

Discovering your God-given Spiritual Gifts



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What are spiritual gifts? One theologian defines them this way:

*'A spiritual gift is an ability that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the church.'*¹

Paul told the Corinthians that he didn't want them to be ignorant about spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:1), and Peter said we should use whatever gift we've received as a way of dispensing God's grace (1 Peter 4:10).

A Christian who wants to grow as a disciple of Christ and play their part in growing God's Kingdom must therefore know what spiritual gifts God has given them and be using them to serve others.

The Bible says a number of things about spiritual gifts...

1. Spiritual gifts are to be used in the context of Christ's Lordship

1 Corinthians 12 is a key chapter when it comes to understanding about spiritual gifts, it introduces a whole section of the letter devoted to the subject. However in v2, after telling the Corinthians that he doesn't want them to be ignorant about spiritual gifts, Paul seems to change the subject:

'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.'
(1 Cor 12:1-3)

By introducing Christ's Lordship, Paul is not changing the subject away from spiritual gifts. Like any good builder, he is laying the correct foundations first. The starting point when it comes to spiritual gifts is the fact that Jesus is Lord.

¹ P.116 Wayne Grudem / Systematic Theology

This is because unless we've trusted Jesus as Lord of our lives, we don't have any *spiritual* gifts, no matter how many natural abilities or skills we might possess.

Spiritual gifts are given to us by the Holy Spirit when we become Christians. However the first and greatest gift the Spirit gives us is the faith to acknowledge Jesus as Lord of our lives. Unless we exercise our gifts within the context of Jesus' Lordship, we risk misusing or abusing them.

2. Every Christian has been given at least one spiritual gift

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul teaches that every Christian has a spiritual gift. In v7 he tells the Corinthians that *'to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good'* (1 Cor 12:7).

He then goes on to list a number of spiritual gifts at the end of which he states again that the Holy Spirit *'gives them to each one, just as he determines'* (1 Cor 12:14).

Paul then goes on to compare the church community to a body made up of lots of different parts, each performing a vital function, enabling the body to work properly. Paul's point is clear: that every Christian within a church community has a gift from God and therefore a role to play.

Similarly, Peter wrote: *'Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.'* (1 Peter 4:10)

If you are a Christian, you have at least one spiritual gift, given to you by the Holy Spirit. He wants you to know what it is and get on with using it to serve others in the church community.

3. There are countless different types of spiritual gifts

There are five different passages in the New Testament where specific spiritual gifts are listed². The lists are all very different and are therefore not meant to be exhaustive. They are an indication that God generously gives many different types of gifts to his Church. There are a countless variety of spiritual gifts, far too many to list.

In addition, the gifts themselves can be worked out in different ways according to the personality, passions, or experience of the recipient. For example, two people who have the gift of serving (Rom 12:6) might use their gifts in very different ways: one choosing to serve by cooking meals for needy people, while the other serving by giving financial advice to those in debt.

This is what makes the Church such a rich community to be part of and why each member is valuable and has a special role to play. A healthy church will have not only a great diversity of gifts, but also a great diversity of ways in which those gifts are expressed. This should lead to greater unity rather than greater fragmentation as we recognise, appreciate and encourage our brothers and sisters who have gifts that are different from our own.

Paul told the Corinthians they were to value every member of their church community because they needed each other in order to function correctly. Moreover, he assured them that *'God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.'* (1 Cor 12:18).

Every Christian therefore has a God-given role to play within the church community.

² 1 Cor 12:8-10 / 1 Cor 12:28 / Eph 4:11 / Rom 12:6-8 / 1 Cor 7:7

4. Our spiritual gifts may bear a close relation to our natural gifts

In Psalm 139 David praises God for weaving him together in his mother's womb. This isn't simply a reference to his physical formation, but also to his emotional, psychological and intellectual formation. He thanks God for creating his '*inmost being*' as well as his '*unformed body*' (v13,15).

The natural abilities we were born with were given to us by God for a purpose. David recognises that '*all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be*' (v16). God has a purpose for our lives, planned even before our birth, and he gives us natural abilities that are often harnessed when we're saved in order to fulfil those purposes and bring him glory.

5. Spiritual gifts are empowered by the Holy Spirit

While spiritual gifts may bear a close relation to any natural talents or skills we may have, they are superior in that they are empowered by the Spirit and are the result of our new birth, not simply our natural birth. All spiritual gifts are therefore supernatural by nature.

After listing a number of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul states: '*All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.*' (1 Cor 12:11)

When natural gifts are empowered by the Holy Spirit they become spiritual gifts. They are 'redeemed' and reclaimed by God in just the same way that the rest of our natures were when we were reborn. As a result natural gifts often increase in effectiveness and power as they become supernatural gifts.

Spiritual gifts are also superior to natural gifts in that they are given for a superior purpose: the building up of God's people and therefore ultimately, the glory of God.

6. Spiritual gifts are given by God to build up other believers

We are given spiritual gifts not primarily so that we might feel fulfilled as Christians, but so that we might bless and build others up. Our gifts are not for our benefit, but for the benefit of God's community.

Paul reminded believers that they were to '*excel in gifts that builds up the church.*' (1 Cor 14:12).

He told the Ephesians that the ascended Christ gave gifts '*so that the body of Christ might be built up.*' (Eph 4:12).

Peter told those he was writing to: '*Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms*' (1 Peter 4:10). As we serve others by using the gifts God has given us, we not only get jobs done, we also become dispensing agents of God's grace!

We must therefore never exercise our gifts in a self-serving way, with a spirit of pride or a misplaced desire to 'guard our territory' or even out of a need to feel 'fulfilled'. In practice this means allowing others the chance to serve and knowing when to pass ministries on so that others have the opportunity to use and grow their gifts.

7. Spiritual gifts are given to equip the Church to fulfil it's mission

Spiritual gifts are given to individual Christians not primarily for their own benefit, but to equip the church to carry out its ministry until Jesus returns.

Paul told the Corinthians: '*Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.*' (1 Cor 1:7)

The Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost to empower the Church to make disciples of all nations (Acts 1:8).

Because the Holy Spirit is the one who gives us spiritual gifts, the ultimate aim of these gifts must therefore be to enable the Church to fulfil the mission he came to make possible.

While some spiritual gifts help fulfil the church's mission in an obvious way, such the gifts of evangelist and teacher, ultimately all the gifts are given, either directly or indirectly, to enable the church to function effectively as a mission-minded community.

Sadly churches can sometimes lose sight of this and as a result they can become inward-looking. When this happens spiritual gifts can become a source of tension and even division. Only when we use our gifts in the context of our mission and in the light of Jesus return do we use them in away that promotes unity and glorifies God.

8. Spiritual gifts grow when they're used and weaken when they're not

Like natural gifts, spiritual gifts vary in strength and can either strengthen or weaken depending on whether they are nurtured or neglected. In Paul's first letter to Timothy he told him: *'Do not neglect the gift you have' (1 Tim 4:14)*. However in his second letter he had to remind him to *'rekindle the gift of God that is within you.'* (2 Tim 1:6).

Like a plant, no gift is given fully grown, but in seed form. It therefore needs to be carefully nurtured and cultivated in order to grow and mature. Within any fellowship there will not only be a variety of gifts, but also a variety of strengths of gifting as well. A church is therefore like a greenhouse, full of gifts at various stages of growth, being nurtured into maturity through training, experience, opportunities to use them, and the encouragement of God's people.

In practice this means that a healthy church community will be patient with those who are growing in their gifting, gracious when mistakes are made, and generous with opportunities to serve. Those who are long in the tooth will gladly encourage and cheer on those who still have their milk teeth!

9. Spiritual gifts are useless unless they are exercised in love

Having spent a whole chapter giving some basic teaching about spiritual gifts, Paul states very bluntly in 1 Corinthians 13 that spiritual gifts are worth nothing if they are not exercised in love:

'If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.' (1 Cor 13:1-2)

Our spiritual gifts should never become a source of pride, a tool for personal gain, or an excuse for treating people ungraciously. They are grace-gifts God has given in order to bless and build each other up. Any spiritual gift exercised out of selfish or self-seeking motives dishonours God and undermines the very reason they were given. Love for God and a desire to bless fellow believers should be our only motive for service. We must never forget that our spiritual gifts are for the benefit of others not ourselves.

10. Spiritual gifts are meant to guide our service, not limit it

While our gifts should guide our service for God, they should not confine what we do. The fact we have a gift doesn't mean we are forbidden from doing something we're not specially gifted to do.

For example, as Christians we are all called to evangelise our friends and neighbours even if we are not gifted as evangelists. Likewise we are all called to give financially even though we may not have the gift of giving. Those of us who are parents also have a responsibility to teach our children Bible stories, even though we may not be gifted teachers.

As Christians God has called us to live for him in the context he has put us. This may mean that we need to unselfishly put the gifts we have been given to one side temporarily in order to live obediently for him in the present.

A woman married to a non-Christian may decide that in order to honour her husband she will not use her musical gift for a time because he is unhappy about how often she is out at 'church things'. A mother may decide not to fully employ her administrative gifts while she has small children at home to bring up. A student may decide not to go out preaching while he is studying for his finals at university.

11. Spiritual gifts are meant to unite, not divide

Sadly, some churches have been divided over differences of opinion regarding some spiritual gifts. Gifts such as prophecy and tongues have been a cause of much debate, often generating more heat among Christians than light. It is therefore not the intention of this booklet to examine these more controversial gifts in detail.

At Woodgreen we do not encourage the public practice of these gifts within our church services because we recognise that there are strong differences of opinion within the fellowship about them. We want to safeguard our unity and not make secondary issues into defining ones, particularly because spiritual gifts are meant to foster unity.

Paul makes it clear that spiritual gifts should unite us rather than divide us and work for our good rather than tear us apart:

'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.' (1 Cor 12:4-7)

This is the perspective we must always maintain as we seek to discover and use the gifts God has given us. The Spirit has given us gifts so that we might use them to bless and serve each other. Our gifts must always be exercised *'for the common good'*.

So... how do I discover what my spiritual gifts are?

1. Pray for insight to discover them.
2. Seek the opinion of others who know you well.
3. Be guided by the opportunities God brings your way in church life.
4. Discern what natural abilities, skills or life-experiences God has given you.
5. Assess what you have done in the past that you have enjoyed doing.
6. Do a gift-discovery course or questionnaire like the one below.
7. Have a go at something!

The rest of this booklet is made up of a gift discovery questionnaire. There are many such tools available, both in paper form, as here, as well as online. We trust it will be a helpful tool to enable you to discover and start to use your God-given spiritual gifts.

GIFT DISCOVERY QUESTIONNAIRE

Some believers feel as though God has gifted everyone else and forgotten about them. Other believers are so good at a wide range of things that they never stop to think 'how has God particularly gifted me?' Other believers think they are gifted in one area of service, when it is painfully obvious to everyone else that they are not!

This questionnaire has been designed to help you begin to explore what your gifts are, so that you can use and develop those gifts.

If you are already a Church member: Please fill this in and if appropriate arrange to meet up with your link-Elder or Growth Group Leader to talk about what you have learnt and how you might best use your gifts in Woodgreen.

If you are applying to be a Church Member: Please fill this in before your membership interview. There will be an opportunity to discuss this as part of the interview.

1. Three general questions to begin

- a) Looking back over your Christian life so far, which time, (or times), have you most enjoyed serving God?

- b) If you are in employment, what skills are involved in what you do?

- c) What hobbies/interests do you have?

2. Here is an opportunity to look at your own responses to situations you may have faced.

Respond to each of the statements below according to the following scale:

Put a **3** if it is **always true, definitely true**

Put a **2** if it is **usually true, most of the time**

Put a **1** if it is **sometimes true, occasionally**

Put a **0** if it is **not true at all, or never true**

Enter your scores into the table on page 21.

Be honest as you respond to each statement. This is how you are now, not what you think you should be.

Also, don't get too hung up on this. The statements are very general and you are unique. Simply answer each one as best you can. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers. This is just one method of trying to home-in on how God has gifted you.

When you have finished, total up each column and then turn to page 22 to see what it all means.

	Statements	0	1	2	3
1	I enjoy learning about management issues and how organisations function.				
2	I enjoy praying for long periods of time and receive leadings as to what God wants me to pray for.				
3	I enjoy working creatively with wood, cloth, paints, metal, glass or other materials.				
4	Christians have told me that they have changed their behaviour because I helped them to understand a biblical truth or personal issue.				
5	I have had positive responses when confronting people who were wandering from the truth.				
6	I seek out unbelievers so I can speak about Christ with them.				
7	I enjoy giving what resources I have to those in need.				
8	I like to work behind the scenes so that others can use their gifts more effectively.				
9	I use my home as a place to serve people in need.				
10	I am usually chosen as the group's spokesperson when in discussion groups				
11	I am able to empathise with suffering people, and involve myself in their healing process.				
12	I am attracted to the idea of serving in another country or an ethnic community.				
13	I can faithfully provide long-term emotional and spiritual support and concern for others.				
14	I can communicate difficult biblical concepts in such a way that people become motivated to learn and study them more.				

	Statements	0	1	2	3
15	Once I know a goal, I like to develop a plan or strategy to meet it.				
16	I am very conscious of ministering to others as I pray.				
17	I am skilled in working with different kinds of tools.				
18	I like the challenge of communicating with variety and creativity.				
19	I enjoy reassuring and strengthening those who are discouraged.				
20	I am always looking for different ways to share my faith effectively.				
21	I believe I have been given an abundance of resources so that I may give more to the Lord's work.				
22	I enjoy doing routine tasks that support the needs of ministry.				
23	I enjoy meeting new people and helping them to get acquainted with others in the church.				
24	I can organise and influence people effectively to achieve a vision that I perceive to be God's plan.				
25	I am drawn towards people who are sometimes regarded as undeserving or beyond hope.				
26	I am willing to take an active part in starting a new church or ministry.				
27	I can patiently but firmly nurture others in their development as children of God.				
28	I enjoy studying the Bible and sharing practical insights that will help others grow and act in obedience.				

	Statements	0	1	2	3
29	I am able to visualise a coming event and solve potential problems before they happen				
30	I pray with confidence because I am convinced that God works in response to prayer.				
31	I can visualise how something should be constructed before I build it.				
32	I like learning from the Bible, and I enjoy seeing others learn too. I am frustrated with teaching that doesn't challenge people to change.				
33	I am able to motivate others to take steps for spiritual growth.				
34	Often when I share the good news about Jesus, people want to know more.				
35	I find fulfilment in sharing my money and possessions without expecting anything in return.				
36	I am most fulfilled when I can serve in an area of obvious need.				
37	I actively seek out visitors in order to make them feel comfortable and cared for.				
38	I can guide others, individually or as a team, to set and achieve godly goals.				
39	I can easily look beyond a person's handicaps or their lingering problems to see a life that matters to God.				
40	I can relate to others in culturally sensitive ways.				
41	I love nurturing people, even when they are demanding.				

	Statements	0	1	2	3
42	I organise biblical materials and give systematic presentations which are appreciated by other Christians.				
43	I can organise ideas, people and events.				
44	When I hear about needy situations, I feel burdened to pray.				
45	I am good at working with my hands and enjoy doing so.				
46	I enjoy gathering material that will help me understand and communicate the gospel better in the future.				
47	I reassure those who need to take courageous steps in their faith, family, work, or life.				
48	I am so concerned for the lost that I constantly feel an urge to invite people to receive Christ.				
49	I manage my money so that I can support Christian ministries that work for God's glory.				
50	I willingly do a variety of odd jobs around the church to meet the needs of others.				
51	I spontaneously invite people to my home, even though my home may not be totally presentable!				
52	Many Christians request my advice about decisions they should make or actions they should take.				
53	I do as much as I can behind the scenes to show God's love to those who are suffering.				
54	I view the overall picture and do not get hindered with problems along the way.				
55	I enjoy giving practical support, nurture, and spiritual guidance to a group of people.				

	Statements	0	1	2	3
56	When I teach others, I feel comfortable responding to questions.				
57	I can handle many details at one time in order to accomplish a task.				
58	God gives me a peace and confidence that my prayers are being answered, even when I cannot see the results.				
59	I serve and work more behind the scenes to make things that are useful for ministry and that honour God.				
60	I constructively critique the delivery, performance, and work of others.				
61	I go out of my way to affirm the value and worth of others.				
62	My conversations with unbelievers often seem to include spiritual matters.				
63	I often give anonymously to help meet an individual's or ministry's financial needs				
64	I like to find things that need to be done and do them, even without being asked.				
65	For me, among the greatest times of joy in the church are the times of social interaction and fellowship.				
66	Because I can adjust my leadership style, I can motivate a wide variety of people to work together to meet a goal or accomplish a task.				
67	I can patiently support those going through painful experiences, as they try to stabilise their emotional and spiritual lives.				
68	I am comfortable initiating new ideas and starting up new ministries.				
69	I can gently restore wandering believers to faith and fellowship.				

	Statements	0	1	2	3
70	I get frustrated when I see people's lack of biblical knowledge.				
71	I like to make ministries more efficient.				
72	I see specific results in direct response to my prayers.				
73	I am able to design and make/build/install things that help the church serve people better.				
74	Through my stories and illustrations people have recognised deeper truths about the Lord, about themselves, and their relationships.				
75	I strengthen those who are wavering in their faith by directing them to God's promises and truth.				
76	I like people around me to know I am a Christian, and hope they will ask me about my relationship with Christ.				
77	I choose to limit my lifestyle in order to give away a higher percentage of my income.				
78	When a task needs to be done, I find it difficult to say 'no'.				
79	I can make people feel at ease even in unfamiliar surroundings.				
80	I am able to cast a vision for ministry that others want to follow and be part of.				
81	I empathize with hurting people and desire to help in their healing process.				
82	I am quick to see new opportunities and act on them.				
83	There are a number of people in my life that I am personally guiding with truth, encouragement, caring and wisdom.				

	Statements	0	1	2	3
84	I love to explain the word of God in ways that people will understand and act on.				
85	I see people as gifted and valuable resources to be co-ordinated for greater effectiveness in the church.				
86	I use prayer lists regularly and feel honoured to be able to pray for people or for concerns.				
87	I am a resourceful person, able to find the best materials and tools to build what is needed.				
88	In my daily Bible readings I sometimes find myself imagining how I might communicate to others what I have learnt.				
89	I carefully challenge or rebuke others in order to help them grow spiritually.				
90	When I share my testimony and God's plan of salvation people respond in faith.				
91	When I know that the resources I share with others are truly needed, I don't worry about whether they will be replenished.				
92	I show my love for others in actions more than words.				
93	I enjoy providing food and lodging for those in need.				
94	I am able to clarify a vision for ministry, and decisively manage people and resources to bring it about.				
95	People have told me I get too personally and emotionally involved in helping needy people.				
96	I respond positively to challenges and to bold steps of faith that involve change.				

	Statements	0	1	2	3
97	I feel responsible to help oversee and protect believers from the things that keep them from fellowship with God and one another.				
98	I have the desire and the ability to relate God's truth to life, so that Christians develop godly attitudes and values.				
99	I can see the big picture and formulate a detailed plan for accomplishing it.				
100	I love attending prayer meetings and praying with others about needs or issues.				
101	I can fashion raw materials into beautiful or functioning objects.				
102	I am keen to find out what helps people understand a message.				
103	I like to motivate others to take their walk with God more seriously.				
104	I'd rather be around non-Christians more than Christians so that I can build relationships with them.				
105	It is fulfilling for me to know that my financial or material support makes a difference in the church's serving of God and others.				
106	I like to encourage others by serving whenever and wherever there is a need.				
107	I do what I can to help new people feel like they belong.				
108	Groups I have led have matured in Christ and understood God's purpose, even when it has been difficult.				
109	I feel such compassion for hurting people that I actively do what I can to help.				
110	I have been able to inspire others to join me in turning my God-given visions into reality.				

	Statements	0	1	2	3
111	Others have told me how much they appreciated my long-term support and concern for them.				
112	People say they learn a lot when I teach the bible, and they seem to be motivated to study it more on their own and with others.				

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42
43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56
57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70
71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84
85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98
99	100	101	102	103	104	105	106	107	108	109	110	111	112
Total													
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N

3. Making some sense of this

Each letter refers to a different spiritual gift. This list is not exhaustive. There are other gifts as well, but these can be a helpful starting point.

- A = Administration
- B = Prayer/Intercession
- C = Craftsmanship
- D = Preaching
- E = Encouragement
- F = Evangelism
- G = Giving
- H = Helping
- I = Hospitality
- J = Leadership
- K = Mercy
- L = Pioneer/Church Planter
- M = Shepherding
- N = Teaching

a) My top three scores were

	<u>Letter</u>	<u>God's gift of ...</u>
i)	_____	_____
ii)	_____	_____
iii)	_____	_____

b) Having completed the questionnaire and seen the results is there

... anything that has surprised you?

... anything that has confirmed what you already thought were the gifts God has given you?

... anything which has given you a clearer idea about how you might serve God at Woodgreen?

4. Taking this a step further

a) At the end of this booklet there is a second chart. Why not give this booklet to someone who knows you well (like your husband or wife!) and ask them to fill it in with you in mind. Then compare how their perception of you matches or is different from your own!

b) Arrange to see your link-Elder or Growth Group Leader to discuss the results of this questionnaire and where you could use your gifts in church life.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42
43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56
57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70
71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84
85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98
99	100	101	102	103	104	105	106	107	108	109	110	111	112
Total													
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N