

SESSION 3

THE GIFTS (PART I)

This Session's Focus

We are gifted people, and the Holy Spirit is the Giver. The first two sessions have set the stage for the central focus of this course, spiritual gifts. In sessions 3 and 4, we will look closely at the lists of spiritual gifts in the New Testament, discovering just what spiritual gifts look like.

In a way, these sessions will look and sound like a gift-opening party. The mood is excitement for the Church—the joy and anticipation of peeling away the wrappings to discover the gracious gifts God has given to His people.

Recall the question we asked in session 1: What are spiritual gifts? We answered this way: Spiritual gifts are special gifts

1. given by the Holy Spirit;
2. given by the grace of God;
3. received by all members of the Church (that is, all members receive one or more gifts);
4. given to be used within the Church (but sometimes to touch people outside the Church);
5. given to build up the Church.

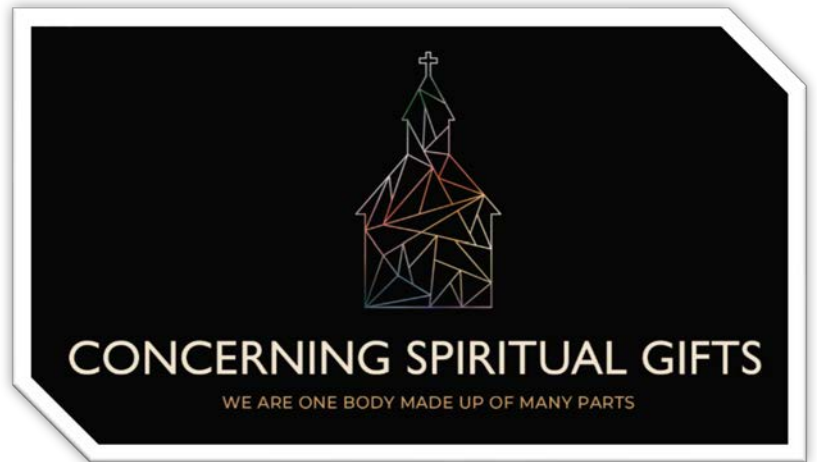
It may help us better understand what spiritual gifts are if we also look at what spiritual gifts are not.

1. Spiritual gifts are not the traits God gives to all Christians. For example, the faith of Ephesians 2:8 is given to all Christians, but not all receive the “spiritual gift” of faith (1 Corinthians 12:9). Every Christian is gifted with one or more spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:11; Ephesians 4:7–11).
2. Spiritual gifts are not earned, but are received by God’s grace (1 Corinthians 15:10a).
3. Spiritual gifts are not given so we can glorify ourselves, but for the building up and ministry of the Church (1 Corinthians 12:7; 14:12).
4. Spiritual gifts are not the fruit of the Spirit. (The fruit of the Spirit are listed in Galatians 5:22–23.)

Our focus is on spiritual gifts. In this session, we’ll build a spiritual gift list on the basis of Scripture.

Meditation

Lord, I looked around the church today, and I was overwhelmed. You know, Lord, we are quite a gifted bunch. I’m sure I should have been listening to the sermon, but my eyes wandered



over there to Grandma Lindsay, who keeps the prayer chain going. She's really something, Lord. And young Tommy Schmidt, acolyte for the day. Everyone expects he'll be a pastor someday. Everyone except Tommy Schmidt. We'll see, Lord. Then I glanced over at Mr. Garcia. Why, in all the church, I doubt if we could find a better teacher than him. The kids actually love Sunday School! And the pastor, looking tired but alive in Christ. And the Washburns, who open their home to foster kids. And Mrs. Brown, wearing her button again—"Thousands are hungry! Will we feed them?" I looked at us, Lord, and I liked what I saw—the people You have blessed, who are now blessings to others. Give us all eyes to see the gifts we have in the people who surround us in church. Amen.



Session Primer

Choose two people from your group to read the dialogue below. Imagine that speaker 2 holds a beautifully wrapped present with his or her name on it. Use the questions provided as a follow-up to the dialogue.

IT'S YOURS!

1: Well, look at you! What do you have there?

2: What does it look like?

1: Happy birthday!

2: It isn't my birthday.

1: Well then, whose birthday is it?

2: I don't know whose birthday it is.

1: May I look at it?

2: Sure, go ahead.

1: Why, this has your name on it.

2: I know. I saw that.

1: Then it's yours.

2: I told you, it isn't my birthday.

1: But the gift is yours. The tag says so.

2: I guess.

1: Then open it up, silly.

2: I'm not sure I should.

1: Why not? Of all the ungrateful—

2: I'm just not sure, okay?

1: Sure of what? It's yours! You're sure of that, aren't you?

2: Maybe. Who would want to give me a gift anyway?

1: I don't believe this. You get a gift, and you're not sure you want to unwrap it? What are you going to do, admire the wrapping?

2: I just wish I knew more about it. Where did the gift come from? What will be expected of me after I open it? Maybe I'll owe somebody something. Maybe I'll be disappointed.

1: Now *there's* a heroic approach to opening gifts. You must be great fun at Christmas.

2: Look, I didn't ask for your advice. As a matter of fact, I didn't even ask for this gift.

1: Well, it's yours anyway. But you're right; I won't talk about it any further. It's your gift and your decision. So what are you going to do? Hold it? Hide it? Look at it? Wonder about it? Throw it out? Waste it? What are you going to do?

1. In 1 Corinthians 12:1, Paul wrote, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed." In verse 31, he wrote, "Earnestly desire the higher gifts." What causes some Christians to fail to discover their spiritual gifts?
2. Why do you think some congregations neglect an emphasis on the discovery and use of spiritual gifts?
3. What is the impact on the Church when people do not "open" their spiritual gifts?

Biblical Search and Study

1. Often the New Testament uses the word gift in a general, universal sense, that is, of a gift received by all Christians. Examine each of the following references and identify the Churchwide gift that is mentioned: Acts 2:38; Romans 5:15–17; 2 Corinthians 9:8–15; and Romans 6:23.
2. In the New Testament, four significant references detail for the Church its spiritual gifts. These "gift lists" occur in Romans 12:3–8; 1 Corinthians 12:4–10, 27–28; Ephesians 4:1–13; and 1 Peter 4:7–11. What spiritual gifts are mentioned in these passages?
3. How many of these spiritual gifts are on your personal list?
4. Are you surprised that any of the gifts should be considered spiritual gifts? Do any of the gifts listed disturb you in any way? Do you think God still gives all these spiritual gifts to Christians today? Some people say that God gives some additional gifts to Christians today such as music, preaching, writing, and craftsmanship. Do you agree?
5. Why all these gifts? What does God have in mind? Read 1 Corinthians 12:7; 14:12; Ephesians 4:12–13; and 1 Peter 4:10. For what purposes does God give spiritual gifts to the Church?

What this Means for Us



1. Look at the list of spiritual gifts again. Which gift is most necessary in your congregation right now? (Choose two or three if you like.)
2. If Christian congregations were to take more seriously the matter of spiritual gifts and their use of them, what changes might be necessary in the structures and procedures of churches?
3. A Christian friend tells you that you haven't really been "filled with the Spirit" until you speak in tongues. He says this gift is the surest sign that one has been born again of the Spirit. Knowing what you know so far about spiritual gifts, how would you respond?
4. Look again at the section "Biblical Search and Study." Think about the "general gifts" (number 1) and the "spiritual gifts" (number 2) you have received. Do you feel more thankful for one type than for the other? Why or why not? How do you think God wants you to use your "general gifts"? your "spiritual gifts"??

Gleanings

Jot down a few insights into spiritual gifts that you learned from today's session.