

How to Determine Your Spiritual Gifts

The following comments were made during a small-group meeting I attended with a number of godly men. They are typical of the comments Christian men everywhere are making:

- “I finally have peace in my career. I want to do more for Him.”
- “I just turned 40. I’ve been in the battle for 25 years. I find myself wanting to feel more significant.”
- “My Christianity is like a savings account that has not produced a very good return.”
- “Will you pray for me? My passion to serve the Lord is gone, and I want it back.”
- “I only have one talent, but I want to be faithful with the one I have.”
- “I burn with a desire to serve this generation.”

The Great Desire

The greatest yearning I hear today in my travels is that Christian men have an intense desire to make their lives count. “I want my life to make a difference. I want my life to have mattered.” I know that women feel this way, too.

However, there is a new sense in which men are thinking these thoughts. In the past, men wanted their lives to count in their work and families, and they wanted to achieve financial success. While these desires have not gone away, today men want more. Today men want their lives to count for God.

If someone wants to make a contribution to build the kingdom and tend the culture, one of the most important steps to take is for them to understand their spiritual gifts.

It would be foolish to try to become a salesman if you prefer

to work with numbers. In the same way we pursue vocational employment based upon our aptitudes and abilities, we pursue our spiritual service based on an understanding of how God has gifted us.

What the Bible Says

Every believer receives at least one spiritual gift: “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7, NIV). The Holy Spirit determines our spiritual gifts: “He gives them to each one, just as he determines” (v. 11). “Each one of you has your own gift from God” (1 Cor. 7:7).

The purpose of our spiritual gifts is to serve Christ by serving others, helping to fulfill the Great Commission: “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Pet. 4:10).

Spiritual gifts include service gifts, speaking gifts and signifying gifts. While theologians and teachers often differ on how to precisely classify and name these gifts, the following generally captures the gist of the different gifts.

Service Gifts

Service gifts are the ligaments and muscle tissue that hold the church of Jesus Christ together. Service gifts are often low-profile, behind-the-scene gifts. They include showing mercy, service (or helps), hospitality, giving, administration, leadership, faith and discernment.

People who serve are eager for God to receive the credit for whatever good comes. “If anyone serves, he should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 4:11). Here are brief definitions of the service gifts with a few examples of how each gift may be used. These, along with the definitions of

speaking and signifying gifts that follow, are adapted from the work of Carl Smith, Kenneth O. Gangel and Leslie B. Flynn:

- **Mercy:** Special ability to show sympathy to the suffering saints. Meals to the sick, hospital visits, phone calls and visits to the hurting.
- **Service:** Special ability to joyfully serve behind the scenes. Set up chairs, ushering, assist leaders.
- **Hospitality:** Special desire to offer home, food and lodging. Host missionaries, Bible studies, singles to dinner.
- **Giving:** Special desire and financial ability to give above and beyond a tithe. Generosity toward youth mission trips, deacon fund offerings, parachurch ministries, a suit for the pastor.
- **Administration:** Special ability to orchestrate program details. Committee work, volunteer for church office, conference supervision.
- **Leadership:** Special ability to preside or govern wisely; boards of Christian ministries; visible roles, elders, deacons, committee chairmen, nursery program, fundraising.
- **Faith:** Vision for new projects that need doing and perseverance to see them through. Building programs, new ministries.
- **Discernment:** Ability to detect error. Meet with teachers who may be teaching incorrectly, letters to the editor.

Speaking Gifts

Speaking gifts include knowledge, wisdom, preaching, teaching, evangelism, apostleship, shepherding and encouragement: "If anyone speaks, they should do it as one who speaks the very words of God" (1 Peter 4:11). Here are definitions and examples of the spiritual gifts of speaking:

- **Knowledge:** Spiritual ability to search and acquire Scriptural truth. Academic pursuits, writing, teaching.

- **Wisdom:** Special insight into applications of knowledge. Counseling, teaching, discussion group leader, accountability groups, friendship.
- **Preaching:** Special ability to rightly proclaim and expound God's truth. Preachers, lay preachers.
- **Teaching:** Special ability to explain Scripture in edifying ways. Sunday school teachers, Bible studies, home groups, children and youth programs.
- **Evangelism:** Special ability to clearly present the gospel to non-believers. Sunday night church visitation program, share faith with contacts on job, sponsor outreach events.
- **Apostleship:** Special ability to begin new works. Missionaries, church planters, Christian service organizations.
- **Shepherding:** Unique ability to care for a flock of believers over the long haul. Pastors, elders, nursery program.
- **Encouragement:** Special skill to inspire, encourage and comfort. Being a friend, counseling, writing letters.

People who have been given speaking gifts are able to help equip others to have a personal ministry of service. *"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up"* (Eph. 4:11-12).

Signifying Gifts

The signifying gifts are miracles, healing, speaking in tongues and the interpretation of tongues.

- **Tongues:** Spiritual ability to speak in a language foreign to speaker.
- **Interpretation of tongues:** Spiritual ability to interpret the message of one speaking in tongues.
- **Miracles:** Spiritual ability to actuate the supernatural

intervention of God in ways beyond His ordinary working through the laws of nature.

- **Healing:** Spiritual agency of God in curing illness and disease and restoring to health supernaturally.

Two Recommendations

To satisfy the deep longings of our hearts to do something significant for God, we must first know how God has uniquely gifted us. If you have never studied and understood your own spiritual gifts, let me make two recommendations.

First, take some time right now or during an upcoming quiet time to reflect on the spiritual gifts cataloged in this article. Put checkmarks by the ones toward which you are drawn. Study the four passages of Scripture that deal with spiritual gifts: Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-31; Ephesians 4:11-13; and 1 Peter 4:9-11. You may want to study the context by examining the verses before and after these specific references. Ask God to reveal His gifts to you and then show you the most effective way to serve Him.

Second, I have read two books which helped me tremendously: *Unwrap Your Spiritual Gifts*, by Kenneth O. Gangel (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1974), and *19 Gifts of the Spirit*, by Leslie B. Flynn (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983). You may want to read one or both of them. May you fully satisfy your desire to lead a life that counts for God.

May you be able to say, "My life made a difference. My life mattered." The life that counts the most is the one that fully employs the special abilities God gives.

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