

# **Your Spiritual Gifts Will Help Your Church Grow**

## ***Spiritual Gifts***

***"Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully"***  
***(Romans 12:4 – 8 NIV)***

***"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."*** (Ephesians 4:11-13 NIV)

### **Gifts are to use, not keep.**

Norah Jones is a singer with an amazing voice. When she was 5 years old she started singing in a church choir. When she was seven she started piano lessons. At 16 she started singing in public. Now at 31 years of age she is an accomplished jazz/blues pianist and singer, and winner of a Grammy award. So many people appreciate her voice that when she sings, people listen. When she releases a CD, thousands of people get to enjoy her voice. Now how would you feel if you were God, and you gave Norah Jones the gift of this amazing voice, and she only used it to sing to herself in the shower or only did concerts for her family? Wouldn't that be a tragedy?

We sometimes speak of spiritual gifts as if we possess them, as if they are our property to keep forever. But believers don't possess gifts. The gift doesn't become our property. We receive them from God when he wants to use us to meet a particular need. They are the tools given to use to accomplish the ministry He wants us to do. A spiritual gift isn't a static possession. It's a dynamic power we are given to accomplish what God wants us to do. They are given to benefit others. You can't accumulate a spiritual gift as some sort of trophy. It's a grace gift given for the moment. So in one sense, the little booklets you have been filling in week by week are not lists of gifts that will be yours for all time, but are only indicators of the ways the Lord has used you in the past. So discovering and using spiritual gifts is an ongoing adventure that lasts a lifetime.

### **Leadership "The God given ability to cast vision, motivate and direct people to harmoniously accomplish the purposes of God"**

Oliver Wendell Holmes was a famous judge of the United States Supreme Court. He once got on a train, but couldn't find his ticket. The ticket collector recognised him as he was fumbling through his pockets, and said to him "Look Mr Holmes – we trust you. When you find your ticket, just mail it to the railroad." This eminent judge looked the ticket collector in the eye and said "Young man that isn't my problem at all. I want to find my ticket so I can find out where in the blazes I'm going!"

The New Testament word used for leadership comes from a word for a person who stands in the bow of a boat to point the way to a destination and to guide around the dangers on the way. This person not only has to see where to go and how to get the boat to the destination, but how to get everyone to use their gifts and work together to make it happen.

It's often a lonely place to be, because the leader has to trust God for things they sometimes can't fully see themselves, and those who are following can't see at all. Andy Stanley leads the North Point Community Church in Atlanta Georgia. He and a few friends have grown a church for those who don't go to church from nothing in 1995 to over 25,000 today.

Listen to what he says about leadership. (*Video Clip – "From Foyer To Kitchen"*).

The leadership gift is not the same as holding a position of leadership. I've seen many people in leadership positions in churches who didn't have the gift, and it was awful for them and awful for the church. I've seen others who do have the gift who are not holding positions of leadership who nevertheless exercise leadership. The leadership gift is not the same as having a dynamic personality. Not all leaders are extroverts. Some of them are not very good with words, but they are still leaders. Moses was one of the best leaders Israel ever had, but he wasn't much good with words.

How do you tell if a person has his gift? The simplest way I know is to see if there is anyone following. If you think you are a leader, but no one is following, you are simply taking a walk. The best leaders are those who are seen to be following Christ. If you have this gift, use it.

**Mercy. "The God given ability to cheerfully and practically help those who are suffering or are in need. Compassion that acts."**

Mercy is a God given supersensitive ability that causes the person with this gift to feel the discomfort of those who are suffering. It's the ability to feel for and with a person in misery that reaches out to relieve the distress. People with this gift can only get relief from the distress they feel by reaching out in compassion to others, just in the same way as the teacher has to teach, and the evangelist has to share the gospel, and the leader has to lead in order to find fulfilment in serving Christ. These people squirm and feel tense when they see others hurting. People with this gift often find their way into social movements and professions that concentrate on eliminating conditions that cause suffering. The dominant characteristic in their lives is compassion. People with this gift can be exploited by the manipulative, but God in His grace often gives the gift of discernment to go alongside this gift to protect those with the gift of mercy. It's a gift that has wide opportunities for use outside the church.

Mercy is the sacrificial gift of helping people in need. It's more than pity. More than feeling sentimentally sorry for someone. It's being able to bear the need of someone else. It's doing deeds of love in the power of the Holy Spirit. It's compassion which causes us to do things that show love. We need to thank God for those among us who have this gift, and keep encouraging them to use it.

**Evangelist. "The God given ability to effectively communicate the Gospel to unbelievers so they respond in faith and become lifelong followers of Jesus Christ."**

Evangelists have a special ability in being able to communicate the good news about Jesus. They look for opportunities to speak about Christ. They may not be talented speakers, but their passion is to see people know Jesus. All of us are called to be witnesses, but evangelists see a much higher proportion of people come to Christ through their efforts. Researchers tell us that about 10% of people in any congregation have this gift. So where are you evangelists? While some of us may plant the seed of the gospel in others, and others water and tend the plant, it's the evangelists who bring in the harvest. The evangelist is the midwife who is present at the birth to help a person when they are born again.

If you look at the people in the New Testament who used this gift, there are several characteristics we should note.

- **They like talking about Jesus.** They don't talk about church or religion. Their primary purpose is to help people understand how to become lifelong followers of Jesus.
- **They like going where people don't know about Jesus.** Fishermen don't like sitting on the beach getting a suntan waiting for the fish to jump out of the water. They want to get out where the fish are to catch some. If people who don't know Jesus are in University accommodation, or in clubs or pubs, then the evangelists want to get amongst them. People with this gift get frustrated being around believers all the time. They are at their happiest when they get the opportunity to talk about Jesus to those who don't know him yet. And when someone responds to the Gospel, for the person with this gift, it's like breathing pure oxygen.

- **They see people become followers.** When someone with this gift explains about Jesus, more often than not people decide to follow Him.

We need to understand something clearly. Not everyone has this gift, so don't get anxious if you don't see heaps of people following Jesus. But that doesn't excuse every one of us from being witnesses to Jesus. A witness is a person who tells what they have seen and heard. Every one of us has that responsibility. We can't excuse ourselves and never talk to anyone about Christ by saying, "I didn't have the gift". If you have experienced forgiveness of sin, direction in your life, and peace in your heart, then you have something to talk about. If you have been changed by the power of God, then you have something to share. God doesn't ask us to change people's lives. That's the job of the Holy Spirit. What he asks us to do is be a witness to what Christ has done in our lives. None of us are exempt from that.

**Pastoring / Shepherding. "The God given ability to nurture, care for, and guide people toward ongoing spiritual maturity so they become like Christ."**

There has been a lot of confusion in the Christian church over this gift, because we have taken the name of a spiritual gift, and made an office out of it. When we invite someone to lead a church what do we call that person? You can call them "The Reverend" although you won't find that title in the Bible. Or there are other non Biblical titles like Rector, Vicar, Parson or Preacher. You can call them "The Minister", although that is not all that helpful because according to the New Testament, we are all ministers of the gospel of grace. The title that many use is "Pastor". That's Biblical. It has the connotation of shepherding the sheep, which you can read about in the New Testament. The problem is, a person can have the title "Pastor", and not have the Pastoral gift. Are you confused? Lots of people are confused, including some people who are leading churches. They are trying to do pastoral work in an area that they are not gifted. Thankfully in many cases, the pastoral gift and the office of pastor do coincide, and that's great.

Here's the good news. In every church there are lots of people who have the pastoral gift who don't have the title "Pastor". You may well be one of them. You may have the God given ability to care for people the way a shepherd cares for sheep. You just love leading and protecting people. You feel you can take responsibility to nurture people in their walk with God. You find it easy to guide a group of God's people. It's a joy to you to be able to model what it means to be a lifelong follower of Jesus.

A person with a pastoral gift just loves to equip the saints for the work of ministry. The word equip is the same word as a word used to mend broken fishing nets. Fixing the holes. Strengthening the weak spots. Clearing them of weed. Making them do what they were designed to do – catch fish. There are lots of you in this church with this gift. One person can't care for everybody. Even Jesus could only cope with 12. But what if the people with pastoral gifts helped care for others. Wouldn't that be the church functioning in the way God intended it to be?

### **Discovering Your Gifts.**

As I finish today I want to say something about how you discover these gifts. Gifts are not so much discovered by research or study, but by being involved in ministry. You can sit through this series and tick the checkboxes in your booklet, but you will still never really know about your gifts until you get out there and do it. Some of you have been Christians for years and you still don't know what your gifts are because you haven't got involved in serving Jesus. The gifts are best discovered and developed in a climate of risk taking and a willingness to fail. Spiritual Gifts are like muscles. The more you use them, the more effective they become. The more we use them, the more delight we bring to the Father who gave them to us. Step out in faith this week and work with God, and see what he does in you and through you.

*David McChesney, Westlake Church in Nyon, Switzerland*

