

Serving God's People
(Using our Spiritual Gifts)
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1 Corinthians 12:4-12, 21-26

Opening: What is the most fulfilling job you've ever had? What about volunteer jobs? Was there a volunteer job you were really good at and really enjoyed?

- Paul wrote this letter to the church at Corinth to answer their questions and provide correction regarding some big errors going on in that church.
- One area they didn't understand was that of Spiritual gifts.
- More than just misunderstanding, some were misusing or abusing their gifts to gain the spotlight or to achieve a position of power in the church.

Big Idea: Every believer has one or more special gifts from God for service to Him and His people. Have you identified your gifts? Are you experiencing the joy of using them? Let's learn from Paul beginning in verse four:

1 Corinthians 12:4–12 (ESV)

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

- Verse seven is a concise explanation of Spiritual gifts: The NLT puts it simply: “A *spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other.*”
- **What does “the common good” mean?**
- The words “manifestation of the Spirit” tell us that the Holy Spirit is the source of these gifts and reveals them to us. It also tells us that the work and presence of the Holy Spirit is revealed as we exercise our gifts.
- **When does a believer receive his/her Spiritual gift? How many?**
- Look at how Paul emphasizes both diversity and unity in verses four through six: “varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit”; “varieties of service, but the same Lord (Jesus);” “varieties of activities”, but the “same God who empowers them all in everyone.”
- In verses eight through ten Paul gave some examples of kinds of Spiritual gifts that were active in the Corinthian church at that time:
- *“The list here includes nine gifts. **Wisdom** refers to insight into doctrinal truth. (2) **Knowledge** refers to the ability to apply doctrinal truth to life. (3) **Faith** as a spiritual gift is probably an unusual measure of trust in God beyond that exercised by most Christians (e.g., 13:2). (4) **Healing** is the ability to restore health and also to hold off death itself temporarily. (5) **Miraculous powers** may refer to exorcising demons or inducing physical disability or even death. (6) **Prophecy** is the ability, like that of the Old Testament prophets, to declare a message of God for His people. (7) **Ability to distinguish between spirits** is the gift to differentiate the Word of God proclaimed by a true prophet from that of a satanic deceiver. (8) **Tongues** refers to the ability to speak an unlearned, living language. (9) **Interpretation** was the ability to translate an unlearned, known language expressed in the assembly.”*
- Some of those gifts are the subject of controversy in the church. They are known as the “sign gifts” of tongues, prophecy, miracles, and healings.
- The question is: were some of the gifts only temporarily present in that time in order to confirm and establish God’s New Testament church?

- A quick overview of the typical positions on this in the evangelical church:
 - Continuation – The sign gifts are still active today as in Paul’s time.
 - Modification – Middle ground: some gifts ended and some continue.
 - Cessation – *“The miraculous gifts seen in the New Testament have ceased, believing that miracles existed to demonstrate the authority of God’s infallible spokespersons.”ⁱⁱ*
- We won’t sort that out in Sunday School! We’ll talk about Spiritual gifts today in a moment, but look at verse eleven for an important point.
- Remember career day in school? **Why did they do that? How could it be dangerous if we got to pick our Spiritual gifts from a catalog?**
- We don’t pick our Spiritual gifts from a catalog; they are assigned to us and designed for us individually. Verse eleven tells how Spiritual gifts are given: by the Holy Spirit, to each one individually, as He (the Spirit) decides (wills.) Then the Spirit “empowers” us to use that gift.
- So what ARE examples of Spiritual gifts today?
- There are three places in scripture that list Spiritual gifts and roles/offices: Here in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10 and 28, and also in Ephesians 4:11 and Romans 12:6–8.ⁱⁱⁱ Keep in mind that God is not limited to these lists. The Holy Spirit can give any gift for service to any believer at any time.
- Most modern Spiritual gifts inventories or assessments use these categories of gifts: Evangelism, Prophecy, Teaching, Exhortation, Pastor/Shepherd, Showing Mercy, Serving, Giving, Administration
- **What would you guess are the most dominant gifts?**
 - According to a 2009 George Barna survey of what professing Christians perceive: The most commonly claimed gifts were teaching (9%), service (8%) and faith (7%). Those were followed by encouragement (4%), healing (4%), knowledge (4%), and tongues (3%). The gift of leadership was mentioned by just 2%.

- In total, one-fifth of all the gifts cited by respondents (21%) were attributes that do not fit the biblical lists of gifts given by God.
 - Among the gifts claimed that are not [in] scripture...were a sense of humor, singing, health, life, happiness, patience, a job, a house, compromise, premonition, creativity, and clairvoyance.
 - Between those who do not know their gift (15%), those who say they don't have one (28%) and those who claimed gifts that are not biblical (20%), nearly two-thirds of the self-identified Christian population who claim to have heard about spiritual gifts have not been able to accurately apply whatever they have heard or what the Bible teaches on the subject to their lives.
- **Have you ever used a Spiritual gifts assessment tool to discover your gifts? What did you learn about your gifts?**
 - **What is the difference between a natural talent and a Spiritual gift?**
 - *"1) A talent is the result of genetics and/or training, while a spiritual gift is the result of the power of the Holy Spirit. 2) A talent can be possessed by anyone, Christian or non-Christian, while spiritual gifts are only possessed by Christians. 3) While both talents and spiritual gifts should be used for God's glory and to minister to others, spiritual gifts are focused on [the "work of the ministry" ([Ephesians 4:12](#))], while talents can be used entirely for non-spiritual purposes."*^{iv}
 - My own experience – a natural inclination to speak/present vs the "gift" and "love" of teaching the Bible. The example of musicians.
 - Believers are given at least one Spiritual gift to discover and use for God's glory, but our service shouldn't be restricted to our Spiritual gifts alone.

Mark Batterson writes:

"There are spiritual gifts like mercy, faith, or generosity that enable people to set the standard, so to speak. But just because you don't have that spiritual gift doesn't mean you aren't held to any standard at all. Even if you aren't gifted in that way, you're still called to live

mercifully, faithfully, and generously. You might not set the standard, but you need to meet the standard. There is a baseline that all of us are called to. When the opportunity presents itself, we need to show mercy, exercise faith, and give generously.”^v

- Another example: Some have the gift of evangelism; all are called to be a part of sharing our faith and making disciples.
- Sometimes the Spiritual gift is different than a person’s occupation. Some of the best Bible teachers on Sunday are carpenters, salespeople, or stay-at-home moms during the week. Some with the gift of administration at church aren’t in management in a company.
- **What are two dangerous extremes with how believers use (or not use) their Spiritual gifts? How can pride and jealousy creep in?**
- Warren Wiersbe wrote that he *“once ministered with two men who had opposite attitudes toward their gifts: the one man constantly belittled his gifts and would not use them, and the other man constantly boasted about gifts that he did not possess. Actually, both of them were guilty of pride, because both of them refused to acknowledge God’s grace and let Him have the glory. Moses made a similar mistake when God called him (Ex. 4:1–13).”* *When the individual believers in a church know their gifts, accept them by faith, and use them for God’s glory, then God can bless in a wonderful way.”^{vi}*
- Using Spiritual gifts should promote unity in the midst of diversity. That’s NOT what was going on in Corinth. They had problem in that church of (as my Daddy used to say) a lot of “big I’s and little you’s.”

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:21–26 (ESV)

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” ²² On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, ²⁴ which our more presentable parts do not require. But God

has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, ²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

- There are no insignificant parts to the body of Christ. As with the human body, there are some parts we don't see but try living without them!

So, What's the Takeaway?

- Paul used the example of the body to show that every member of the body of Christ (the church) has gifts to use and a role to play.
- It also illustrates the fact that all gifts are important.
- What would happen if one part of our body decided it didn't want to participate? Even though you can live without certain parts, it still changes the way the body works. Some parts are so vital they **MUST** be there.
- Every believer has one or more special gifts from God for service to Him and His people.
- We don't pick our Spiritual gifts from a catalog; they are assigned to us and designed for us individually by the Holy Spirit as He (the Spirit) decides (wills.) Then the Spirit "empowers" us to use those gifts.
- How do I discover my Spiritual gifts?
 - Pray and ask God to show you.
 - Ask other mature believers for their observations.
 - A Spiritual gifts assessment tool can help but don't be "boxed in" by what it tells you.
 - Explore your natural desires.
 - Get involved where you know you can help and see what God reveals in terms of contentment and spiritual fruit.
- Have you identified your gifts? Are you experiencing the joy of using them?

ⁱ Lowery, D. K. (1985). 1 Corinthians. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 533).

ⁱⁱ Pratt, Richard L., Jr.. Holman New Testament Commentary - 1 & 2 Corinthians: 7 (pp. 211-212). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

ⁱⁱⁱ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 608). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

^{iv} <https://www.gotquestions.org/difference-talent-spiritual-gift.html>

^v Batterson, Mark. All in: You Are One Decision Away from a Totally Different Life. Christian, a Part of Gale, Cengage Learning, 2015.

^{vi} Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 555). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.