Our description to our people of "first things first" has always been something like "things of the kingdom" (Matt. 6:33) or "church work." Unfortunately, that's all very unclear to the majority of our people. They still haven't been told which "things" in the kingdom are to be first. The fact that our ascended Lord has entrusted each and every believer with a specific capacity for 'service implies that the first priority is to develop and use that gift. In other words, the man who is gifted as a pastor-teacher will not get himself buried in administration. His priority must be in his area. The woman who has been gifted with the spiritual ability of helps will not force herself into joining the evangelism committee just because she has been told that it's her Christian responsibility to witness for Christ.

Secondly, a proper knowledge of the teaching of spiritual gifts and of one's own gifts will help each individual Christian with self-acceptance. Here we find two major problems that affect just about every Christian: pride or pessimism.

Pride plagues more than one or two people in our congregations. There are those who do spend great amounts of time and effort doing the congregation's work. But it can go to their heads, thinking that the church simply could not function without them. Even we, as called workers, suffer from the disease of pride. We hear ourselves complaining too often of the "I-have-to-do-it-all-around-here" syndrome. We even speak glowingly of the humble service we give to the church. Yet, at the same time, we are rather proud of all that we accomplish in the church in all the areas of ministry even if it isn't supposed to be our job. There is an account of a congregation which gave its pastor a medal for his humility, but took it away again because he wore it. Pride affects the church.

Pessimism is the opposite disease which cripples many in our churches and even ourselves. How many of our people consider themselves as being worthless and heap tremendous amounts of guilt upon themselves simply because they cannot do the same tasks or the same amounts of work as some of their fellow Christians might be able to perform? Sarah's gift is that of being a good wife, mother and server at the coffee hours. She looks down on herself and feels guilty because she can't accept the job of organizing a school lunch program and run the ladies' aid as Mary does.

Pessimism strikes even ourselves as pastors and teachers. We see and hear the many different things our fellow workers do, the classes they write and teach, the sermons they preach, the articles they publish. We compare ourselves to them and feel guilt because, as we tell ourselves, "I *should* be doing all those things too." Pessimism combined with guilt kills our self-acceptance.

However, when one properly understands spiritual gifts, then the problems of pride and

pessimism disappear. Remember, they are gifts of *grace*, which God gives as He sees fit without any merit on our part. We are not to take pride in our abilities, as if we had somehow earned or merited them. Our attitude is to be that which Jesus speaks of in Luke 17:10, "So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'" Nor are we to look down upon ourselves as worthless individuals, filled with guilt over the lack of our abilities in certain areas of ministry. We are God's special, redeemed people, purchased with the precious blood of God's own Son. More than that, we are people whom He, in grace, has given special gifts for use in His Kingdom. That makes us extremely valuable people who have been gifted to serve our Lord in the special, unique way that He has enabled us.

Spiritual gifts do have a tremendous value for the work which God has called His Church to do. We, the Church, are His instrument to reach the world with the saving message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The world needs this ministry desperately. Worldlings will never come to the church to find Christ. The church is to be in the world lighting up the darkness of unbelief. It is for this purpose that God has entrusted His people with all the necessary gifts to accomplish this work.

It is more than possible that many of God's people have lived for years without ever realizing that God has given them gifts for use in His kingdom. It is no wonder that much Christian service remains undone. It is our task to instruct them and guide them in the use of their gifts.

It is also possible that many of God's people have left their gifts to cool almost to ashes. To such we need to give the encouragement to "fan into flames the gift of God" (2 Tm. 1:6).

God has placed us here to do His business. It is our business to see to it that the Gospel is preached and that our fellow believers grow to maturity in their Christian faith. God has equipped us and all believers with gifts. He now calls us to learn of those gifts and to put them to use. Then His work in this world will be done.

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