

What's My Gift?

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

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Steve DeWitt

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (1 Corinthians 12:4-7)

Today's message is not really the one I thought it would be. My plan was to touch on how to find your spiritual gift, and then move on to 12:12-13 and the subject of baptism in the Holy Spirit. The more I wrote on finding your gift, the more there was to say. So today's message is not more exposition, but more application of 12:7-11.

Spiritual gifts are *enablements for ministry, given by the Holy Spirit, to each Christian, to serve and bless the church*. These are sometimes natural gifts the Holy Spirit uses to bear spiritual fruit. Often they are new abilities which we didn't have the capacity for prior to conversion. After conversion, things change. The desires and directions of my heart are changed toward the things of God and His Church. A Christian is drawn toward serving their Savior and will discover a few things they are surprisingly effective at AND they enjoy doing.

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>				

We said last week that this list is not exhaustive, but likely representative of the kinds of abilities Christ gives, through the Spirit, to His Church. What's your gift? It is up here or at least the category is. God's gifts are God's call. If you want to know what God wants you to do, simply ask what He has gifted you to do. Do what you are gifted to do. Don't do what you're not gifted to do. There are few things more frustrating to a Christian and a church than people doing what they are NOT gifted to do. We will see that more next week with Paul's easy to understand illustration of the ear wishing it was the eye. Ears don't see very well. It's very frustrating for an ear to try to be an eye and dangerous for the body to try and see with its ears.

Additional Thoughts on Spiritual Gifts

- *As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace. (1 Peter 4:10)*
- *Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his*

teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 12:6-8)

- *For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. (2 Timothy 1:6)*

The biblical exhortations are for us to use our gifts, grow our gifts, and adorn our gifts with attitudes that show we are using our gifts for the right reasons.

The call to **use** our gifts is seen in 1 Peter 4:10 and Romans 12:6. *As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another.* Since all Christians have a gift, all Christians should use their gift. To not serve Christ is to not use our gift. To not use our gift is to deny the Church the blessing the Holy Spirit knew we needed. It is also to deny our lives the blessing and growth that comes from serving Christ by serving others.

Imagine hearing of a family with a specific need. Because you love them, you give to one member of the family a wrapped present in which is a gift to meet their need. You tell the person, "This is for your whole family." Sometime later you spend time with the family and ask, "How are things going?" They say, "Not so good. We have this need." They tell you the need and it's the same need that you gave a gift to meet. You'd go to the family member and say, "I gave you a gift for your family. What did you do with it?"

An unopened, unused gift given to meet a need would be hard to explain. Here's the irony – the person who allows fear or laziness or selfishness or busyness as an excuse personally suffers the consequences of an unhealthy family. The analogy is easy to see. When I have a spiritual gift that I don't use, it negatively affects my church family which negatively affects me. I am appealing to every Christian in our church to USE your gift. Like the parable of the talents, NOT using your gift will not be well received by Christ. Use it – for God's glory, for the Church's benefit, and for your blessing.

Not only should we use our gifts, but we should **grow** them. Paul tells Timothy *to fan into flame* his gift. This means that the gift Timothy was given had growth potential. It could become more than it was when he received it. If I have the gift of leadership, I can become better at it. If I have the gift of serving, I can become better at it. To receive a spiritual gift is like receiving a plant. I could take you to Hobby Lobby and give you a plastic plant. If I visited your house in two years, it would look the same. It doesn't change. However, if I gave you a real plant and you watered the plant and cared for it, it would become more than it was when you received it.

Think for a moment about what you perceive to be your gifts. Are you more effective today than you used to be? Are you more zealous for it than you used to be? For me, if I am properly using my gift, I ought to be a better teacher and preacher today I than I was five years ago. Paul tells Timothy, not to neglect his gift but use it in a way that his growth in it was obvious to the Church (1 Timothy 4:14-15). We should encourage one another when we see growth. "You're really getting good at _____!"

Finally, we should adorn our gifts with attitudes that show we are using them for the right reasons. We see this in Romans 12 – the person who leads with zeal; who gives with generosity; who gives mercy with cheerfulness. It's not just using the gift, but our attitude in serving that matters. If Christ showed up here, we would run around Him like school children happy to do anything at all He wanted. It would be a thrill. Our attitude would befit the service. Serving Christ ought to be like that. He is here. This is His Church. We should adorn our service with attitudes befitting service of the King. How's yours doing? Pray that

God would help us do that. *But Pastor Steve, I still don't know how to know what my spiritual gift is!*

How to Discover Your Spiritual Gift(s)

If I read chapter 12 to you, what is absent is any guidance on how to find your gift. The Corinthian issue was not with discovering their gifts but their abuse of them. We could wish Paul gave a helpful guide, but he doesn't. In fact, there is no passage of Scripture that explicitly tells us *how* to discover our spiritual gift. The Bible isn't as concerned with how to find them as what we do with them.

To help find your gift, here's what I suggest. Head. Heart. Eyes. Ears.

Head – What does the Bible teach about gifts?

Discovering your gift begins with understanding what gifts are. You can't know if you have a certain gift if you don't know what the gift is or how it works. Some of the gifts are self-explanatory, some of them are not. We are going to spend more time on some of them later, particularly the speech gifts. Spend time studying these passages. Pray over the gifts and ask God to help you know what yours might be. Go online and re-listen to these messages about gifts. Essentially, become familiar with them in such a way that you can identify them and understand how they function. *We can't know what we don't understand.*

A few weeks ago, I had some free time and decided to attend a Shakespeare play in Valparaiso, Indiana. I got there as it was starting and quickly tried to read through the cast of characters and the summary of the plot. The play began. Not only could I not identify who was who, I couldn't understand what they were saying. The rest of the crowd would laugh at certain lines. I didn't get it. They were enjoying it. I was not. I was bored nearly to tears. I paid \$15 for the ticket and walked out after 30 minutes.

What was I missing? Understanding. Head. We can't know what we don't understand and we can't understand what haven't taken time to think about. Discovering your gift begins by understanding the gifts, their purpose, and their general nature. Hopefully these messages are helping.

Heart – What am I drawn toward?

By heart I mean interests, passions, and compassions. All of us have these. There are categories of ministry that we are more interested in than others. Praise God we're not all into the same thing or all the other things would be ignored. We need to appreciate the variety of heart in the Church. So some people have a unique heart for young people, some for worship, some for leadership, some for needs in the community, some for fellowship. All of these are needed and God often shapes our desires around the gifts He's given. We're drawn to certain needs.

"Heart is where you are centered, where you desire to serve, the altar upon which you wish to place your talents. Giftedness is what you are. Heart is where you will most likely apply what you are. Heart refers to empathy, attraction or "draw" towards a group of people, a field of expertise, or a particular type of service. Evaluating your heart helps you determine where you might best use your gifts, where you wish to serve, and whom you wish to serve." (Tom Paterson, as quoted in *SHAPE* by Erik Reese, p. 55-6.)

Often our passions flow from life experiences that God saved us from or brought us through. Our *Celebrate Recovery* staff has many people on it whom God has delivered from very painful bondages in their past. Guess who they have a heart for? Those who were impacted by youth ministry tend to be interested in youth ministry. God uses all of who we are to prepare us for what He's called and gifted us to do. Ask yourself, *What do I find myself drawn to? Where do I feel burdened? What am I interested in? Where do I feel spiritual gravity drawing me?*

One word of caution here. Desire is not always an indication of gifting. God doesn't always want us to do what we want to do and sometimes He wants us to do what we don't want to do, otherwise, few would serve in the hard places or reach hard people. It's always easier to staff the party committee rather than the nursery. Our hearts can mislead us toward the safe and comfortable and the glamorous.

Here's an important example. Paul writes to Timothy in 1 Timothy 3:1, *If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.* The desire to be a leader or to be in vocational ministry is a good one IF it flows from right priorities – God's glory. This is subtle but we must be aware of the deceptions of our hearts. A good thing for the wrong reason is a bad thing. Vocational ministry is a good example. The desire to shepherd souls is a good desire but if I am doing it for personal glorification then it is a bad thing. OR if I want to do it but I clearly do not have the gifts for it, I shouldn't do it. Seminaries would plead with churches not to send men not gifted for shepherding. William Carey, the great missionary to India, wrote back to England about the men they were sending to help him there. He said, "Send me men born twice, but send me men born well the first time." In other words, send me Christian men, but please send me men gifted for the task.

Heart is a helpful guide as long as what is guiding me is love for God and not for myself.

Eyes – Where does God appear to bless?

By "bless" I mean, *Where does God seem to use my involvement to produce spiritual fruit?* The blessing can be found in two places. First, in the context of the Church. *Is my involvement life-giving and helpful to the ministry and the people involved? Or do they see me coming and are like, "Oh, it's you." Do I see evidence of God using my service in spiritually positive ways? Am I helping the team? Is God blessing His people in some way through me serving in this category?*

The second context is important but subjective. *Am I blessed in doing it? Do I walk away from the experience with a sense of fulfillment and joy? "That was very meaningful. I wouldn't mind doing that again!"*

When you find a ministry category where the people are blessed by your involvement and you are blessed by your involvement, you have likely found your gift. When people are kind enough to tell me after a service, "I enjoyed your sermon," I'll often reply, "I enjoyed giving it." I do. When I am not using my gift, on a vacation or sabbatical, it is somewhat hard because teaching and preaching and leading are so life-giving to me. Ask yourself, *Where does God bless others and where does God bless me?*

This is a matter of careful and objective observation and may require some time. How would a farmer know if he was a good farmer? Not when he plants. He needs to wait for the harvest. So don't be disappointed if it takes a little time. Remember, gifts are like little plants; they can grow. Don't quit right away. Give it some time. Let it develop.

Ears – What do godly people affirm to me?

A final important question is, *What do I hear from God's people?* By this I don't mean the courtesy words that people say. Nice people will only say nice things. I'm talking about spiritually discerning people who know you well enough to be honest with you. What do they say? "You stink at that," or "You're surprisingly good at that."

Here's a good example. The book of Acts tells us about Barnabas. He was a companion of Paul in his journeys. Barnabas wasn't actually his name. It was his nickname. *Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus...* (Acts 4:36) Barnabas' real name was Joseph. The Apostles spent time with him and named him, *Son of Encouragement*. If Apostles are naming you *Son of Encouragement*, you can be confident you've found your gift.

We have that kind of role to play with one another; to affirm gifts. We also need to listen to the opinion of godly Christians who observe our service. This requires honesty with one another and enough humility to hear, "This probably isn't your thing."

[Steve went into the audience at this point and had a few people stand, asking the congregation, "What gifts do you observe in this person?"]

One final thought or two. There is a book out about finding God's will entitled, *Just do Something*. If you look at all of this and are still like, *I don't know*, just do something. As Chesterton said, "Anything worth doing is worth doing badly." I tenderly say to many of you, you don't have any idea what your spiritual gift is because you've never tried much of anything at all. Friends, *just do something*. There are organized ministries in our church you can be a part of. Using your gift doesn't require that, but it can help. Just do something. If you do it badly, do something else until you find your spiritual gift.

Finally, this is a message about discovering our spiritual gift and our time is gone. Even as we discover our gifts we have to bear in mind that our real joy ought not to be in our gift but in the One who gave it to us. I recently read an example of a selfish little boy who took his gift from Grandma and played with it by himself all afternoon. In contrast, another little boy who received a gift from Grandma climbed on her lap and smothered her with kisses. Which of them really understood gifts? The glory of spiritual gifts is the One who gave them to us. Let's get excited about gifts, but let's be more excited about the giver of the gifts and honor Him in the way we use them.

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