

“Uncovering and Using Our Spiritual Gifts”

Just suppose God thought to Himself, “I love the church, My people! I need to provide some tools so the church body can be built up and strengthened, to protect my people in their battle against evil and falsehoods...to provide some ways I can speak *directly* to them, at times to reveal to them what lies ahead for them, and how they should respond, to make sure that the healings and miracles Jesus did will continue. Maybe I’ll just give out some gifts – some presents - to every one of My followers, so the church can be strong, and fulfill its mission to the world!

That’s exactly what happened! God gave the *gifts of the Spirit* to the church to do the things I mentioned! But the reality is, that in many cases, those in the church *aren’t even aware* of these gifts. They’re completely ignored, like they’re not even mentioned in the Bible! And in other situations, God’s people shy away from these gifts, because some of them may seem a little bit weird, or they think the gifts were for the first century church, but not for today.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed” (1 Corinthians 12:1). I want you to be informed about these gifts of the Spirit!

Now if you’ve been attending Community UMC for a while, you should not be uninformed about spiritual gifts! I had a whole sermon series on the gifts of the Spirit. But it’s so easy to focus on them for a while, then just put them aside and move on.

Today I’d like to do a little refresher course on the gifts of the Spirit. The Greek word for “gift” is the word “charisma”. The word “charisma” has in it the word “charis”, which means “grace”. These are gifts of God’s grace: which means we can’t earn the gifts, and we don’t deserve them. They’re not given to us only after we arrive at a special level of spiritual maturity. They’re presents from God given to every believer!

1 Corinthians 12:7 says, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” Every follower of Jesus has at least one gift of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit distributes the gifts *as He chooses*. And the gifts are given “for the common good”, to build up the body of Christ. They’re not given for anyone to brag about or use selfishly.

Paul said to the Corinthians, “I don’t want you to be ignorant about these”, then he went on to list some – 9 gifts of the Spirit.

Verse 8: “To one is given through the Spirit the ***utterance of wisdom***”. This involves wisdom that you have no way of knowing yourself – the Holy Spirit reveals it. Then you verbalize what wise thing someone should do.

Verse 8: “To another the ***utterance of knowledge*** by the same Spirit.” Knowing something that you have no way of knowing, then speaking it. When Kathryn Kuhlman in her healing services would say, “Someone in this section is being healed of cancer”, or “Someone in this row is feeling the warmth of a healing in their back”, that was the use of this gift. It is not knowledge

we gain ourselves by study, but knowing something because God reveals it.

Verse 9: “To another ***faith*** by the same Spirit.” This is not saving faith – putting our trust in Jesus to save us – it’s the gift of an extraordinary faith, often connected with miraculous things happening.

Verse 9: “To another ***gifts of healing*** by the one Spirit.” God gifts some in the church to be channels through which God heals people.

Verse 10: “To another the ***working of miracles***.” While this gift may be rare, some are gifted to work miracles in Jesus’ name.

Verse 10: “To another ***prophecy***.” “Prophecy” basically means “to speak for God”. While it may involve peeking into the future and saying what will happen, it basically means saying what God is doing, how God is present, what God’s will is, in a given situation.

Verse 10: “To another the ***discernment of spirits***.” Being able to discern what is truth and what is falsehood, what is of God, and what is evil or from the devil. This is to help protect the church from evil.

Verse 10: “To another ***various kinds of tongues***, to another the ***interpretation of tongues***.” These go together. Speaking in tongues is where a person speaks in an unknown language, a heavenly language, and God gives to either that person, or someone else, the gift of being able to interpret what God is saying through that message in tongues. It’s a way that God speaks directly to us! (Also, those who have the gift of tongues often will *pray in tongues* as a way of praising God).

There are other gifts mentioned in the New Testament. Later on in 1 Corinthians 12 I believe some other gifts are identified:

Some additional gifts: “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues” (1 Corinthians 12:27-28).

Apostles (apostleship) – some think those with this gift are modern missionaries, sent to share the gospel in a different culture.

Teachers (teaching) – some are supernaturally gifted to teach God’s truth and the gospel.

Forms of assistance – this is sometimes called the gift of “helps”, to give practical assistance. For instance, this could be the church secretary who helps the pastor, or the person behind the scenes who assists a church leader in some practical way.

Administrations (administrative gifting) – every organization needs good administrators to run things efficiently. Some are gifted for this.

In Romans, chapter 12, some additional gifts of the Spirit are indicated. “For as in one body we have many members and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the encourager, in encouragement; the giver, in sincerity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness” (Romans 12:4-8).

Ministry (service) – practical ways of serving! This could be people in the kitchen who prepare for a church brunch, those who prepare the communion elements, or help clean up after an event at the church.

Exhortation (encouragement) – some just have a God-given gift to always be a source of encouragement to others.

The giver (giving) – for some, it’s just their “thing” to love giving generously to those in need and the work of the Lord.

Leadership – some are gifted by the Spirit to be leaders.

The compassionate (acts of mercy) – while every follower of Jesus is to be a compassionate person, some are just Spirit-gifted to go over-the-top in showing compassion to people in need.

Ephesians, chapter 4, mentions two other gifts of the Spirit.

Evangelism – while every Christian is to bear witness of Christ, some are especially gifted for this – they love to share their faith with people, and are at ease with it.

Pastor/shepherd – not just the “ordained minister”, but those who are great at shepherding people (could be the leader of a small group, or Sunday School class).

So, those are 20 gifts of the Spirit. And they should be operating in the church today! Every faithful church is sitting on a gold mine of potential, if we can only begin to uncover and put into action the gifts of the Spirit given to us!

So many churches are pastor-centered congregations. Those in the congregation are far too dependent on the pastor (or the pastor and a few other people) to do most of the ministry of the church. Harold Bales has some wise words for pastors. He writes, “All the members of your congregation are being equipped by the Holy Spirit for ministry and for the growth and maturing of the church. You can, indeed, you *must* share leadership broadly. Churches grow when the people discover and utilize their gifts for ministry. Perhaps the shortest route to failure is the rather immodest belief by a pastor that he or she must personally do everything of importance in

the congregation's life and work...trust God to equip the community with spiritual gifts for ministry. Help parishioners discover their gifts and begin using them for ministry.”

No pastor has all the gifts for ministry, nor all of the spiritual gifts. When a congregation has this over-dependence on a pastor, it is stressful for the pastor (same holds true when a church is dependent on the pastor and a tiny number of church leaders). Not only is it stressful for the overworked pastor, or the few overburdened church leaders, it limits the effectiveness of that church to just the few gifts that these leaders have. All the other gifts that the others in the congregation have are absent or underused.

On the other hand, when all of us in the body of Christ are exercising our spiritual gifts, this makes for joy and excitement and power in the church. *It is an alternative to drab, predictable church life and worship services!* Some years ago there was a Presbyterian Church between Gap and Coatesville where the pastor, Jim Brown, and a number of those in the congregation were baptized in the Spirit – they had an encounter with the Spirit, and the gifts of the Spirit began to be evidenced. They held a Saturday night service that often had 200 or 300 people there, literally from all over the world. What an exciting service it was. Spirited music. Spontaneous prayer and praising God! Someone would speak in tongues, and another would interpret. Or someone might get up and prophecy, “Thus says the Lord...” and describe what God wanted the people to do, or how God was encouraging them.

What if our Sunday morning worship service was like that! We may shy away from all this “emotionalism” – but that’s more like the worship in the early church, than our present styles of worship! What if people were put in positions in the church on the basis of their spiritual gifting, rather than for another reason? It’s exciting when those with the gift of teaching are your teachers, when those with the gift of encouraging are encouraging people all the time in the church, when the givers just keep giving and giving to the Lord’s work in the church and community and world. See what I mean!

Then, too, when the gifts of the Spirit are operating in the church, it frees the pastor and a few church leaders from being stressed out and overworked. I’ve already spoken about this. The ministry and outreach of the church is spread out among the congregation, rather than dumped on the laps of 1 or 2 or 3 people.

Finally, having the gifts of the Spirit operate in the church brings joy and satisfaction to those who use their gifts. Everybody feels important, like they’re contributing, because every gift is important! Paul made that point in 1 Corinthians 12. No one can say to another, “Your gift isn’t needed,” just as our eye can’t say to our hand, “I don’t need you”, or the head say to your foot, “I don’t need you.” Even the practical, less spectacular gifts like serving or helping are essential!

So, where do we go from here? If you don’t know what your gift or gifts are, pray and ask God to help you discern them. If you need help with this, please feel free to contact me. Pray that God’s Spirit would be poured out afresh on our congregation, and that the gifts of the Spirit may be evidenced here in greater ways!

