

4 Wrong Concepts We Have Taught About Spiritual Gifts

One of the greatest blessings of the Holy Spirit is that He manifests Himself in every believer. He does not sit passively inside us. He is active. Jesus said in John 7:38 that the Spirit would become in us like a flowing river. He fills us so He can touch others with the reality of Christ.

The apostle Paul explained how this miracle happens. He taught that the Spirit gives gifts to each individual Christian, and these gifts manifest various aspects of Christ's power and nature. He taught in 1 Cor. 12:7: "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for the common good."

The word for spiritual gift in the Greek is *charismata*, from which we derive the term "charismatic." I have been a charismatic Christian for 40 years, but I'm still learning more about spiritual gifts today. And I'm concerned that those of us who use that term to describe ourselves have taught some misleading things about spiritual gifts. My prayer is that we will demonstrate greater maturity in the way we steward the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

This list is certainly not complete, but here are four misconceptions we have promoted:

Misconception No. 1: Spiritual gifts require titles. I'm often asked how I prefer to be introduced when I go to a church to speak. "Are you a pastor, a prophet, an evangelist or an apostle?" they ask, as if I must pick one of those four answers. My standard reply: "You can just call me Lee."

I've never been comfortable with religious titles. I don't pastor a local church, so the term "pastor" doesn't fit me. I don't typically lead evangelistic campaigns, so I don't call myself an evangelist. And I've always felt it was pretentious

to pin the apostle or prophet label on myself.

The truth is that Paul never refers to his ministry colleagues using titles. He never talks about “Apostle Titus” or “Bishop Peter.” He simply referred to them by their first names: Timothy, Luke, Euodia, Priscilla or Sylvanus. I’m not saying it’s wrong for certain people to use titles. Many of my friends do. But you don’t need a title to function in your spiritual gift. Just serve and allow the Spirit to work through you.

Misconception No. 2: You can only experience one of the “power gifts.” In 1 Cor. 12:8-10, Paul lists nine different manifestations the Holy Spirit that can reach unbelievers and edify the church. These gifts are the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues and interpretation of tongues.

Some people seem to excel in one of these gifts. But our heavenly Father is generous, and He does not dole out His gifts in a stingy way. I have met Christians who believed that because they manifested one of these power gifts in a particular situation, they could never experience the others. Don’t limit Him.

At various times in my life, I have experienced all nine of the power gifts. Depending on the needs you face, God can release healing, prophecy or a word of knowledge through you. It’s okay to desire these gifts. In fact, Paul exhorts us in 1 Cor. 14:1 to “earnestly desire” them. Then expect His power to flow through you.

Misconception No. 3: You are locked into one primary spiritual gift. In Rom. 12:6-8, Paul lists what we often call the motivational gifts. These are prophecy, serving, teaching, exhorting, giving, leadership and mercy. Christian ministries have devised various “spiritual gift tests” to help us determine which one of these gifts is strongest in our lives.

I have no issue with such tests. But sometimes we can fall into the trap of thinking every Christian must fit into one of seven molds—almost like non-Christians who believe in horoscopes and try to fit under the characteristics of the zodiac signs. The truth is that every believer has a unique gift mix.

You probably have a combination of God's gifts. He loves variety, and He doesn't create people using just seven molds. Just as we each have individual fingerprints, we are unique in the way we express Jesus to others. You may have a gift of mercy, but your unique personality, your natural talents, and even your life experiences (both good and bad) make you a special vessel of the Holy Spirit.

One person may express his gift of prophecy through writing. Another may express it by playing the guitar or by using drama. One person may express her gift of mercy through prison ministry, while another uses it to counsel people who were sexually abused. The combinations are endless. Discover your unique blend of gifts and don't try to conform to someone else.

Misconception No. 4: Some spiritual gifts are only for men.

When Jesus' followers gathered on the day of Pentecost, the flame of the Spirit rested on each person's head. This holy fire touched both men and women. Since that moment, the Spirit has imparted spiritual gifts to both men and women. Gender has never been a barrier to spiritual gifting.

In Rom. 12, for example, leadership is mentioned as a spiritual gift—and no gender restrictions are listed. Yet some Christians have taught that only men can be leaders—even though Paul mentions that Priscilla, Phoebe, Chloe, Euodia and other women were leaders in the early church. Prophecy is also a vital spiritual gift, and women in the Book of Acts spoke under the anointing of the Spirit (see Acts 21:9). Yet some Christians have invented policies that forbid women from

prophesying and preaching. It is sad that so many of the Holy Spirit's gifts in women have been shut down.

This type of discrimination reveals a lack of faith as well as a carnal mindset. 1 Cor. 12:11 says: "But that one and very same Spirit works all these things, dividing to each one individually as He will." We are not in control of the Holy Spirit; we don't tell Him what to do or who to use. Let's get out of His way and let Him work through every surrendered believer. {eo}