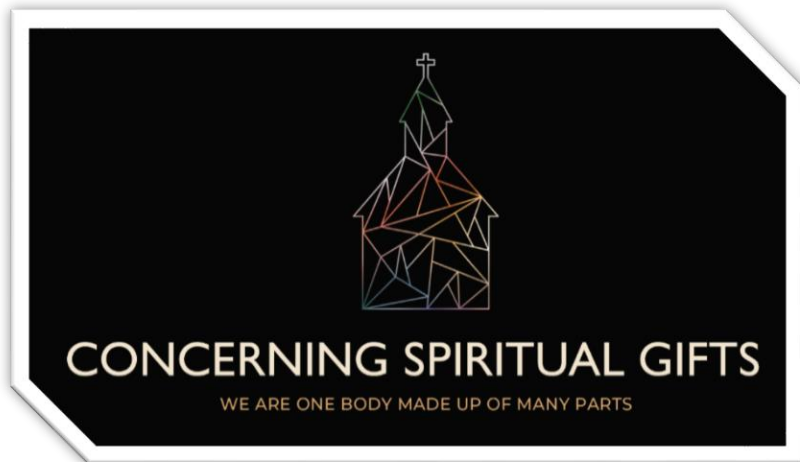


SESSION 5

Discovering Your Spiritual Gift(s)



This Session's Focus

In the last session, you looked at Scripture passages and definitions of the various gifts of the Spirit. These gifts form a wonderful parade of attributes, actions, people, and skills that enable the Church to carry out its mission and ministry.

In this session, you'll do more than watch the parade go by. You'll start finding your place in the parade as you try to discover your own spiritual gift(s).

Meditation

Lord, the house down the street is a sight to behold! It's green, blue, yellow, beige, and trimmed in brown. The owner, it seems, has started painting his home several times, changing the color scheme along the way, but never finishing the job. The children call it "the house of many colors." For me, the house is a stark parable of having many good starts and few finishes—of not following through. Sometimes, Lord, I've felt that way about my work in the Church. I've tried many things, held many offices. At times, I've worn more hats than I could manage. Too many times, I started something but didn't finish well. Lord, help me find my niche in the church. Teach me to seek and to use my gifts to the fullest, so that my life in the church does not look like a house of many colors. Teach me, Lord, to start with the best I have from Your Spirit and to focus on doing well what I can do best. Amen.

Session Primer

Evaluate each of the following situations, using these questions: Do you think the situation shows good judgment? Can you see yourself or your congregation doing the same thing? What might prevent similar circumstances from happening?

1. For years, Grace Church held elections of church officers in which people ran against each other, some losing, some winning. Now Grace has changed its constitution and bylaws; now no one loses an election. Instead, the members of Grace Church have identified their spiritual gifts and are chosen by a selection committee to serve in areas of ministry for which they are especially gifted. Every year, the congregation "elects" no fewer than 190 people for specific ministries in the congregation. Now everyone wins; the whole slate of candidates is elected without people running against each other. Gifts are simply matched to ministries.



2. People are surprised, but Jill has been adamant in her decision. For years, she was busy in many church activities, often harried and frustrated. This year, she has decided to focus on the one ministry that has always brought her the most joy: teaching Sunday School. When asked to serve on other committees or to head up other projects, she responds, “No, thank you. I’m a teacher, and I want to teach well.” She feels her teaching has improved greatly, and she has never felt more fulfilled in her church work.
3. Everyone agrees: Jim would make a great pastor. Jim has the dream himself; however, he and his family do not have the financial resources to put him through the seminary. Jim and his wife, Linda, have five children, including two toddlers. Recently, the congregation did an amazing thing. Recognizing Jim’s gift, they decided to pay the full tuition for his seminary training. He will begin his studies next fall.

Biblical Search and Study

1. Read 1 Corinthians 1:4–7. Paul is writing to a gifted congregation. Later, in chapters 12–14, he exhorts them to recognize their spiritual gifts, to appreciate them as gifts from God, and to use them in the proper way. Now read 12:31a and 14:1. The process of recognizing one’s spiritual gift(s) involves earnestly seeking those gifts from God. What motivates Christians to seek or earnestly desire spiritual gifts? For what wrong reason might Christians seek spiritual gifts? According to 14:12, what should be the central motivation for gift seeking?
2. Christians who desire spiritual gifts often pray that God will enable them to discover their gifts. Describe the prayer and the outcome of prayer in each of the following passages: Luke 11:9–13; Colossians 1:9–10; and 1 Corinthians 14:13. You may wish to discuss the role of prayer in the ministry of your congregation. Are you a praying church? Is your church’s ministry characterized by specific prayers to recognize, appreciate, and properly use the gifts of God?
3. Now read Romans 12:6a. Recognizing the variety of gifts in the Church, Paul says, “Let us use them.” How should they be used according to 1 Corinthians 12:7 and 14:12? If we do nothing, we certainly do not build up the Church, nor do we grow in our ability to use our spiritual gifts. Paul takes this even further. His beautiful celebration of Christian love in 1 Corinthians 13 is understood best in its context—a discussion of spiritual gifts. Read the chapter, beginning with 12:31 and reading through 14:1. In what sense is Christian love the ideal setting for discovering and using spiritual gifts?

What this Means for Us

A TOOL FOR DISCOVERING ONE'S SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Answer the following questions. They are designed to help you identify your spiritual gifts—or at least to begin the process.



1. *Life purposes.* Spiritual gifts are a part of one's whole life picture. We all have some central values and purposes that shape our actions and attitudes. We're most fulfilled when we are true to our life purposes—our vocations or callings.

In the space that follows, list three such callings, or central life purposes, that characterize your life right now. Examples of these are a desire to make people happy, a yearning to relieve suffering, a need to be creative and innovative, and a wish to spread beauty or to bring organization and structure to life. Think about your life, your personality, your history, and your dreams. Then list three purposes.

Now look at the list of spiritual gifts in session 4 of this study guide. Which gifts appear best to fulfill your life purposes? List all that seem relevant.

2. *My ministries.* You've probably been involved in some of your church's ministries—maybe many, maybe just a few. List as many of these experiences as you can, especially those from recent years. When your list is complete, circle those that brought you the greatest satisfaction and fulfillment. (You may circle many or just one or two.) Then check those items that brought frustrations and burdens instead of satisfaction.

Now look at the ministries you circled. Try to match these ministries with the spiritual gifts from session 4. Jot down the spiritual gifts expressed in your fulfilling ministries.

3. *Affirmation.* Affirmation from other members of the Body of Christ can help you discover your spiritual gifts. Very often, this affirmation assures us that we've found our niche in the Church's ministry. (Remember, though, that God does not promise that affirmation will always come our way as we practice our spiritual gifts. A cross may come instead.)



Think about a time when you were affirmed by a fellow Christian or spiritual leader in your congregation. What gift had you practiced? Refer again to the list of gifts. You may be able to think of more than one experience of affirmation. Jot down the spiritual gifts practiced and affirmed in each instance.

4. *Changes.* Perhaps you sense a need for some changes concerning your work in the Church. What should change? Specifically, on what ministries would you like to focus most? What gift or gifts do these ministries express?
5. *Discoveries.* Look at your responses to items 1–4. What spiritual gift(s) surfaced frequently? That is, what spiritual gift(s) appear to relate best to your calling, your fulfilling ministries, the affirmation of Christ's people, and your own need for change or focus?

To Follow Up

1. Prepare to share your responses.
2. Did the tool help you discover anything about yourself or about your spiritual gift(s)? Explain.
3. Suggest opportunities to use the gift(s) you identified within your congregation.
4. Provide ways to use the gift(s) to build up the Church in your community.

Gleanings

If you are not sure you have recognized your spiritual gift(s), continue to “earnestly desire” it through prayer. If you feel you have discovered one or more gifts, ask God to bless and direct your efforts to use each gift for the common good.