

# Cultivating Our Spiritual Gifts According to God's Purpose

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**Central Scriptures:** Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12-14  
Ephesians 4:7-16; 1 Peter 4:7-11

**Related Scriptures:** Isaiah 28:10-13; Acts 2:1-13  
2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3-4

## **Definition of Spiritual Gifts:**

A supernatural enablement for ministry to others that focuses on the "common good" and glorifies God (1 Corinthians 12:4-7; Ephesians 4:7; 1 Peter 4:10-11).

## **Distribution of Spiritual Gifts:**

To each believer (by implication at the moment of salvation in order for each one to be included) as God determines (Ephesians 4:7; 1 Corinthians 12:11; 1 Peter 4:10).

## **Diversity of Spiritual Gifts:**

### Romans 12:3-8

Prophesying  
Serving  
Teaching  
Encouraging/Exhorting  
Giving  
Leading  
Showing Mercy

### Ephesians 4:7-16

Apostles (Ephesians 2:20)  
Prophets (Ephesians 2:20)  
Evangelists  
Pastor/Teachers

### 1 Peter 4

Speaking  
Serving  
(Hospitality)

### 1 Corinthians 12:8-10

Message of Wisdom  
Message of Knowledge  
Faith  
Healing  
Miraculous Powers  
Prophecy  
Distinguishing Spirits  
Speaking in Tongues  
Interpretation of Tongues

### 1 Corinthians 12:28-30

Apostles  
Prophets  
Teachers  
Workers of Miracles  
Healing  
Administration  
Speaking in Tongues  
Interpreting Tongues

## **Principles:**

- Diversity of gifts reflects God's freedom to minister as He chooses. (God's purpose, not His power is the issue.)
- Diversity is to contribute to unity, not cause division (1 Corinthians 12:21-26).
- The greater gifts (1 Corinthians 12:31) are those which build up the church (1 Corinthians 14:12) most significantly.
- God can use gifted people to bless others regardless of their motivation; but apart from love, gifts are useless to the gifted individual.

## ***Development of Spiritual Gifts:***

**Attitude:** Humility (Romans 12:3) and love (1 Corinthians 13) are the key attitudes for ministry that honor God. We must focus on maturity evidenced by the fruit of the Spirit as the foundation for ministry through the gifts of the Spirit.

**Availability:** Romans 12:6-8 describes how believers are to use their gifts: with faith, generously, diligently, cheerfully. As God gives a heart of loving humility, we begin to serve others wholeheartedly. This availability will give a believer a range of ministry experiences that will make a strategic focus of ministry possible.

**Assessment:** As a believer keeps in step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-26), studies the Scriptures related to spiritual gifts and cheerfully serves in the body, God will begin to use that person as a blessing to other believers. Personal joy and spiritual blessing to others in specific ministries are key indicators of potential spiritual gifts. As we ask for wisdom (James 1:5) and rest in the Spirit's intercession for us (Romans 8:26-27), God will guide us toward our *niche* of most effective ministry.

## ***Dangers to Spiritual Gifts:***

**Pride:** "My gift is better than others." "If you don't have this gift, you are not spiritual." This leads to the divisiveness seen in Corinth.

**Presumption:** The assertion that God has to use His power the same way in each generation is not consistent with Scripture. God's power remains unchanged; however, His purpose does not require uniform utilization of that power. Hebrews 13:8 has no bearing on how God may choose to work in our generation. God is free to accomplish His purposes in any way He chooses. The diverse lists of gifts noted previously also points to God's freedom to give gifts selectively according to the needs of the church.

**Preclusion:** The assumption that God will never use our lives apart from our giftedness can easily lead to a narrow focus that limits our joy in serving. All are not gifted as evangelists, but every believer is an ambassador for Christ; all are not gifted as givers, but all believers are to give cheerfully; all are not gifted as servers, but every believer must be willing to serve in appropriate situations. Our gifts help establish priorities of ministry, but are not absolute boundaries hindering our availability beyond our ministry focus.

## **Debate About Spiritual Gifts:**

### **A. Miracles/Healing**

#### **1. Authentication of Revelation**

*Significant Periods of Miracles in Scripture:*

Moses/Joshua (Exodus-Joshua)

Elijah/Elisha (1-2 Kings)

Jesus/Apostles (Gospels-Acts)

Antichrist/False Prophets (Matthew 24:24; 2 Thessalonians 2:9; Revelation 13:13)

Note the association of apostleship to signs, wonders and miracles. According to 2 Corinthians 12:12, the things that mark an apostle are signs, wonders and miracles. The book of Acts confirms that direct association (2:43; 3:12; 4:33; 13:8-12; 20:7-12) with the few exceptions being directly associated with apostles [Stephen (Acts 6:8), Philip (Acts 8:6) and Barnabas (Acts 14:3)]. Hebrews 2:3-4 links the miraculous authentication of the Gospel with the apostles and those who heard Jesus first-hand. With God's authoritative revelation complete, authentication is now accomplished by evaluation with Scripture.

#### **2. Answer to Prayer**

God is free to perform miracles and healings in answer to prayer (James 5:13-18). His power is not limited; however, His purpose is no longer authentication of messengers since the Gospel has been clearly communicated in Scripture. God is free to grab the attention of people with miracles and healings; but just as in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit uses the Word of God as the essential means of communicating the Gospel and convincing individuals of their need for Christ. [Note: In the area of healing, people who are not healed are often led to conclude that their prayer for healing was not answered positively because of sin or lack of faith. While there may be instances where these issues are involved, God's purposes are inscrutable. Godly people sometimes die quickly while rebellious people are sometimes healed. We pray in faith to a God who can be trusted now and forever.]

### **B. Tongues/Interpretation**

1. A tongue usually refers to an understandable language or one's literal tongue. Acts 2 is clearly languages; 1 Corinthians 14 is understood by some as ecstatic utterances. However, there are at least two reasons to see a continuity of meaning between Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 14.
  - a. Ecstatic utterances (or unintelligible glossalalia) were common in the Greek mystery religions of the region and are known to occur today in non-Christian religions. If the Corinthian church merely experienced something similar to what had been part of their previous religion, what benefit would it give? However, if people were able to speak genuine languages they had not learned, that would have made an impact. Corinth was a cosmopolitan seaport where various languages were understood. This could have had an evangelistic impact whether the language was supernaturally interpreted or merely understood by someone who spoke that language (1 Corinthians 14:22). The person speaking could edify himself with the genuine language he did not understand (1 Corinthians 14:4) even more than with an unintelligible glossolalia which could not be understood by anyone apart from unverifiable interpretation.

- b. Speaking in a tongue was a sign to unbelievers (1 Corinthians 14:22). Paul's reference to Isaiah 28:11-12 points toward tongues as a language (Assyrian is the view in Isaiah). Tongues as a sign to unbelievers was the context of Acts 2 where tongues were languages. When tongues were interpreted (either naturally or supernaturally), the body benefited from the message as it would from a prophecy.

## 2. Observations on Tongues in 1 Corinthians 12-14

- a. Tongues are not essential to spiritual growth and vitality (1 Corinthians 12:30; 1 Corinthians 14).
- b. Tongues that are not interpreted do not benefit others.
- c. If tongues in 1 Corinthians 12-14 are unintelligible glossolalia, then modern tongues-speaking may be a genuine spiritual gift, a spiritual release unrelated to biblical tongues-speaking, a learned experience or a satanic counterfeit.
- d. If tongues in 1 Corinthians 12-14 are human languages, then only the last three mentioned above appear to be options.
- e. Tongues, interpretation and prophecy in the church gathering were clearly regulated by Paul (1 Corinthians 14:26-40).

## C. Prophecy

Some Christians distinguish New Testament prophets from Old Testament prophets. While Old Testament prophets were required to be 100 percent accurate (Deuteronomy 18:18-21) in their prophecies in order to be considered prophets, this view holds that prophets in the church may be partially erroneous in their pronouncements without being rejected as false prophets. This view is popular in groups which encourage prophecies, but do not fully face the implications and impact in believers' lives when prophecies are not fulfilled. This view hinges largely on 1 Corinthians 14:29 where the church is told to "weigh carefully" what is said. The assumption is that the church must determine the truthfulness of any prophecy and perhaps extract truth from error. However, another view understands this verse as an exhortation to determine the validity of the prophecy as an authoritative word from God. This view sees the New Testament prophets authoritatively revealing God's truth to the church prior to the completion of the Scriptures. The standard of prophecy in the Old Testament and the New Testament would be complete accuracy. The authors of the New Testament, largely from Jewish backgrounds, would be inclined to use the Old Testament concept in their writings.

Most of what is portrayed as prophecy in modern charismatic circles appears to be exhortation based on Scripture rather than new revelation. If a supposed prophet makes a prediction that does not come true, then beware being misled by such a so-called prophet. We already have an inexhaustible, infallible word from God. Since the Scriptures are profitable for "teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" so that the believer may be "thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17), it seems foolish to pursue prophets who supposedly mix truth with error. It is much wiser to trust the Holy Spirit to guide us personally as we focus on the more certain Word of God in Scripture (2 Peter 1:19-21).

- D. The body of Christ is debating these issues related to the "sign" gifts. We can disagree with other believers on these issues while affirming our unity in Christ and our agreement on many other matters related to spiritual gifts.

For further study consider Kenneth Gangel's [Unwrap Your Spiritual Gifts](#).