

Spiritual Gifts from a Biblical Point of View

What is a "spiritual gift?"

Spiritual gifts are the capacity to excel in a given area for the edification of the church body. They are distinct Divine endowments which are entrusted to every believer (Rom 12:6, I Cor 12:7-11, I Pet 4:10).

Where are the spiritual gifts primarily found?

Rom 12:3-8, I Cor 12-14, Eph 4:1-16, I Pet 4:10-11, (one might also consider the gifts of marriage and singleness in I Cor 7).

How many gifts are there?

No really knows for certain! Many commentators combine two or more words from Scripture into one gift while others feel that the "offices" in Ephesians are not gifts.

What should we always remember about spiritual gifts?

1. The Holy Spirit distributes all spiritual gifts (I Cor 12:11, 18). Our giftedness is not a reason to boast, and someone else's gift is not a reason to idolize them.
2. Every Christian has at least one spiritual gift (Rom 12:6, I Cor 12:7-11, I Pet 4:10). To say that "there is nothing I can contribute at church" is simply not true.
3. Some Christians have more than one gift. Many also believe that we are given primary gifts (real strength areas) as well as secondary gifting (strong areas yet not as strong as the primary gifts).
4. Every gift is essential and needed in our church (I Cor 12:14-26, Luke 14:11-27). Your gift is not insignificant. Every gift is needed. Not using your gift may be robbing the church of something that was intended to build it up. The church does not revolve around one person's gift. Every person and every gift is essential. Age should not stop us from using our gifts. There is no place in Scripture that suggests that gifting starts or stops being useful because of age.
5. No Christian has all the gifts. Paul makes it clear that we are interdependent upon one another (I Cor 12:14f).
6. When possible, each of us should primarily serve the church in the area(s) of our strength. However, we may also occasionally need to serve in an area of secondary strength.
7. We need to identify our spiritual gift(s) through prayer, counsel, study and exposure. This may include taking time to pray, asking wise people around us what they observe in our lives, learning about the gifts, using gift inventories for direction, trying out a gift and examining the results as to whether or not we are effective in that area.
8. Spiritual gifts need to be developed (I Tim 4:14-5). Development comes with consistent use of one's gift, getting constructive criticism from others Christians, and concentrated learning in one's area of gifting.
9. A distinction should be made between "talents" and "spiritual gifts." All people have talents given to them through common grace at birth. Talents have to do with techniques and methods. They inspire, challenge and entertain on a human level. Spiritual gifts are only given to Christians and are for the building up of the church and glorifying God. Some talents that are similar to spiritual gifts may be given at birth and enhanced with supernatural gifting.
10. Spiritual gifts are to be used within the context of love, never self-exaltation (1 Cor 13). We must be immersed in an attitude of love when we use our gifts, not for attention or self-exaltation.

When do we receive our spiritual gift(s)?

Scripture does not give us a definitive answer but there are good reasons to believe that everyone receives at least one gift at conversion. Since spiritual gifts are used for the edification of the church, it is safe to assume that they are given after conversion (Eph 4:12, I Pet 4:11-12). It also seems clear that additional spiritual gifts can be received after conversion (I Tim 4:14, I Cor 12:31).

THE GIFTS

Administration (kubernesis) [I Cor 12:28]

The Greek word means “helmsman.” It was a nautical word used for the steering of a ship. It is the gift of wise, timely, and appropriate organization.

Leadership (prohistemi) [Rom 12:8]

It refers to “one who presides” or “one who manages.” Jesus clarifies what true leadership partially looks like in Mark 10:42-44. Jesus also modeled true leadership in Phil 2:5-11. Exodus 18:13-27 describes the Leadership/Administration principle.

Exhortation (paraklesis) [Rom 12:8]

The ability to comfort, encourage, admonish with love, offer wise counsel, motivate, and challenge. This gift is often used while preaching, teaching, and counseling, but it is distinct from all of them.

Word of Knowledge (gnosis) [I Cor 12:8]

Knowledge is the accumulation of “ordinary information.” This gift is well exemplified by Stephen (Acts 7) and Apollos (Acts 18:24-28).

Word of Wisdom (sophia) [I Cor 12:8]

The gift of wisdom allows one to apply knowledge to everyday life. The person with this gift sees solutions where others see problems. This person will be respected for his or her insights.

Faith (pistos) [I Cor 12:9, 13:2, Rom 12:6]

The gift of faith is a special blessing of “wonder working faith” given by God to some Christians. These Christians are sure God will provide. This gift should not be confused with a lack of careful planning or preparation.

Giving (metadidou) [Rom 12:8]

The giving of one’s money, possessions, time, energy, and self, eagerly, generously, and without a need for recognition. 2 Cor. 9:7 reminds us that all Christians should give “cheerfully.” Spiritual gifts are for edifying the church—so use of this gift advances God’s work (1 Cor. 12:7, 25, 27).

Ministering/Helps (diakonian-Rom 12:7, I Pet 4:11) [antilempheis-I Cor 12:28]

People with this gift are always involved in some form of selfless service to others. It is exemplified by the “little things” people do for others. Sometimes their service to others is known, while more often it goes unnoticed and unrecognized.

Distinguishing spirit/Discernment (diakriseis pneumatou) [I Cor 12:10]

This gift allows one to evaluate between truth and error. There seems to be at least 3 types of discernment: 1) Natural discernment 2) Spiritual discernment and 3) Gift discernment.

Evangelism (evangelistes) [Eph 4:11]

While all are required to evangelize (Matt 28), some have been given an unusual ability in sharing the gospel. The use of this gift may be public or private.

Teaching (didaskalos) [Rom 12:7, I Cor 12:28-29, Eph 4:11]

This is the gift of explaining God’s word and applying it to everyday life in a clear and useful manner. Strong study skills, strong communication skills, as well as a total reliance upon the Holy Spirit are evidences of this gift. All who possess the gift of Shepherding seem to have the gift of teaching, but not vice versa.

Shepherding/Pastoring (Poimen) [Eph 4:11]

A shepherd leads, teaches, protects, feeds, refreshes, seeks the lost, redirects the stray, doctors the wounded, and unifies the flock. Shepherding is a prerequisite for all elders (Acts 20:28, I Pet 5:1-4).

Mercy (eleos) [Rom 12:8]

The gift of mercy is the ability to sympathize, suffer, and grieve with others during affliction. Scripture says that this gift is to be accompanied by “cheerfulness.”

Hospitality (philozenios) [Rom 12:13, I Pet 4:9]

The word hospitality literally means “the love of strangers.” Biblical examples of hospitality are found in Acts 9:43, 16:13.