

How to Recognize and Develop Your Spiritual Gift

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I. The Definition of Spiritual Gifts

- The New Testament vocabulary for gifts helps us to understand what they are:
 1. **Spirituals (*pneumatika*)—the origin and nature of gifts.** 1 Cr 12:1. This word literally means “what pertains to the Spirit,” referring to what comes from the Spirit, has spiritual qualities, and is under spiritual control—the control of the Holy Spirit.
 2. **Gifts (*charismata*)—the gifts themselves.** 1 Cr 12:4; Rm 12:6; 1 Pt 4:10. Clearly related to the word for grace (*charis*), this word refers to what God gives grace has bestowed
 3. **Administrations (*diakonia*)—the way in which gifts are used.** 1 Cr 12:5. This term shows that gifts are intended for serving others. This word refers to all kinds of service, including everyday service like waiting on tables. We are to use our gifts to edify each other effectively and thus to honor the Lord
 4. **Operations (*energema*)—the spiritual results of using gifts.** 1 Cr 12:6. This word hints at the divine energy that empowers the gifts. The Holy Spirit uses the gifts He has given believers to apply His divine power.
 5. **Manifestations (*phanerosis*)—the design of the gifts.** 1 Cr 12:7. The Holy Spirit uses gifts to show Himself through us. Our gifts are the tools through which the Holy Spirit accomplishes His work, and brings glory to God and Christ.
- Spiritual gift is the unique ability each believer possesses to communicate Christ to others through loving service.
- Spiritual gift is granted by God at conversion. Every Christian is gifted (1 Cr 12:7; Ep 4:7; 1 Pt 4:11).
- Spiritual gifts are to be completely controlled by the Holy Spirit.
- Spiritual gifts are intended to build up the assembly for Christ’s glory.
- Spiritual gift should not be confused with natural ability, although gift is built on natural ability. “It is the same God who works all things in all men” (1 Cr 12:6). “What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?” (1 Cr 4:7).
- Spiritual gifts must be developed. It is every believer’s responsibility to find, develop, and fully use whatever capacities for service God has given.

II. The Purpose of Spiritual Gifts

1. To glorify God (1 Pt 4:11) and Christ (Jh 16:14).
 2. To edify the body of Christ (Ep 4:12-13; 1 Cr 14:26).
 3. To lead souls to Christ (1 Cr 14:16; Ep 4:11).
- 1 Corinthians 12-14, even though largely taken up with sign gifts, greatly helps us to understand the purpose of gifts and to test the value of gifts:

- Chapter 12—to what degree is God glorified in the gift?
- Chapter 13—to what degree is love exercised in the gift?
- Chapter 14—to what degree is the church edified by the gift?

III. The Diversity of Spiritual Gifts

- The NT gives us five lists of the gifts which God has given to believers, assemblies, and the Body of Christ to maintain testimony for God throughout this age:

1 Corinthians 12:8-11	1 Cr 12:28	Romans 12:6-8	Ephesians 4:11	1 Peter 4:11
Word of wisdom	Apostles (F)	Prophecy	Apostles (F)	Speaking
Word of knowledge	Prophets	Service	Prophets	Service
Faith	Teachers	Teaching	Evangelists	
Healings (S)	Miracles (S)	Exhortations	Pastors	
Miracles (S)	Healings (S)	Giving	Teachers	
Prophecy	Helps	Leadership		
Discernment	Administrations	Showing mercy		
Tongues (S)	Tongues (S)			
Interpreting tongues (S)				

(F) = foundational gifts, (S) = sign gifts

- The varieties of gifts fall into two general categories—speaking and serving. Paul’s lists of gifts alternate between the two categories, suggesting that each is equally important.
- Together, these gifts form a palette of basic colors from which God chooses. He selects a unique combination of gifts and degree of giftedness for each person’s life, so that every believer has a distinct hue. Although we share the same categories, no two of us are exactly alike.
- 1 Cr 12:8-11 describes gifts given to believers by the Holy Spirit. The speaking or verbal gifts (prophecy, knowledge, wisdom, teaching, and exhortation) and the serving or nonverbal gifts (leadership, helps, giving, mercy, faith, and discernment) are all permanent gifts that will operate throughout the church age. Miracles, healing, languages, and the interpretation of languages were temporary sign gifts limited to the apostolic age and have, therefore, ceased. Their purpose was to authenticate the apostles and their message as the true Word of God, until God’s written Word was completed and became self-authenticating.
- 1 Cr 12:28-31 describes gifted men given to the assembly at Corinth, rather than the gifts themselves.
- Rm 12:3-8 lists the activities of gifted believers.
 1. **Word of wisdom.** “Word” indicates a speaking gift (1 Cr 12:4; 1 Pt 4:11). The NT usually uses “wisdom” to mean the ability to understand God’s Word and to apply that understanding skillfully to life (Mt 11:19; 13:54; Mr 6:2; Lk 7:35; Ac 6:10; Jm 1:5; 3:13,17; 2 Pt 3:15). In the apostolic era, this “word” involved direct revelation from God. Today we are to apply the written Word of God.
 2. **Word of knowledge.** This is the ability to understand and speak God’s truth, with insight that cannot be known apart from God’s revelation (Rm 16:25; Ep 3:3; Cl 1:26; 2:2; 4:3; 1 Cr 13:2). Knowledge emphasizes grasping the meaning of the truth, while wisdom emphasizes the practical application of that truth. Like the “word of wisdom,” this “word” initially involved direct revelation from God.
 3. **Faith.** This “faith” is not saving faith, which all believers possess. This gift instead works through persistent prayer and complete dependence on God. It is the ability to trust God in the midst of trying circumstances, as when Paul declared, “I believe God” on

the doomed ship (Ac 27:25). It may imply trusting God to bring about certain things for which there is no specific promise in Scripture (George Muller of Bristol). Cf Mt 17:20.

4. **Prophecy.** To prophesy is to “speak forth” the Word of God. The best definition is in 1 Cr 14:3—speaking “edification and exhortation and comfort to men.” The word does not necessarily imply predicting the future. In Acts, some prophets did predict future events (11:27-28; 21:10-11), but others simply spoke the Word of God to strengthen and encourage their hearers (15:22-31,32). At times, prophecy is distinguished from teaching (Ac 13:1; Rm 12:7; 1 Cr 12:29; Ep 4:11). Prophecy seems to have an element of immediacy not true of general teaching (Ac 13:1-3; 21:10-1). Prophets give the word for a present need, a “word in season.” Today, those with this gift use the Scripture to give a timely word for a present need.
5. **Discernment.** Satan is the great deceiver (Jh 8:44) and his demons counterfeit God’s message and work. Those with the gift of discernment have the God-given ability to recognize lying spirits and to identify deceptive doctrine (Ac 17:11; 1 Jh 4:1). Paul used this gift in Ac 16:16-18, as Peter had done in Ac 5:3. Though its operation has changed with the completion of Scripture, it is still essential to have people in the assembly who are discerning. As with knowledge, wisdom, preaching, and teaching, discernment requires diligent study of the God’s Word. Cf 1 Th 5:20-22; Ac 17:11.
6. **Teachers.** Teachers have the ability to interpret, explain, and apply God’s truth (Ac 18:24-25; 2 Tm 2:2). In early days, they probably expounded the Christian meaning of the OT. They may operate publicly or privately (“prophecy” implies only public proclamation). Elders should have a measure of this gift (1 Tm 3:2; 4:16; Tt 1:9).
7. **Helps.** These are gifts of support. This is a general term for all kinds of assistance. Those with this gift know how to support the spiritually or physically needy. E.g. Epaphroditus (Ph 2:20), Onesiphorus (2 Tm 1:16-18). Cf cognate verb in Lk 1:54; Ac 20:35; 1 Tm 6:2.
8. **Administrations.** These are gifts of leadership and direction. The word was used of a pilot who steers a ship (Ac 27:11; Rv 18:17). Those who can organize and inspire assembly activities, whether spiritual or physical, have this gift.
9. **Service.** This word (cf deacon, deaconess) refers to those who serve. It broadly applies to every kind of practical help (Ac 20:35), and also to spiritual service.
10. **Exhortation.** This gift enables the believer effectively to call others to obey and follow God’s truth (v 1). It may be used negatively to admonish and correct (2 Tm 4:2), or positively to encourage, comfort, and strengthen struggling believers (2 Cr 1:3-5; Hb 10:24-25).
11. **Giving.** This denotes the sacrificial sharing of resources and self to meet the needs of others (2 Cr 8:3-5,9; 11; Ep 4:28). “Liberality” means openhearted generosity. The believer who gives rightly does not do so for thanks or personal recognition, but to glorify God (Mt 6:2; Ac 2:44-45; 4:37-5:11; 2 Cr 8:2-5).
12. **Leads.** This literally means “to stand before.” The NT uses this word to describe leadership in the home (1 Tm 3:4,5,12) and in the assembly (1 Cr 12:28; 1 Tm 5:17).
13. **Shows mercy.** This refers to a believer who actively shows sympathy and sensitivity to those who are suffering or in sorrow, and who has both the willingness and the resources to help lessen their afflictions. “Cheerfulness” is crucial to ensure that the gift of mercy becomes genuine help, and not discouraging commiseration with those who are suffering (Pr 14:21,31; Lk 4:18-19).
14. **Evangelists.** Men who proclaim the good news of salvation through faith in Christ to unbelievers. Cf the use of this term in Ac 21:8; 2 Tm 4:5. The related verb translated “to preach the gospel” is used 54 times and the related noun translated “gospel” is used 76 times in the NT.

15. **Pastors.** Shepherds lead the flock to good pasture and clean water, and protect the sheep from marauders. They are under the “Great” and “Chief Shepherd” (Hb 13:20-1; 1 Pt 2:25). One whom God has given this position is also called an elder (cf Tt 1:5-9) and overseer (cf 1 Tm 3:1-7). Ac 20:28 and 1 Pt 5:1-2 bring all three terms together.

IV. The Recognition of Spiritual Gifts

- All believers are gifted (1 Pt 4:11)
- To some degree, all Christians likely possess the gifts of helps (1 Cr 12:28), showing mercy (Rm 12:8), serving others (Rm 12:7), and giving (Rm 12:8)
- No person can competently judge his own gift. “Let the prophets speak two or three and let the others [of the same kind] discern” (1 Cr 14:29). This is especially true of speaking gifts—the subject of 1 Cr 14. E.g. a man endowed with the gift of teaching should not invite himself for meetings. Instead, responsible elders will encourage him to come and minister to the Lord’s people. Cf Ac 9:15; 13:2.
- Principles for discovering gift:
 1. Be willing to serve. “Present your bodies a living sacrifice” (Rm 12:1-2). “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” (Ac 9:6).
 2. Respond to burdens and concerns. “My heart’s desire and prayer for Israel is that they might be saved” (Rm 10:1).
 3. Stay active in the assembly. If you are involved with the work, opportunities will arise. Cf Ac 9:22,29; 11:26; G; 1:15-18.

V. The Development of Spiritual Gifts

- Pray that God will raise up gifted believers. “Covet earnestly the best gifts” (1 Cr 12:31). The context shows that this is not coveting the best gift for myself, but the yearning for God to raise up gifted men in the assembly—just preceding this statement Paul listed gifted men given to the Corinthian assembly.
- Consistently exercise your gift.
 1. It is a stewardship (1 Cr 4:2; Pt 4:10; cf Lk 16:1-10).
 2. It is a command (Rm 12:6-8; 1 Tm 4:15; 1 Pt 4:10).
- Recognize that having gift does not preclude hard work
 1. “Neglect not the gift that is in thee”—it will be stunted unless you use it (1 Tm 4:12-14)
 2. “Stir up the gift that is in thee”—it won’t grow without diligent effort (2 Tm 1:6)
- Respond to help and encouragement
 1. Barnabas with Paul (Ac 11:26)
 2. Priscilla and Aquilla with Apollos (Ac 18:24-25)
- Depend on the Lord for help—not on your own natural ability
 1. Think soberly (Rm 12:3). A proper assessment of your gift is essential. Realize that with gift comes a “measure of faith”—knowing to what extent you have the faith / faithfulness suited for exercising your gift.
 2. God will provide the needed faith / faithfulness if we ask Him.

3. Sound judgment will lead us to remember that in ourselves we are nothing (1 Pt 5:5), and will yield the fruit of humility (3 Jh 9).
- It is good for young believers to exercise their gifts at the very beginning of their Christian experience. Of course, they should use their gifts according to their experience and under the guidance of older brethren. But it is a mistake to wait.

There has never been a gift so great that there is not full room to exercise it within the sphere that the word of God decrees. The gifts function in an assembly (1 Cr 14:19f). The gift of the teacher may function in a number of assemblies in which he is encouraged to exercise it. The work of an evangelist is toward the world (2 Tm 4:5), but always in relation to the local church (cf Ac 13-15).

Gift is 90% hard work.

.Gifts are given at conversion. Timothy's gift seems to have been given to him through a prophetic utterance. He was singled out to receive it, probably at the time of his conversion, and at a later time, the elders recognized the work of God that had been done in its bestowal, and gladly gave him their commendation (1 Tm 4:14; Ac 16:2). The laying on of Paul's hands (2 Tm 1:6) may refer to a recognition of the gift, an identification with Timothy in the use of his gift, and take us to his commendation at Lystra as recorded in Ac 16. Some believe that apostolic instrumentality may have been involved in the giving of the gift. Perhaps. And yet the gifts are still given today, long after the apostles have gone. And as with Paul and others in the NT, their bestowal can be traced right back to conversion.

Prophecy. The evidence suggests that in the apostolic era (before the NT was complete and the sign gifts had ceased, 1 Cr 13:8; 2 Cr 12:12; Hb 2:3-4), this word may have had both revelatory and no-revelatory meanings. In its non-revelatory sense, the word "prophecy" simply identifies the skill of public proclamation of the Word of God (1 Cr 14:3,24,25; 1 Pt 4:11). Prophets are those who have the word from the Lord for a given situation, a "word in season." This is the timely ministry appropriate, e.g., after the Lord's Supper. Prophecy seems to have an element of immediacy and spontaneity not true of general teaching (Ac 13:1-3; 21:10-1). "Prophecy" means "speaking forth." The connotation of prediction was not always present, and was certainly not the primary meaning. Since the completion of Scripture, prophecy has not been a means of new revelation, but is limited to proclaiming what has already been revealed in the written Word. Even the biblical prophets were preachers, proclaimers of God's truth both by revelation and reiteration. OT prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel spent lifetimes proclaiming God's Word. Only a comparatively small amount of what they preached is recorded in the Bible as God's direct revelation. They must have continually repeated and reemphasized those truths, as preachers today repeat, explain, and reemphasize the Word of God. 14:1,39 reveal the importance of this gift. Chapter 14 shows its supremacy to other gifts, especially tongues. Cf 1 Th 5:20; Rv 19:10.

"In proportion to (the) faith" can be taken subjectively or objectively: It may mean the prophet's own faith (vv 3,6), or the truth content of the gospel as the standard and measure of each prophetic utterance, testing whether the utterance conforms to "the pattern of sound words" (2 Tm 1:13). In the former sense, it refers to the believer's personal understanding and insight regarding the gospel (v 3). In the latter sense, it refers to "the faith," the fully revealed message or body of Christian faith (Jd 3; 2 Tm 4:2). The preacher must be careful to preach the same message the apostles delivered.

All of the gifts in the two lists that are found in 1 Cr 12 had some element of the supernatural in their function. Of course, all spiritual gifts are supernatural in origin. The Corinthian gifts, by and large, were also supernatural in function—most were sign gifts that were temporary. Those that are still in existence function in a different form today (1 Cr 13:8-13). These sign gifts passed away once they had fulfilled their purpose. They were temporary in time and inferior in value. They were inferior because they were only of partial value. E.g. a NT prophet was able to stand up in the assembly and speak words from God that exactly suited the need of the hour. He did not read from Scripture, but spoke the words of God directly. The gifts of knowledge and wisdom were similar. Today, however, we can turn to the written word for answers to questions and problems; these early assemblies looked to men with the gifts of knowledge and

wisdom. However, in these three gifts there was not the full revelation of the mind of God. It was “in part,” a partial revelation of His mind. It suited the need of the hour, but new words were needed for each occasion. When the entire revelation of the mind of God was given in His written word, this partial wisdom and knowledge and words from the prophets became redundant and ceased (1 Cr 13:8-10). This is the literal meaning of the words, “We know in part, and we prophecy in part, but when that which is complete is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.” God could have continued this kind of communication, but it was His will that something better should be given—His full revelation in the Scriptures of truth. Second, the sign gifts were inferior because they were marks of testimony in their infancy. Paul made this clear when he wrote about these gifts, “When I was an infant in arms, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but now that I am become a man, I put away childish things” (1 Cr 13:11). It is not a mark of advanced spirituality to desire sign gifts, or to profess to have them; it is a mark of infancy.

Even if 1 Cr 13:12 is taken to mean heaven, and future glory, the passage still teaches the passing of sign gifts. In v 11 Paul writes, in the present tense (“now that I am become a man”), whereas in v 12 he speaks of the future (“But then shall I know”). The reason for the change in tense is quite clear: The full revelation of the mind of God in His word is a wonderful improvement over the partial word of the prophet, and the partial knowledge of the gift of knowledge, but there is also something ahead which is even greater, when I will leave earth for glory and stand in His presence “and know even as I also have been known” (v 12).

Notice that the sign gifts disappeared as the NT days passed. When a loved one is sick, it would be wonderful to have the gift of healing. But even when such gifts were functioning, it was not always God’s mind to heal. Epaphroditus, so loved by Paul and esteemed by the Philippian church, was sick nigh unto death, and recovered through prayer—not through the function of the healing gift (Ph 2:25-30). Paul left Trophimus at Miletus sick, and there was no miraculous healing, even though Paul was in need of his companionship (2 Tm 4:20). Paul had a thorn in the flesh which appears to have been a physical malady. He besought the Lord three times that it might be taken away, but received the answer, “My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Cr 12:9). The Lord uses illness to teach and refine us.

The five gifts listed in Ep 4:4-11 are men who are given by the Lord Jesus to the body. The apostles and prophets are in this list. The church His body is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone” (2:20). It is a mistake to think of them as part of the foundation; rather, they were engaged in the laying of the foundation (1 Cr 3:11). This is the only time the gift of the evangelist is mentioned, and the reason for this is quite obvious, for the evangelist is engaged in the work of bringing people into the body. It seems better to view the pastors and teachers as being distinct gifts in the body. The closer link between them in the language of the verse can be explained by the function of these gifted men. A teacher cannot be effective if he does not have a shepherd heart, although there are men who have a great shepherd’s heart who do not have great ability to teach.

So there are three categories of gifts in Ep 4:

1. Foundational—apostles and prophets
2. Temporary—sign gifts
3. Permanent—evangelists, pastors, and teachers