

“If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Jesus, in John 8:31–32

Introduction

This is a course about spiritual gifts—the special gifts given to particular Christians for the sake of specific ministries in the Church. The first two sessions survey the receivers and the Giver—the

context for the gifts. Sessions 3 and 4 examine the gifts. Session 5 provides an opportunity for participants to discover their own spiritual gift(s). Session 6 explores the fruit of the Spirit and how the fruit helps us use the gifts effectively.

Because of the extraordinary qualities of some of the spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament, many Christians shy away from the topic of spiritual gifts. They may be afraid of the topic or unsure of what to do with the biblical material about spiritual gifts. Worse, some people write off these passages as outdated and irrelevant to the Church today.

This course takes seriously what the Bible says about the gifts of the Spirit. The focus of the course is on you, the individual Christian looking for your niche in the Church, and on the congregation, the God-ordained gathering of believers around Word and Sacrament.

SESSION 1 THE GIFTED

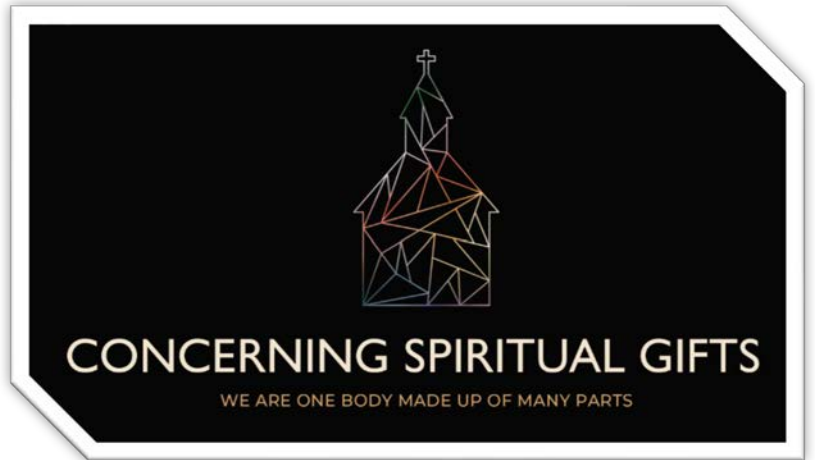
This Session’s Focus

“You know, you’re really a gifted person!”

How do you respond when someone compliments your gifts? If you’re like many people, you smile, blush with embarrassment, and humbly glance downward, saying, “Me? Oh, not really.” Why do we respond that way? Perhaps we’re genuinely humble. Maybe we just can’t see ourselves as gifted, or maybe we haven’t yet discovered what gifts we have.

In this session, we learn that the Lord says, “You know, you’re really a gifted person.” The Early Church of the New Testament heard that good word from the Lord and celebrated it. They lived as if no people in history had been so blessed as they. Joy and thanksgiving abound in the New Testament, built on the realization of giftedness.

Times change. Christians today may need a little coaxing before they will believe how gifted they are. So this is where we begin our study of spiritual gifts, asserting that we are, indeed, gifted and ready for celebration.



Meditation

As you know, I'm not usually one to complain.
Lately, though, let's just say that my mood needs some improvement.
It concerns Your church, Lord—our church.
Something is missing, but I can't put my finger on it. Something's just not right.
Why must we coax and twist arms for volunteers?
Why can't we do more?
Why do the same people do so much of the work?
And why do I hear so much about that other church, where everything good seems to be happening? Lord, I'm not asking for full pews or new buildings.
I'm asking for a mood swing.
Long ago, Lord, people often said, "These men have turned the world upside down!"
That's how struck they were by the Church's fervor and Spirit.
Bring back that time to Your church, Lord.
Begin with me. Amen.



Session Primer

What are spiritual gifts? For this course, we will use the following definition:

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.

Consider the definition. Then respond to the following. Do you agree or disagree?

1. Most people in the Church today do not even know what their spiritual gifts are.
2. Ministry in the Church is primarily the task of pastors and teachers.
3. Every congregation has within its ranks the gifts necessary to carry on the Lord's work successfully.

Biblical Search and Study

Search the Scriptures to discover the giftedness of Christ's Church.

1. The New Testament teems with expressions of thanksgiving and joy. Early Christians celebrated being Christ's Church. They knew God had gifted them. The basic verb for the action of giving (*didomi* in Greek) occurs in the New Testament over one hundred times with God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit as its subject. Seven different nouns can be translated "gift" in the New Testament. The Church saw itself as the gifted people of God.



- a. Read 2 Corinthians 8:9. According to Paul, to what do Christians owe their giftedness? Paul strikes a paradox here. What is it?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 1:4–7. For what is Paul grateful? What is the result of God’s blessing?
 - a. Now examine Romans 12:6a; Ephesians 4:7–8; and 1 Peter 4:10. What do passages like these tell you about the grace of God? What does God’s grace do for the Church?
3. The Early Church received grace upon grace from God. Joy and thanksgiving were fitting, natural responses. Still, some Christians missed how gifted they were. Their mood soured, and then prodding and reminding were needed to move them to thanks and joy. Sound familiar? What attitudes or practices work against a celebrative mood in churches? What could cause an abundantly gifted congregation to grow stale and cold? (See, for example, Revelation 2:1–5.)
 - a. Paul often had to exhort his congregations to a celebration of their gifts. Read Colossians 3:15; 1 Thessalonians 5:16–22; and 1 Timothy 4:4–5. In each of these passages, what reason does Paul give for thanksgiving and joy? What do these imperative passages tell you about the Church then and the Church now?
4. The image of the Body of Christ helps lead to a richer understanding of the Church as God’s gifted people. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12–27. In a chapter about spiritual gifts, Paul talks about body parts, functions, unity, and diversity. After you examine these verses, list some truisms (self-evident truths) concerning the Church and its gifts.
5. Read 1 Peter 2:4–10. Peter creates a montage of the Church. What pictures comprise his montage, especially in verses 5 and 9? What does God ask of every Christian in Romans 12:1? Tell about times when you have seen this happen in your congregation.

What this Means for Us

Read the following letter.

Dear Pastor,

With this letter I resign from all my offices and duties in our congregation. You personally, Pastor, have done nothing to bring this about. I continue to love and respect you.

Specifically, I no longer wish to serve as Sunday School superintendent, congregation secretary, fellowship committee member, visitation committee member, and guild treasurer. Pastor, I guess I’m just tired—bummed out, maybe. I don’t feel I’m doing a good job. It seems as though I do nothing except go to meetings. I’m sure another person can bring more to these positions than I can. I’m concerned, too, about how much time I spend away from my family.

I’m asking for some time and some distance to rest and get renewed. I’ll continue to worship and attend Bible class regularly. I may join the choir. Maybe someday I’ll be ready for more active church work again. Right now, I need to step aside. I hope you understand.

In Christ, Linda



1. What, in your opinion, is behind Linda's resignation? How does Linda's letter reflect characteristics of many Christian congregations today? Why do you think she chose to resign from everything? Is Linda justified in her decision? What does Linda need most right now?
2. Consider yourself a present-day Peter or Paul writing to your congregation in the imperative (commanding) mood. What motivation would you present for the future life of your church, especially concerning gifts, thanksgiving, and joy?
3. A pastor once commented, "In the typical American Christian congregation today, 30 percent of the members do 25 percent of the work; the pastor does 25 percent; and 50 percent of the church's work never gets done." What do you think? Is the pastor correct?
4. Start to think about your gifts. Though we haven't yet looked directly at the lists of gifts in the New Testament, the Body of Christ metaphor provides some interesting aspects of giftedness in the Church. From the list below, choose three body parts and their functions that you think best apply to you and your gifts.
 - Heart (shows love and compassion; is at the center of things)
 - Eyes (sees opportunities and challenges; watchful)
 - Ears (listens well)
 - Kidney (helps cleanse and purify the Church)
 - Feet (carries good news; a mover)
 - Hands (makes things happen; builds)
 - Head (learns easily; motivates; innovates)
 - Neck (takes risks; sticks neck out)
 - Arms (embraces; joins; reconciles)
 - Mouth (speaks well and articulately)

What parts of the Body of Christ are represented in your group? Did you discover a diversity?

Gleanings

What have you gleaned from the Scriptures today? Jot down a few notes on what you've learned, especially regarding the following: the Church's moods; the relationship between grace and gifts; the priesthood of all believers; your role in the Church.