

What the Bible Says about Spiritual Gifts

SPIRITUAL GIFTS



ROSE
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GIFTS FOR LIFE

You've become a believer and, perhaps, even joined a church. Wonderful! Your wonderful and challenging journey has just begun. The church as God's people has existed for many hundreds of years. The church you're becoming part of has likely been around for a few years already. How do you, being new to Christianity and the different practices in your specific congregation, go about being an active member in the life of the church?

The good news is that God himself will help each believer fit into God's church. The way God does this is through the special empowering of the Holy Spirit. God not only promised to be with each of his people "to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20), but he also promised to give us all the tools we need to serve him and each other—"you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you" (Acts 1:8).

GIFTS FOR THE BODY

The apostle Paul used a helpful illustration to explain this important teaching. When he explained what the church is and how it works, he used the image of the body.

Paul taught in his letters that for the church to function correctly, each member of the "body" must perform a role. God prepared *ministries*. Ministries are activities believers do that serve and allow the church to grow and mature. These ministries exist for each believer. God empowers every believer that forms part of the church to participate in one or more of these ministries. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, God gives gifts—in the sense of "presents"—to each believer. These gifts are called "spiritual gifts" because they are directly connected to the work of the Holy Spirit. Through these gifts, the life and the ministry of the church occur.

Read on to discover presents from God that allow us to be active members of Christ's body.

"For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." —Romans 12:4–5

THE REAL FORCE—THE HOLY SPIRIT

WHO IS THE SPIRIT?

The Holy Spirit is a person. The Spirit is God. Before his death and resurrection, Jesus promised his disciples to send the Spirit of truth, one who "will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). Jesus has not left his disciples alone. The Holy Spirit is with us.

WHAT DOES THE SPIRIT DO?

Besides giving us comfort as we wait for Jesus' return, the Spirit is actively moving within our lives.

GIFTS?

The English word *gift* has two meanings:

1. A special ability or talent—such as playing piano, learning languages, and so on.
2. Something that is given without a charge and freely—such as a *present* for a birthday.

These two definitions color the way we read the New Testament passage. For some of these ministries God did give special talents and abilities—for healings, miracles, or speaking in tongues. However, the emphasis of the New Testament is not on the abilities themselves but on how they function in the ministries (services) of the church.

As we think about the spiritual gifts, we must keep in mind that what makes them spiritual is that they come from the Holy Spirit. And what makes them a gift is that the Holy Spirit freely gives them to us so we can use them in serving the body of Christ. Spiritual gifts are not meant to be stored or publicized. They are meant to be *used* for the service of the body.



THE HOLY SPIRIT ACTS IN THESE WAYS:

ADVOCATES (John 14:16)—“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever.” The Holy Spirit teaches, reveals, and interprets Jesus’ words to his followers. The Holy Spirit is the divine presence with Jesus’ followers.

CONVICTS (John 16:8–9)—“When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment.” The Holy Spirit will convince people of the need to repent from sin, that justice is only achieved through Christ, and that judgment of all humanity belongs to Jesus alone.

DRAWS TO CHRIST (John 16:14)—“He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you.” The Holy Spirit leads people to Christ at all times.

TEACHES (John 14:26)—“But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”

SEALS (Eph. 1:13)—“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,” Like a “seal of authenticity,” the Holy Spirit marks us as God’s property.

GUIDES (John 16:13)—“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”

INTERCEDES (Rom. 8:26)—“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.”

EMPOWERS (Acts 1:8)—“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

These ministries identify the Holy Spirit’s main function: to glorify Christ (John 16:14). Similarly, the primary function of our own ministries is *to glorify Christ*. The other critical function of our ministries—service—in the church is to allow the body to mature, to grow up. How do we reach this goal? Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, especially his ministry of empowering believers, each Christian becomes an extension of God’s own ministry among his people.

THE NURTURING OF THE BODY— SPIRITUAL GIFTS

One way the Holy Spirit empowers believers in the church is by creating ministries—opportunities to serve. Each believer contributes to the growth—both in numbers and in maturity—of the church. If the Holy Spirit is the “fire” that gives the body warmth and life, believers are the “members of the body” that keep it moving.

The Holy Spirit empowers believers to be part of these ministries. The spiritual gifts, then, are the tools we use to carry on those ministries. The function of the spiritual gifts is service. Paul’s main interest in his letters to the early churches is to teach, guide, and help them to grow as the body of Christ.

FOUR LISTS of SPIRITUAL GIFTS in the BIBLE

EPHESIANS 4:11	ROMANS 12:6-8
Apostles Prophets Evangelists Pastor-teachers (or pastors and teachers)	Prophecy Service/serving Teaching Encouragement One who gives One who leads One who shows mercy
1 CORINTHIANS 12:8-10	1 CORINTHIANS 12:28-30
A word of wisdom A word of knowledge Faith Healings Workings of miracles Prophecy Distinguishing the spirits Kinds of tongues Interpretation of tongues	Apostles Prophets Teachers Miracles Healings Helps Guidance Speaking in tongues Interpreting tongues

CESSATIONISM AND CONTINUATIONISM

One of the most debated issues in Christian theology is the question of what some people call the “extraordinary or miraculous” gifts of the Holy Spirit. These gifts are:

- ✧ APOSTLESHIP
- ✧ PROPHECY
- ✧ SPEAKING and INTERPRETING TONGUES
- ✧ WORKING of MIRACLES

MOST COMMON CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING of the GIFTS:

- Some believers hold firmly that these four gifts were limited to a period between Jesus’ ascension and the death of the last Apostle, Jesus’ beloved disciple John (about ad 90). People who hold this view are known as cessationists.
- Other Christians affirm the continuation of all of the gifts. They are continuationists.
- Many other believers would fall in an in-between category of being “open but cautious.”
- Still other believers hold that some of the four gifts continue, while others have ceased.

Whatever view we take, we must remember that according to Paul, the spiritual gifts are meant to promote the unity of the body (1 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 4:12–13). In the letters of Paul, the unity of the body is necessary for the church’s growth. The alternative, disunity and spiritual arrogance, tears down the church.

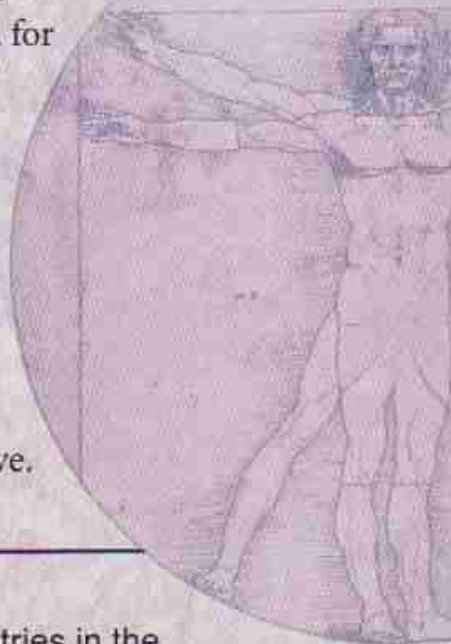


	Cessationists	Continuationists
DEFINITION	Cessation refers to the conviction that the extraordinary gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to the church ended with the closing of the apostolic age.	Continuation refers to the conviction that the Holy Spirit continues to grant extraordinary gifts to the church so it can continue its mission in the world.
MAIN POINTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit were necessary to lay down the church's foundation—in other words, the teachings of the apostles. • Apostleship as a gift ended when the New Testament-era apostles died. Since the church has already been founded, the presence of apostles is no longer necessary. • Since the writings of the New Testament are finished, there is no need for new revelation. Thus, the gift of prophecy is no longer necessary. • Although God can and does do miracles, the gift of working of miracles by individuals has ended along with the gifts of apostleship and prophecy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although the foundation work—for example, writing the New Testament—of apostles and prophets has ended, they had other functions—for example, planting new churches or bringing the gospel to people who've never heard it. • The extraordinary gifts of the Spirit aid the church in fulfilling its mission by providing encouragement, edification, and guidance. • Unlike prophecy as an office in the Old Testament, prophecy in the church is a gift that any believer can have, though some have a special gift in this area. Prophecy today does not reveal God's will the way the Scriptures did. Prophecy today communicates God's word to his people for encouragement, edification, and guidance. • Prophecy and all other gifts are dependent and subordinated to the authority of the Scriptures.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

The word *church* comes from a Greek word (*kuriaskos*) that means "belonging to the Lord." However, the most common word in the New Testament for *church* is *ekklesia*, which means "assembly, gathering." In the New Testament, it is used for the gathering of believers in specific places to worship and have fellowship together.

The church is made up of individuals. Yet, it is more than just the sum of individuals. It is a divine institution. The church is one (it is Christ's body) even if it can be found in many places and at different times. The church is universal. Christ's body is found throughout the world, and it is timeless. It contains all the people who have believed and those who will believe.



POWER and WEAKNESS

God empowers his people to carry on their ministries in the church. Spiritual gifts aren't only about the abilities one may have, but about what God is doing in and through the church and how we fit in. God is always active inside and outside the church. We must discern how he is active and ask him to empower us to be part of those activities.

The apostle Paul reminds us that our calling does not depend on who we are, what we have, and what we can do. God uses for his glory what we can offer. Yet, God is not limited to our personality and abilities. Surprisingly, according to Paul, God often calls us to serve him and others out of our weaknesses, even to the point of emphasizing that we are weak. It is in these cases that God's strength shines through our weaknesses. Paul concludes that, "For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). Paul teaches us that we must serve out of humility, dependence, and trust.

DESCRIPTION OF GIFTS



APOSTLE

1 Cor. 12:28-29; Eph. 4:11

We can speak of more than one kind of apostle in the

New Testament. The first kind refers to those Jesus called and set apart, who witnessed his life and ministry. They are the first twelve disciples, although it also includes people like Paul and James (see 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:5-9; Gal. 2:9). A different type of apostle includes those who were especially appointed as missionaries to spread the gospel—for example, Barnabas (Acts 13:2-3; 14:14) and Silas (Acts 15:40; 1 Thess. 1:1, 2:6).



MIRACLES

1 Cor. 12:10, 28-29

For the apostle Paul, miracles existed to validate

the message of the apostles—"I persevered in demonstrating among you the marks of a true apostle, including signs, wonders and miracles" (2 Cor. 12:12). Some examples of miracles in the New Testament are the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:9-11) and the judgment of Elymas the magician (Acts 13:6-11). Many Christians believe that the need for these miracles for validation ended with the passing of the apostles. However, Christians affirm the possibility and existence of miracles from God today. Miracles strengthen the believers' faith. They build up the church.



TEACHING, PASTOR-TEACHER, and EXHORTATION

1 Cor. 12:28-29;

Rom. 12:7-8; Eph. 4:11

Traditionally, the ministry of pastors is closely connected to that of teaching. In addition to caring for the members of each church, the other crucial role of pastors is to explain the apostolic teachings to believers. However, many people can thrive as teachers without having to become pastors. Teaching is a vital ministry of the body of Christ. Beyond giving information, teaching allows people to deepen their relationship with God. Furthermore, teaching equips believers to be aware of false teachings that they might encounter. Closely connected to other gifts, exhortation means that one comes alongside of someone with words of encouragement, comfort, consolation, and counsel to help them be all God wants them to be.



EVANGELIST

Eph. 4:11

Though sharing the good news of the gospel is a

privilege and responsibility of every believer, some people have the ability to present the message of salvation in a clear, simple, and engaging way. Those who fit in this ministry can provide leadership to all believers to carry on their task of evangelism.



HEALINGS

1 Cor. 12:9, 28, 30

Connected to miracles, healings were also a demonstration of God's

power that validated apostolic authority. The specific "office" of healer—if there was ever one—may have ended with the apostolic age. However, Christians continue to believe that God can and does heal as a response to prayer.



WORD of WISDOM and WORD of KNOWLEDGE

1 Cor. 12:8

We must understand these two gifts in the context of the whole letter. The Corinthian church seems to have struggled with being too impressed with, and attracted to, the more "flashy" gifts of tongues and prophecy. Although Paul does not deny their importance, he makes it clear that these gifts without love, wisdom, and knowledge are empty. Wisdom, the discerning and understanding of God's doings in the world and the way the world functions, is a critical ministry that allows all ministries and gifts of the church to work in harmony and unity. Knowledge allows believers to understand and explain God's revelation to others.



HELPING, SERVING, GIVING, and MERCY

1 Cor. 12:28, Rom. 12:7, 8

These different gifts are so closely related that some tend to assign them to the tasks of deacons. However, the overall context of these passages suggests that they are activities for all believers. These gifts are crucial for the maturity of the church. Service stands at the core of our calling. The practice of these gifts can be as varied as offering help to widows, orphans, and the poor, give aid for the daily activities in the church, and discerning when individuals or groups are in need of help to carry on their ministries.



FAITH

1 Cor. 12:9

This faith does not refer to "saving faith," which every believer has. Nor does it refer to the daily faith necessary for the Christian life (Eph. 2:8), which every believer is expected to exercise (Heb. 11). Rather, it refers to a faith that complements the other gifts and allows them to be daring and active. When the ministries of the church face odds that overwhelm most people, this ministry of faith challenges, encourages, and reminds people that we serve a powerful God who owns and controls all things.



LEADERSHIP and GUIDANCE

Rom. 12:8, 1 Cor. 12:28

Although traditionally these gifts have been related to the ministry of elders in the church, the context of the passages suggests that they are meant for all believers. These ministries are applicable to many areas of church life: goals for the church, teaching, evangelism, acts of mercy and service, and so on.



DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN SPIRITS

1 Cor. 12:10

In the context of the letter to the Corinthians, distinguishing (or discerning) between spirits may refer to two activities. One is the ability to recognize truth from error. In this sense, truth is a revelation from God, so this gift is the ability to discern when a prophecy actually comes from God. According to many believers, since God has stopped revealing his will in the same way he did in the Bible and since prophecies have stopped, this part of discerning is no longer necessary. However, the second activity is still important. It refers to the ministry that discerns when a teaching or a plan fits in with God's will, whether it comes from the leading of the Holy Spirit. It also includes the ability to discern when

a new teaching contradicts the basic teachings of the Christian faith—for example, contradicts teaching on the Trinity, the person and ministry of Christ, the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit, the inspiration of the Scriptures.



TONGUES and INTERPRETATION of TONGUES

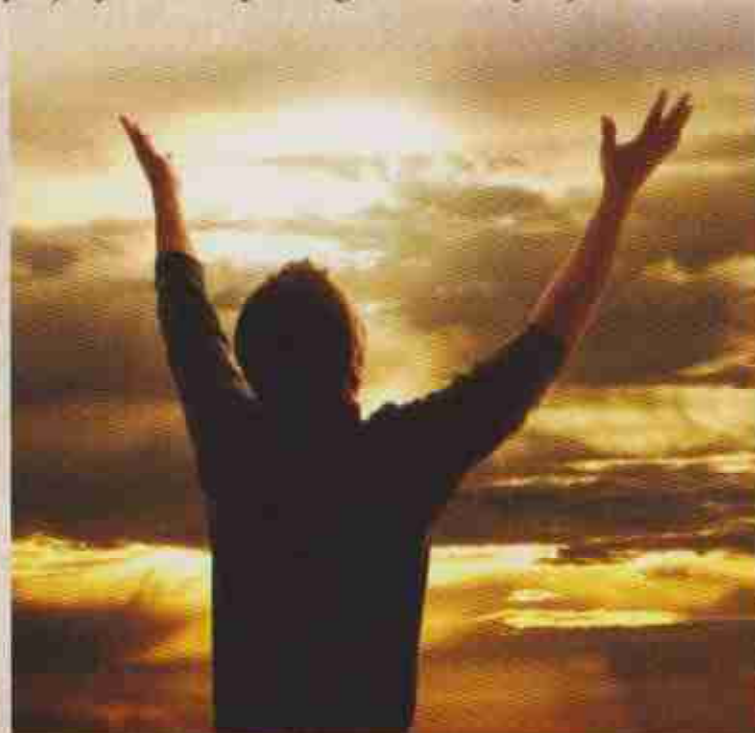
1 Cor. 12:10, 28, 30

The apostle Paul did not discourage speaking of tongues—in fact, he urged the Corinthian leaders to not forbid it (1 Cor. 14:39). However, Paul was correcting an error in the church. Some in the Corinthian church were too enchanted with the flashy gift of speaking in tongues. Paul reminds them that speaking in tongues without love is like a "resounding gong or a clanging cymbal." Paul's main concern is the edification of the church as a whole, as a body. He explains that speaking in tongues edifies the one speaking (1 Cor. 14:4). Thus, for the apostle Paul, speaking in tongues seems to be a secondary. Today, Christians are divided on whether the ministry of speaking in tongues has stopped or continues. Paul makes it clear that the unity of the body of Christ is far more important than speaking, or not speaking, in tongues.

SPIRITUAL GIFT QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is one of many tools to help you discern where you fit in the church's many ministries. It can help you to either learn or confirm areas of affinity—areas that you naturally tend to focus on. But as with most spiritual gifts tests, it is not meant to definitively tell you what your gift is. Simply knowing your spiritual gifts is not the goal, but rather knowing how to serve God as a member of Christ's body and serve are the real goals.

- ✧ *Ask God for guidance and wisdom to find your place in the church's ministry.*
- ✧ *Your life experience can be a good guide to find your interest and abilities.*
- ✧ *Be mindful of the needs of your church. Sometimes, God will call you to minister—serve—in places you might not prefer. The calling may be temporary or long term.*
- ✧ *Be ready, willing, and courageous. Obedience is challenging.*
- ✧ *Listen to the encouragement, wisdom, and guidance of other members of the body of Christ.*
- ✧ *Be prayerful about finding God's will for you.*



FOR EACH QUESTION, CHOOSE A RESPONSE BETWEEN 0 AND 3 AS FOLLOWS:

3 Consistently,
almost always true

2 Most of the time,
usually true

1 Some of the time,
once in a while

0 Not at all,
never

1. I am able to communicate effectively the message of salvation.
2. I make critical decisions when necessary.
3. I rejoice when meeting needs through sharing my possessions.
4. I enjoy studying.
5. I thrive when trusting God in difficult situations.
6. I actively meet physical and practical needs.
7. I can analyze events or ideas from different points of view.
8. I naturally encourage others.
9. I am acutely in tune with the emotions of other people.
10. I am a cheerful giver.
11. Yielding to God's will gives me great joy.
12. It is very important for me to do things for people in need.
13. I can identify those who need encouragement.
14. I am sensitive to the hurts of people.
15. I am sensitive to new truths and to how they apply to specific situations.
16. I have experience with organizing ideas, resources, time, and people effectively.
17. I am able to discern when sermons or teachings do not conform to the Scriptures.
18. I can trust in God even in very difficult moments.
19. I can discern where God wants a group to go and help it get there.
20. I have the ability and desire to teach.
21. I am sensitive to what people need.
22. I have experience making effective and efficient plans for accomplishing the goals of a group.
23. I can explain Scripture in simple and accessible ways.
24. I spend time digging into facts.
25. Sharing Christ with nonbelievers comes naturally to me.
26. I can discern the motivation of persons and movements.
27. I can delegate and assign meaningful work.
28. I detect when people experience stress and distress.
29. I desire to give generously and unpretentiously to worthwhile projects and ministries.
30. I can relate God's truths to specific situations.
31. I can organize facts into meaningful relationships.
32. I can detect honesty when people share their religious experiences.
33. I look for ways to encourage and comfort others around me.
34. I am able to help people flourish in their ministries.
35. I can make complex ideas and doctrines simple and accessible.
36. I look for opportunities to establish relationships with non-believers.

Write your answer for each question, then add your answers for each gift. Pay attention to 2's or 3's. These are likely the gifts you are currently leaning toward.

GIFT	QUESTION NUMBER	YOUR ANSWER	TOTAL
<i>Discernment</i>	17		
	26		
	32		
<i>Exhortation</i>	8		
	13		
	33		
<i>Evangelism</i>	1		
	25		
	36		
<i>Faith</i>	5		
	11		
	18		
<i>Giving</i>	3		
	10		
	29		
<i>Guidance</i>	16		
	22		
	27		
<i>Help/Serving</i>	6		
	12		
	21		
<i>Knowledge</i>	4		
	24		
	31		
<i>Leadership</i>	2		
	19		
	34		
<i>Mercy</i>	9		
	14		
	28		
<i>Teaching</i>	20		
	23		
	35		
<i>Wisdom</i>	7		
	15		
	30		