

WHY THE HOLY SPIRIT'S GIFTS MATTER (Part 2) **ROMANS 12:4-8; 1 CORINTHIANS 12:27-28; EPHESIANS 4:11-13**

Each Sunday morning as they began their confirmation class, the fifth graders in one church would line up and recite one section of the creed about the Christian faith they'd learned. That teaching method worked well until one Sunday. The first girl recited her line flawlessly, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, the maker of Heaven and Earth." The second student, a boy, stood up and said his part of the creed, "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord." But then an awkward silence descended on the class. Finally, one girl stood up and said to the teacher, "I'm sorry, sir, but the boy who believes in the Holy Spirit is absent today."

We have only two more messages in our series about the Holy Spirit. I do hope you believe in Him! I also hope you're growing in your understanding of why He matters as well as in your own relationship with Him. Two weeks ago, we did part one of this message on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. You might recall I shared six truths about why the Holy Spirit's gifts matter. One, they're given by the Holy Spirit. Two, they're gifts of God's grace. In other words, we don't earn or deserve them. Three, spiritual gifts are given to every believer. Fourth, spiritual gifts are given with variety. Each follower of Jesus has a gift mix – a unique combination of spiritual gifts, personality traits, and life experiences that make you uniquely useful to God. Five, these spiritual abilities are for serving God and others. They're not given to build your ego, but meet the needs of God's people. Six, spiritual gifts need to be used in love at all times. Otherwise, they're useless and irrelevant.

Now, today I want to look at the specific gifts mentioned in the Bible. This is a snapshot approach, but I hope it will build an interest in your heart and mind. Discovering and then using your personal spiritual gifts is one of the most exciting and wonderful aspects of following Jesus. It's essential if you want to find out God's will for your life, because your spiritual gifts are your spiritual job description. Let's look at three different Scripture passages that identify these specific gifts. One way to identify spiritual gifts is to separate them into three categories. First, there are...

THE SPEAKING GIFTS.

All of these gifts require or involve some ability to speak well or persuasively. Let's begin with apostleship which might be defined as the ability to start and oversee the development of new churches particularly in different cultures than your own. That seems to have been an integral part of what apostles did back in the first century. Today, many missionaries who share the good news about Jesus in a different culture or another country might well have the gift of being apostles.

A second speaking gift is prophecy. It's the ability to reveal truth and proclaim it in a timely, relevant way so that people understand more about God, repent of their sins, or get encouraged in some way. The gift of prophecy might show up in a pastor's preaching. It might be found in the ministry of a Christian leader like the late Martin

Luther King, Jr. or the late Billy Graham when they addressed cultural or social issues in our country from a biblical perspective. The gift of prophecy is understood differently by some of our Pentecostal and charismatic friends. They consider it to be a direct word from God for a specific situation. Prophecy can have an immediate, authoritative, “thus saith the Lord” quality about it.

The gift of evangelism is the ability to proclaim the good news of Jesus effectively so people respond by receiving Jesus as Lord and Savior. Everybody thinks of the late Billy Graham when you hear the word “evangelism” and rightly so. But it’s a great mistake to think that only professional evangelists like Billy have the gift of evangelism. There are followers of Jesus who just have a knack for making friends with non-believers, getting into spiritual conversations, and persuading people to put their faith in Jesus. Here’s a good place to say something about spiritual gifts in general. Just because you may not have a specific gift doesn’t mean you have no responsibility in that area of ministry. You may not have a gift of evangelism, but the Bible makes it very clear every follower of Jesus has a responsibility to pray for lost people, build relationships with non-believers where it’s possible, and look for opportunities to share our faith as the Holy Spirit opens doors of opportunity to do so. Each and all of us.

One night a pastor was called to a hospital very late at night. As he walked down a darkened hallway, largely vacant of people because of the late hour, a man suddenly ran out of one of the patient’s room. He ran up to this pastor – a man he’d never met – and said with great joy on his face, “She’s going to make it! She’s better and she’s going to make it!” Then off he went down the hall. The pastor never saw that man again and he still doesn’t know who he was referring to. Nevertheless, it was obvious he’d received some very good news and his natural response was to share it. In fact, he couldn’t wait to share it! He didn’t even know the pastor with whom he shared his happy news. But it flowed from him because he’d received good news and that’s what you do with good news: you share it. The greatest news anyone in this world will ever hear is how much God loves us and what He did through Jesus to make it possible for us to know Him personally. Don’t keep that news to yourself!

What’s the gift of pastoring? It’s the ability to guide, teach, protect, and care for God’s people so they can mature in Jesus and discover their places of ministry. The Greek word for “pastor” in the New Testament comes from another word meaning “shepherd.” That image gives us one very important way to understand what pastors do. They shepherd people. Don’t associate the gift of pastoring with just the office of pastor in the local church, however. There are many Christians with profound pastoral gifts who don’t have “Reverend” or some other churchy title in front of their names.

Encouragement is a wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit. It’s the ability to strengthen, console, and even correct other believers in love and with compassion. This is the person you want to be around after a really bad day because he or she just knows how to put life back in a positive perspective for you. He or she can even eyeball it with you if necessary and speak the truth in love without bruising your feelings. If you have the

gift of encouragement, you're the first to notice drooping shoulders, teary eyes, and you're the first to offer God's comfort. God bless encouragers! May your tribe increase!

Teaching is the ability to explain the Bible clearly and apply its truths to life situations appropriately. You can be uniquely gifted by God to teach adults, teenagers, or children. The gift of teaching is demonstrated differently. Many times you don't know you have a teaching gift until or unless you try it. If you're given the opportunity to teach, give it a try. What have you got to lose? You will find out something valuable about yourself regardless. And you might just find a wonderful, fulfilling way for God to use you for His Kingdom in the lives of His people.

The spiritual gift of knowledge and wisdom are closely aligned. Knowledge is the ability to bring out truth through a biblical insight. Some followers of Jesus can be like walking, talking search engines of helpful spiritual information or Bible knowledge. They're of great value in the church. A man once wrote John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist church, these words, "The Lord has told me to tell you that He doesn't need your book-learning, your Greek or Hebrew." I've always loved John Wesley's reply to that man. He wrote him back saying. "Thank you, sir. Your letter was unnecessary, however, as I already know the Lord has no need for my 'book-learning,' as you put it. However, although the Lord has not directed me to say so, on my own responsibility, I would like to say to you that the Lord doesn't need your ignorance either." The people who know the Bible inside and out or who possess large intellectual capacity are a great blessing to any church. The gift of knowledge.

Wisdom is the ability to apply biblical principles effectively to a complex state of affairs. On occasion, a group of God's people might be wrestling with a very difficult decision. Suddenly someone in the group provides an insight, an answer, or an approach that puts everything in its proper place and satisfies everyone. Again our Pentecostal and charismatic friends talk about "words of wisdom" or "words of knowledge." By that they mean moments of Holy Spirit-inspired illumination concerning some aspect of God's will for a person's life, or about a decision that needs to be made. All of those gifts we can put in the speaking category. Here's a second category:

THE SERVING GIFTS.

One gift is called just that – the gift of serving or helps. It's the ability to accomplish practical and necessary tasks which support and meet the needs of others. This is quite often a behind-the-scenes kind of gift, but no church can ever hope to be effective unless it has lots of people who love to use their gift of serving or helps. I read about a man named Bo who cleaned his little church in Charlotte, NC every Saturday. He's a member of that church. He mows the grass and trims the hedges. Few people in the church even notice Bo or how cheerfully and faithfully he performs his ministry. That's just fine with Bo. Bo can't preach. Bo can't teach. He can't sing and he doesn't like to pray in public. But he has the gift of serving and God uses Bo mightily.

Mercy is the ability to empathize with hurting people and to translate that into cheerful acts of service. Yes, every follower of Jesus is called to care deeply about other followers of Jesus. It's like evangelism. We all need to show compassion and mercy. But this gift is a deep, Holy Spirit-inspired compassion that goes beyond normal Christian caring. People on the receiving end of the gift of mercy are quite often the chronically ill, shut-ins, people in jail, people in homeless shelters, or those in mental hospitals. Mercy is more than just feeling deeply; it involves knowing just what to do to help and doing it. Beethoven, the great classical composer, wasn't known for being an outgoing extrovert. Because he was deaf, he found conversation difficult and humiliating. On one occasion, when he heard a friend's son had died, he hurried over to this man's home overcome with grief for his friend. He had no comforting words. But he saw a piano in the room. For the next half hour, Beethoven played the piano, pouring out his emotion in the most eloquent way he could. When he finished playing, he simply left the home. Later, his friend remarked no one else's visit had meant so much. That's mercy in action.

Giving is the ability to support the Lord's work with generous, timely, and cheerful contributions. Since every follower of Jesus is expected to give at least the tithe to the Lord (10% of one's income), those with the gift of giving return to the Lord far more than the tithe. Rick Warren, who wrote the national best seller, "The Purpose Driven Life" became a multi-millionaire with that book's sales. But he didn't revel in his millions. Instead, he returned back to his church his entire pastoral salary for the 20-25 years he had served that congregation up to that point in time. In addition, the last I heard, he lives on 10% of his income while giving away 90% to the Lord's work. He's what some call a "reverse tither." He lives on 10% and gives 90% to the Lord's work. Granted, not many people can do that, but if you enjoy underwriting the Lord's work above and beyond the tithe, you probably possess the spiritual gift of giving.

Here's a gift you may never have heard of before. Creative ability is the ability to enrich and edify God's people through music, art, drama, and craftsmanship. In the Old Testament, we hear about an interesting man named Bezalel. God put him in charge of making everything associated with the Tabernacle – the structure where the people of Israel worshiped God. This is what God Himself said about Bezalel. "I have filled him with the Spirit of God, giving him great wisdom, ability, and expertise in all kinds of crafts. He is a master craftsman, expert in working with gold, silver, and bronze. He is skilled in engraving and mounting gemstones and in carving wood. He is a master at every craft!" (Ex. 31:3-5 NLT) Yes, God can use and does use people who are artistic or musical to bless and build up the Body of Christ.

Leadership is the ability to cast vision, motivate, and direct God's people with wisdom, humility, and efficiency. Spiritual leadership isn't about being noticed and wielding power; it's about humility. Spiritual leadership isn't about being the boss or dominating people; it's about serving. Another spiritual gift associated with leadership is administration. That's the ability to organize, plan, and execute effective ministry so the

goals of a church or an organization are accomplished. If a church is ever going to be effective in its ministry, it will need people with the gift of leadership and administration.

Perhaps you think it's strange to consider faith to be a spiritual gift. After all, doesn't every follower of Jesus exercise faith when you invite Him to be your Savior and Lord? Aren't all of us who love Jesus supposed to grow in faith every day? But the gift of faith is something more: it's the ability to act on God's promises with unwavering confidence in God's ability to fulfill His purpose. I believe the gift of faith is often manifested in another gift – the gift of intercession. That's the ability to pray consistently on behalf of others, seeing frequent and specific results. These are most definitely the people you want praying for you, praying for our church, and praying for any special concerns that come up. People with the gift of faith and intercession just keep on believing in God.

Discernment is the ability to distinguish between truth and error or to know when a person or an activity is truly from God or not. Folk with this gift just have a Holy Spirit knack for detecting hypocrisy, deceitfulness, or the efforts of the devil to undermine the church. They're a very valuable asset to this or any church. Hospitality is the ability to care for people by providing fellowship, food, and shelter. This person could care less if everything at home is dusted and put away before you come over to visit. Usually this person just knows how to come alongside the lonely person, the new person, or the hurting person. You always leave the presence of a Christian with a hospitality gift feeling refreshed and renewed physically, emotionally, and above all, spiritually. Let me mention a third group or category of gift. They are ...

THE SIGNIFYING GIFTS.

Miracles are the ability to perform a supernatural act that authenticates a person's ministry or message as coming from God. Jesus performed miracles as did some of the first Christian leaders in the book of Acts. Of course, miracles still happen today. They're numerous. They've been documented. It's also fair to say miracles often happen more in places around the world where the good news about Jesus has not been shared before. They assure people who've never heard about Jesus before that the message about Jesus is true, real, and that they should become His followers. China is a country where the message of Jesus has been stifled by the Communist government. Some amazing stories of miracles have emerged. For example, years ago, a Christian man in charge of security at a coal mine felt the Holy Spirit prompting him to pull the alarm even though there had been no sign that a disaster was about to happen. But so strongly did the Holy Spirit impress him that he pulled the alarm. When the miners assembled together on the surface after coming up and out of the mine, they thought a mistake had been made. Moments later an earthquake occurred and a large section of the mine collapsed. Many miners would have been killed or injured, but God worked a miracle. As a result, some 400 coal miners became followers of Jesus after that miraculous intervention.

Healing is the ability to be God's means of restoring people to physical or emotional wholeness. Of course, God stills heals people today – sometimes of terrible and terminal diseases. Sometimes God does it in a supernatural, immediate way. At other times, He uses doctors and medicine. Why a healing that comes through medicine is any less a miracle of God is hard for me to understand. Is it always God's will to heal a person? When Jesus was here on Earth physically, He didn't heal every sick person in Israel. What if God always healed every follower of Jesus of every disease, of every injury, of every sickness? People would become His followers for all the wrong reasons. More importantly, God works patience, endurance, and grace into our character through suffering. Through suffering Jesus can be seen in our lives.

Finally, there is the gift of tongues. This is the ability to speak, worship, or pray in a language unknown to the speaker. Sometimes people with this gift may receive a message from God which can be made known to the entire church through the gift of interpretation. Tongues allow a person to speak to God in prayer with a greater liberty. It can be a way for the deep subconscious part of your being – or your inner spirit – to be caught up in praise to God bringing release, deep joy, and new peace. The Bible says tongues builds up the one uses it and, by inference, the congregation if an interpreter is present. Nowhere in Scripture is tongues presented as a special sign of God's blessing or an evidence of greater spiritual power or maturity. Many spiritual mature people have never spoken in tongues and some who do speak in tongues are not spiritually mature. But, it is most definitely a gift of the Holy Spirit and it should be so honored. Tongues should never be despised or dismissed as weird or out of place.

Why is it important for you to both discover and use your spiritual gifts? Because God has a mission and a ministry for you. When you discover and use your gifts in ministry, you'll be transformed from a frustrated follower of Jesus into a more joyful, more effective disciple of Jesus. Understand all the gifts and how they operate. Then, discover and identify your gifts. Try some things. Take a few risks. God will show you where you are and where you're not gifted. Commit to use your spiritual gifts and then do it. Elizabeth O'Conner wrote these words about why the gifts of the Holy Spirit matter. "The identifying of gifts brings to the fore the issue of commitment. Somehow if I name my gift and it is confirmed, I cannot 'hang loose' in the same way. I would much rather be committed to God in the abstract than be committed to Him at the point of my gifts. Commitment at the point of my gifts means I must give up being a straddler. Life will not be a smorgasbord that I have made it, sampling and tasting here and there. My commitment will give me an identity." The gifts of the Holy Spirit matter. You need to discover your gifts. You need to serve the Lord and His church with those gifts.

In Albuquerque, New Mexico, there was a restaurant called Tim's Place. It was named after Tim Harris, a young man with Down's syndrome who started the business in 2010 with help from his dad, Keith. Six days a week, Tim greeted each customer at the door. Tim called his restaurant "the world's friendliest restaurant." He wanted to own a restaurant ever since he was a kid. That was his dream. When he was in high school, Tim decided he wanted to go to college. So in 2004, he moved about three hours away

to study food service, office skills, and restaurant hosting at Eastern New Mexico University.

The separation wasn't easy at first—for Tim or his parents. Tim says, "I pretty much, like, stayed in my room because I was upset, missing my mom and dad. That was the saddest part. I cried in my pillow. My pillow was nothing but tears. So I decided to knock it off and make friends. It didn't take long." Tim graduated in 2008 and moved back to Albuquerque. He eventually lived in his own apartment within walking distance of his restaurant. Every day, customers used to come into the restaurant and part of the experience was getting a hug from Tim. He said, "When they see me, they just melt into my arms for a hug." The hugs were tallied on a digital counter on the wall, which got up to at least 73,000 hugs. I understand Tim's place closed in 2015, because Tim left Albuquerque to be close to his girlfriend. Tim said, "I got hit by the love bug." But, I understand there's an effort to re-open Tim' Place in Denver where he lives now.

Aren't you glad Tim didn't listen to some people who would have said or implied he had nothing to contribute because of his disability? So, what's your excuse for not contributing to the ministry of this church or helping to build God's Kingdom? Don't ever think you have nothing to contribute – and that goes for this church and for God's Kingdom, too. Sometimes the "weakest" among us actually have wonderful ways to contribute and bless the Body of Christ. If you're a follower of Jesus today, the Holy Spirit lives in you. And if the Holy Spirit lives in you, He's given you spiritual gifts. Discover them. Use them. Find joy in seeing God use them to bless others.