

A Spiritual Gift Sampler

1 Corinthians 12:8-11

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I was thinking about the proper balance for a church on a special day, like Mother's Day. We have another one in two months as the Fourth of July is on Sunday this year. How can a church service balance Mother's Day and be a worship service? My thought was that we honor the mothers and worship God. That would be a good approach. So we have honored the mothers. *We love you all! We are so thankful for you. There is a gift for you as you leave today.* Now we are glorifying God in song and in the proclamation of His Word.

Our church's teaching ministry has been going through a book of the Bible, a letter named 1 Corinthians. We are in chapter 12, which is all about what are known as "spiritual gifts." These are spiritual empowerments that uniquely enable each Christian to bless and build up the church in at least one type of ministry. They are gifts from God to the *Church*; they are not gifts from God for us individually. Have you ever seen a wrapped gift on the kitchen table and thought, *A gift for me?* Only for someone to say, "It's not for you." Understanding the purpose of spiritual gifts might be like that. We receive the gift enablement but the gift blessing is not for us, it's for the Church. The Corinthians saw all the gifts and thought, *This is for me!* Verse 7 makes it clear, *To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.* We will see later how their self-obsession turned God's purpose for spiritual gifts upside down and how they viewed the spectacular gifts as means to their self-exaltation and self-fulfillment.

Here's a definition of a spiritual gift: *A spiritual gift is any ability that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the church.* (Wayne Grudem) The difference between a natural gift and a spiritual gift is one of empowerment and fruit. A natural gift can be humanly enabled and done by people on their own. Bill Gates can make a fortune and give generously to a foundation. Tony Robbins can inspire people. Peter Drucker can lead and administrate. What they cannot do with their natural abilities is produce spiritual fruit.

- *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.* (1 Corinthians 2:14)
- *Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.* (Romans 8:8)

So the difference between a natural gift and a spiritual gift is that spiritual gifts are empowered by the Holy Spirit and produce spiritual fruit that the natural gift never could. That doesn't mean that the Holy Spirit doesn't empower natural gifts for spiritual purposes. I think He often does as He works through our natural personality, temperament, or gifts which are used for spiritual purposes in the Church. Don't split hairs here. Am I using my natural gift or my spiritual gift? Just say, *I want everything I have to be used by God.*

I was recently talking with the head coach of a local high school team. He has had a lot of success and he wanted to know how he could be a better Christian coach. We're talking about putting together a ministry for Christian coaches in the area. Is coaching football or baseball a spiritual gift? No. Could God use the organizational ability for spiritual purposes? Could God take the ability to guide young men and empower that in the church for spiritual purposes? God can use natural gifts for His purposes. At the same time, can God take

someone who is terrified to be in front of people and give him the ability to speak truth for the edification of the Church? He can! That's my story. Have you heard of being so afraid your knees knocked? I remember in high school being so afraid to stand and speak in front of people that my knees were literally shaking in my pants. If you would have said, "Steve, you're going to do this every weekend of your life," I would have fainted on the spot. I am up here doing this only by divine call and enablement.

Sometimes God empowers natural gifts for spiritual purposes and sometimes God gives the ability to do things spiritually that up to that point we couldn't do. In either case, it is a spiritual gift because it is sourced in the Holy Spirit, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and by the Holy Spirit, produces fruit in the life of the Church.

To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 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. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. (1 Corinthians 12:7-11)

There is a main truth here and there is a minor truth.

The Main Truth

Here's the main truth: **The MAIN point of the passage is that all Christians are individually gifted from the same glorious source – The Holy Spirit.**

The repetition gives the author's emphasis:

- v. 8 *through the Spirit*
- v. 8 *according to the same Spirit*
- v. 9 *by the same Spirit*
- v. 9 *by the one Spirit*
- v. 11 *All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit*

What is Paul's point? All these gifts come from God; specifically the Holy Spirit. Remember what the problem was in this Corinthian church? They were obsessing over the more spectacular gifts, specifically speaking in tongues. They highly valued that gift and were less interested in the others. Paul says that ALL these gifts are from the Holy Spirit. He apportions His gifts to each of us as He wills. Therefore, don't glory in a more spectacular gift and don't look down on a less spectacular one.

A favorite memory in my family has to do with my brother Scott. He is one of Bethel's missionaries in Paraguay, South America. This illustration is an opportunity to let you know that Scott is making a transition and recently accepted a Senior Pastor position at a church in southwest Minnesota. So they are moving back this summer and we will be happy to have the family all on the same continent. The funny thing is that the name of the church is Bethel. What are the chances of that?

Anyway, when Scott was a boy he was famously mischievous and naughty. This little naughty boy desperately wanted a bow and arrow for Christmas. He talked about it. He hoped for it. When Christmas finally came he saw a long slender gift under the tree for him. He was so excited! When it came time for him to open the gift, he grabbed it and began ripping the paper off screaming, "I knew it! I knew it! A bow and arrow!" In the next moment he realized what it was and said in the saddest voice you've ever heard, "Oh...a

fishing pole.” What was going on there? Mom and Dad knew what would be best for him and for the safety of the entire family. It was a good gift, but it wasn’t a bow and arrow.

The safeguard against disappointment in our spiritual gift or jealousy of someone else’s is to realize the Holy Spirit is the one who distributes His gifts. He gave yours to you. He knows what’s best for the safety of the entire family. We must not question His wisdom or His goodness in who He gives what gift to and how much of that gift is given. We should be grateful that He gives them at all. Understanding this will promote humility and respect in the church as all the gifts are valued and no one glories personally in the gift they have received.

The Minor Truth – A Spiritual Gift Sampler

I say the minor truth because Paul doesn’t explain or define any of the nine gifts he lists here. He just lists them. There are five lists of spiritual gifts in the New Testament; two of them are in this chapter. Look at 12:28, *And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.*

Here is a chart of all five gift lists: (from Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, p. 208)

<u>1 Cor. 12:8-11</u>	<u>1 Cor. 12:28</u>	<u>Rom. 12:6-8</u>	<u>Eph. 4:11</u>	<u>1 Peter 4:11</u>
<i>Wisdom-word</i>	<i>Apostles</i>	<i>Prophecy</i>	<i>Apostles</i>	<i>Speaking</i>
<i>Knowledge-word</i>	<i>Prophets</i>	<i>Service</i>	<i>Prophets</i>	<i>Serving</i>
<i>Faith</i>	<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Teaching</i>	<i>Evangelists</i>	
<i>Healing gifts</i>	<i>Miracle-workers</i>	<i>Exhorting</i>	<i>Pastor-teachers</i>	
<i>Miracle working</i>	<i>Healing</i>	<i>Giving</i>		
<i>Prophecy</i>	<i>Helps</i>	<i>Leadership</i>		
<i>Distinguishing spirits</i>	<i>Administration</i>	<i>Mercy</i>		
<i>Speaking in tongues</i>	<i>Tongues</i>			
<i>Interpreting tongues</i>				

There are 30 gifts listed here. Some of these overlap, so it’s not precise how many gifts are listed. If you don’t count them twice, there are somewhere around 20.

Since none of the lists are the same and these letters were written to different congregations, it seems fair to say they were not meant to be exhaustive but examples of the gifts. It could be argued that they are categories that all the gifts fall into. Some of the gifts are functions; some are offices, like Apostle and prophet. 1 Peter 4:11 summarizes them nicely into two categories: *whoever **speaks**, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever **serves**, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.*

Speaking gifts and *serving gifts*. Not that speaking isn’t serving or serving doesn’t involve speech but for a broad breakdown, it’s helpful. Let’s survey the gifts the New Testament does give, but please remember that there is no dictionary definition for these, perhaps on purpose to keep their expression flexible to the unique gifting of each individual.

Speech/Word Gifts

Revelation Speech/Office

Apostles

Prophets

Peter outlines the qualifications for an Apostle in Acts 1:21 as a man who was with Jesus during his earthly ministry. The original 12, minus Judas, adding Mathias and Paul gives a total of 13. They are all dead and with them died the office of Apostle.

Prophets – the book of Acts identifies early church prophets including Agabus in 11:28 and the daughters of Phillip in Acts 21:9. We will deal with what prophecy is in chapter 14 but to whet your appetite, the word is very elastic. Broadly speaking it means *foretelling* – the speaking of what is going to happen, and *forth telling* – the speaking of the way things are and the way they should be. It has more to do with the authority and source of the Word than being about the future. More on that later.

Mediatorial Speech/Office

Evangelists

Pastor/Teachers/Exhorting

Speaking Wisdom/Speaking Knowledge

These are in our immediate passage. Knowledge is related to God; the ability to speak about God and the things of God. Wisdom is the application of knowledge to the practicalities of life and ministry. Being around D.A. Carson a few months ago when he was here, I would say he has the gift of knowledge. He has amazing insight and knowledge of God. A word of wisdom helps to guide the Church with prudence and discretion. They are somewhat interrelated.

Prophecy

Distinguishing Spirits

Paul describes this in 14:29, *Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.* To distinguish spirits is to discern whether the source of what was said is God or not, truth or not, light or not. When we get to chapter 14 we will see Paul's concern with the free-for-all worship services in Corinth. They needed order and they needed people with discernment to weigh what was spontaneously being said.

Tongues and/or their Interpretation

This was the gift that was so controversial in Corinth. Sure glad that's changed. Most of chapter 14 is about speaking in tongues so we will get into this one later.

Serving Gifts

These are a little more self-explanatory.

Faith

Saving faith is a gift that all true Christians receive as they put their trust in Jesus' death on the cross for our sins and in our place and for our redemption. The *gift* of faith is the ability to trust God's character in extraordinary circumstances. People with the gift of faith pray really great as you hear their confidence in God. When everyone else is shaking, these are

the people who have an unusual steadiness. May God bless us with lots of people who have this gift.

Healing

Physical healing was a part of Jesus' ministry and was common in the early days of the Church. The Apostles had this gift. Paul had this gift. The language in verse 9 is literally, *giftings of healings*. It seems to indicate that sometimes God would empower someone to effect a healing. They were not healers, but God would use them to bring the healing. James 5 tells us that healing is available through the prayer of the elders of the church.

Miracle-working

Helps

Administration

Leadership

Giving

Mercy

These are self-explanatory. What a blessing all of these are. Those with the gift of *helps* LOVE to "help" and serve Christ's Church in this way. *Administration* acknowledges that the church needs structures and organizational leadership. Some people are uniquely gifted in organizing ministry and people for maximum impact. What a blessing this gift is to the Church.

Giving – We are all called to give generously and to have a lifestyle of stewardship and giving. But there are some people who just can't give enough. They have the heart of the widow and her two mites. Everything they have is available to God and they take great joy in giving it.

Mercy – These are the folks whose heart fills with compassion for others and their needs. This is the person who doesn't give up on someone. These are the criers; the tender of heart. Other people's hurts are their hurts. Praise God for the gift of mercy in the Church.

Look at this list. Any fishing-pole gifts here? Are any of these really disappointing? No. All of them are wonderful and massive blessings to the Church. That's what Paul is saying; the Holy Spirit doesn't give any bad gifts. Getting that means that when we discover our gifts, rather than viewing them like a fishing pole we should view them as bows and arrows. One way you can know you are serving in your area of gifting is that it is a joy and delight. You leave the ministry moment thinking, *That was cool!* All God's gifts are bows and arrows.

Here's my last thing. Why do they all sound so great? Here's why. The gifts of God are the characteristics of God. They all are manifestations of the Spirit (verse 7). He is a God of mercy, wisdom, healing, organization, helps, truth, and as chapter 13 will tell us, love. The gifts of God are God's nature on display in the Church. When Steve teaches and exhorts, the blessing you feel is not me, it's God. When a brother or sister comes alongside you in your pain, and you feel their mercy and love, the blessing is not them, it's God. There is a spiritual transaction that happens when the Spirit empowers and uses a grace-gift to bless. We'll talk more on spiritual gifts next week including some ways to discover your grace-gift.

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