

Congratulations You're Gifted!

Spiritual Gifts

"Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus be cursed,' and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit. There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines." (1 Corinthians 12:1-11 NIV)

A Parable

Once upon a time there was a prince who had a magnificent garden. The fruit trees were laden all the year round with mouth-watering treasures. The flower garden was always a glorious flash of colour. As for the vegetable garden - you've never seen anything so good. Surrounding the garden was a high wall. But one day the prince threw open the gates and said "Anyone who wants to, can come in" Many didn't, but a lot did. "Everything you want is supplied" explained the prince. "Use all the equipment you want. I'm going away to my Father. You'll be able to keep the garden in just as good a condition as I have."

The people had a marvellous time. But gradually the place began to run-down. Weeds over-ran the vegetable garden. Blight destroyed the tomatoes. Brown rot destroyed the peaches. Creepers took over the trees. As a result people began to get sickly. And very discouraged. And they were puzzled. The prince had seemed such a wonderful man. Yet the garden didn't stay in the good condition that he had promised. All the time there was a glorious white building in the garden. It was so splendid that they didn't dare go in. On the door was the label "tools". That meant nothing to them because nobody had ever used or even seen a tool before. Finally in desperation one group dared to go in. Sure enough inside the building was row upon row of bright shiny tools. And on the shelves were cans of insecticide and spray.

The group grabbed some of the equipment and rushed outside. Then the riot began. One man with a scythe wildly sliced through the garden. mowing down the cabbages as well as the weeds. Another poisoned the beehive as well as the white butterfly. Another sawed down entire fruit-trees. This put the garden into an uproar. One group withdrew to a far corner of the garden saying. "Keep those tools away from here. They're too dangerous". The second group, the wild tool swingers. mocked them calling them "the freezers". The rest of the people stood in the middle just confused. Finally the confused middle group said. "Let's look at those tools again. After all the prince did say 'You'll be able to keep it in as good shape as I have.' There must be something in these tools."

They got out the tools and began using them. It took time, because they had never used these tools before. Slowly they learned the skill of using them. Their part of the garden gradually improved. Eventually it was as good as it had ever been. Their health improved too. The swingers noticed the contrast between this beauty and their chaos. They began to tone down and use the tools properly. The freezers could see something in it too and they started to use the tools. So there was harmony again. The garden was magnificent and their health was first-class. Just the way it was meant to be.

Discover your Gifts, Develop your Gifts, Use Your Gifts.

My goal in teaching on the gifts of the Holy Spirit is to build up the church. I want us to become strong and effective Christians. In the past, some teaching on spiritual gifts has generated more heat than light. In five weeks I can't cover everything, but I do want us to discover our spiritual gifts and find a place to use them. I'm making two assumptions in this teaching series. I'm assuming that you accept that all of the spiritual gifts mentioned in scripture are still given to the church today, and that what we do have described in scripture is an indication of the huge variety of gifts that God generously lavishes on his children.

As we go through this series I want you to bring a pen each week, and use the cards we have supplied for you. On the back of the card are some questions to help you discover your gifts, some suggestions as to ways you can develop your gifts, and some spheres of service where you can use them. Try to remember to bring the card back each week.

Varieties of Gifts

Our God is a God of endless variety. No two of us are the same. No two blades of grass are the same. No two grains of sand. No two snowflakes. No two Christians have the same combination of gifts. Each one of us is unique. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, Romans and Ephesians, he wasn't setting out to make an exclusive list of gifts, but picking out gifts from a large total. Gifts are as varied as human personality. Most theologians see the biblical lists as a sampling of all that God gives. Over the coming weeks we are going to study the gifts listed in Paul's letters to the Corinthian church, the church in Rome, in Ephesus and we are going to look at reference to spiritual gifts in Peter's first letter and also in Hebrews. There are about 30 gifts mentioned in scripture altogether. Some are mentioned more than once. There are at least 19 different gifts mentioned in the New Testament. All these come from the one giver – a God who loves his children and spoils them with gifts.

Wisdom. – “A God given ability to apply spiritual truth effectively to meet a need in a specific situation.”

It's a God given insight that can't be seen or understood using our natural abilities. It's the ability to make the right decisions, or to say the right thing in the right situation. To be able to get to the heart of a problem quickly.

Years ago I remember the Lord giving me this gift in a particular situation. We had been praying for a couple that we knew, and had invited them round for a meal. We believed that the Lord was going to give us the opportunity that night to talk to them about Jesus. As they came through the door, the first thing Tim said was "There are two things I don't want to talk about - politics and religion". My heart sank. But I prayed one of those quick "Help me Lord" prayers, and I found myself saying. "Tell me about that Tim. For me, what you call religion is the most important part of my life. How come that subject is off limits for you?" For the rest of the evening we talked about why he didn't like talking about religion. The only time in the whole evening when he was really quiet was when I explained to him about where Jesus fits, and why the Cross is so central to my Christian faith.

The gift of wisdom is not the storing up of life experience, but something that God gives you to say that applies the truth of scripture to a given situation. In Acts 6:8 we read how Stephen used this gift. He was full of God's grace and power. He had some pretty high powered people who wanted to argue with him about Jesus. The scripture says ***"These men began to argue with Stephen, but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke" (Acts 6:10 NIV)***

You see it's not our own wisdom, but wisdom given by the Spirit in a particular situation. Jesus promised us this wisdom. ***"But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict."* (Luke 21:12 NIV)**

The gift of wisdom is a powerful thing that can break through all sorts of difficult situations. Do you need this gift? Ask the Lord for it and see what happens this week.

Knowledge. "The God given ability to bring truth through a revelation from God or through a biblical insight."

This is God given insight into something outside our own natural understanding. It doesn't come about by education or even observation, but by revelation. It can be knowledge about God, or about other people. When Jesus was speaking with the Samaritan woman that he met at a well, he told her she had had five husbands, and the man she was living with now was not her husband. How did he know that about a woman he had never met before? It was a revelation from God.

I've seen God use this gift in powerful ways. Have you ever had someone pray for you, and in that prayer they start praying for a whole lot of things they don't know about that are exactly right for your life?

F B. Meyer was a great preacher in an earlier generation. He was once preaching in the Free Assembly hall in Edinburgh in Scotland. In the middle of his sermon, he just stopped for a moment and said "There is a young man in this congregation who owes his employer 3 pounds 18 shillings. Until that sum is repaid, you will never have peace with God. After the service a young man who F. B. Meyer had never met came forward and gave his life to Christ. He owed his employer 3 pounds 18 shillings exactly.

Sam Storms tells the story of a woman in a conference where he was speaking in 1997 who was suffering from asthma since she was 12. When she was 17 it became markedly worse. She also had chronic bronchitis and repeated bouts of pneumonia, despite being on steroids and antibiotics. At the end of the conference a man came to the microphone and said this – "There is a lady here today whose name I don't know, but the Lord told me she has dark hair. When you were 17 years old you became quite ill, which aggravated your chronic respiratory problems. I would like to pray for you today. It may be the Lord wants to heal you." She was prayed for and was instantly healed, and hasn't had a health problem in five years.

Faith "The God given ability to act on Gods promises with confidence and unwavering belief in God's ability to fulfil his purposes."

The spiritual gift of faith is the supernatural ability to trust God beyond what other believers are able. People with this gift have the irresistible knowledge that God will intervene. This kind of faith moves mountains. A couple of times I've visited the Crystal Cathedral church in California. When Robert Schuller was building that huge glass church, he used his gift of faith. On one occasion he approached a wealthy local businessman, who was not a Christian, and asked him for \$1 million towards the building of his church. The man looked at Schuller and said "anyone that has the gall to ask me that confidently deserves it" and wrote him a cheque for \$1 million. George Muller had the spiritual gift of faith. With no money he set up orphanages for abandoned children in England. When there was no food to feed the children, he would sit them at the tables, thank the Lord for what they were about to receive, and then wait for the Lord to provide. Then there would be a knock at the door, and there would be someone delivering bread or vegetables.

The book "God's Smuggler" is the story of a remarkable Dutch Christian named Brother Andrew. When communist countries in eastern Europe were closed to Christians coming in from the West, Brother Andrew and people from his organisation would smuggle bibles into these Communist Countries. In his book he tells story after story of driving to a border checkpoint with a car weighed down with bibles, and every car in the line being thoroughly searched. He would pray in faith, and again and again, when it was his turn, they would wave him through. People with this spiritual gift can't understand why every Christian doesn't just trust God the way they do. They are just full of confidence in Gods ability to do things. They are wonderful people to be around. Do you have this gift? Thank God if you do.

Healing "Gods enabling to restore people, through His power, to wholeness."

We tend to think of this in terms of physical healing, but the original Greek language is in the plural. It's a gift of healings. It's not just limited to the healing of people's bodies, but with the healing of the whole person – bodies, emotions, spirits, minds. There is a lot of confusion and heartache over this gift, and some things claimed as healing that are not. I wish I had time to teach more on this. Let me touch on a few things.

There are some Christians who teach that we should never be sick, but there are plenty of New Testament examples of Godly people who were not healed – Timothy, Trophimus, Epaphroditus & Paul. There are some who teach that faith is the key. If you have enough faith, you will be healed, but the Bible doesn't teach faith healing, it teaches Divine healing. It's the power of God and the presence of faith that brings healing, not the pressure of our faith on the reluctance of God. The key element in the exercise of this gift is that God is Sovereign, and he is free to do whatever he wants. Does it surprise you that there are only three instances in the Book of Acts that describe physical healing? Peter, Philip and Paul had this gift. I don't have this gift, but I still pray for people who need healing, because I would rather pray and only see a few people healed, than not pray at all.

We need this gift exercised in the church. There are many times when I have cried out to the Lord and asked Him where the people are in the church who pray for those in need of healing, and consistently see God answer. If you have this gift, come and talk to one of the Pastoral Staff or the Elders, because we want to use you.

"Why can't we do that?"

When we read the account of the early church we are often confronted with the question "Why can't we do that?" Spiritual gifts are ultimately about doing things in the power of the Holy Spirit. Gifts are one of the main channels for Gods power. Spiritual Gifts are the presence of God within us. Gifts are God going public among his people. We are meant to be a people who are living in the power of the Spirit, doing things in his strength, and using the gifts he has given to be effective for him in the world.

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