

Every Body Has Spiritual Gifts

Spiritual Gifts

"And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues"(1 Corinthians 12:28 NIV)

"For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully"

Romans 12:3 – 8 (NIV)

In the early 1920's Ira and Ann Yates bought a ranch in West Texas. They worked long hours on the dry land, struggling to make ends meet. The work nearly killed them, and the money they were making was hardly enough to pay the mortgage or put clothes on their backs. They were so poor they had to live on a government subsidy. In 1926 Ira Yates invited an oil company to drill on his land for oil. At just over 1000 feet down they struck an oil reserve. So much oil came out of that first well that it just went everywhere. They dammed up canyons to contain the stuff. They subsequently discovered that the Yates oilfield covers 41 square miles. So far it has produced one billion barrels of oil. It's estimated there are another billion barrels of oil left still there. Ira and Ann Yates were multimillionaires living in poverty until they discovered the riches right underneath their feet. They just didn't know what they were sitting on.

Many Christians are like them. They are living in spiritual poverty, unaware of all that God has already provided for them. They don't realise what their life could be if only they utilised the spiritual gifts God has given them. Using the gifts he has given us, we have the capacity to serve the body of Christ in ways that are beyond our imagining. When writing his letter in the New Testament, Peter says ***"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."*** (1 Peter 4:10) A spiritual gift is God's grace manifested in specific service to others. Every time we use our spiritual gifts, we are ministering God's grace to others. We are making his grace visible. So let's look at some more of them today to see how we can be useful to God in dispensing His grace to others.

Apostleship "The God given ability to start and oversee the development of new churches or ministry structures."

A New Testament Apostle was a person who had seen Jesus, and was a witness to his resurrection. Apostles were those sent with the Gospel. Usually we think of the disciples of Jesus, and Paul, as Apostles, but there were others who were recognised by the early church as Apostles. Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Andronicus, Junia (who was a woman apostle) Epaphroditus were all called Apostles in the New Testament. The root meaning of the word apostle is a "sent one". Their function was to take the gospel into new areas, to establish numbers of new churches and to nurture them into maturity. Apostles were to not only spread the gospel, but to preserve it's purity. Apostles have spiritual authority and power that has been given by those who respect them and which brings unity among believers. They often have the ability to unite diverse churches into powerful and effective forces for the Kingdom. The Apostle builds co-operative ministries between churches.

So are there people today with the gifting of an Apostle? When Lyn and I were at the conference for International Churches in Stockholm in April this year, we met Andre and Renate Krukliis. Andre is a Brazilian who is Pastor of the International Protestant Church of Zurich. He has made more than 200 mission trips to 78 nations and during his 31 years of ministry, has established 19 churches. That's the Apostleship gift in action.

In New Zealand I have seen this gift exercised through a remarkable Pastor named Chris Sola. Chris is part Maori, part Samoan. His church is made up of 200 poor urban Maori and Pacific Island people who are either out of work or have low paid jobs. In the 10 years his church has been going they have planted 7 churches. But Chris had a dream for an urban ministry centre in the centre of South Auckland. In 2004 a movie theatre complex with 8 cinemas was put up for sale. Chris believed the Lord wanted them to have it, even though they had no money. When he enquired about the price, it was being sold for 14 million dollars – about 11 million Swiss francs. Chris's church didn't have any money, but for 7 months he walked around that building 7 times a day praying, asking God for the building. In 2009, the building came back on the market, this time for 4 million dollars, just over 3 million Swiss francs. The church still didn't have that sort of money, but through a whole series of miracles, the Lord has provided the money and they have bought the building. They are establishing a café, a dance centre for youth, a fitness centre, a conference centre, an auditorium to seat 700 people, a commercial kitchen, and a banquet hall for 500 people. I believe Chris is exercising the apostleship gift.

God gives this gift to people who have a big vision. It's usually given to people, who prove themselves faithful in a local church setting, and God grows them bigger, and they begin to get a vision for more churches and mission opportunities.

Teaching "The God given ability to understand, clearly explain and apply the Word of God, which causes greater Christ likeness in the lives of listeners."

Dr Charles Ryrie, who was a great Bible teacher used to say that the person who says it the most simply, knows it best. Anyone can make the simple difficult, but it takes a gifted teacher to make the difficult understandable.

But teaching is more than just conveying biblical truth. Anyone can read, recite and memorise Bible verses. The Devil probably knows the Bible better than most of us. Biblical teaching involves life transformation. It's not about filling up heads with knowledge, but about applying that knowledge to our lives. We can only truly say that learning has taken place when there is a transformation of our behaviour. Biblical teaching is teaching that brings about change, as the Holy Spirit takes that truth and applies it in our lives. That's why James writes this to the believers. **"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does."** (James 1:22 -25 NIV)

If you and I go away from this series of talks on spiritual gifts, and nothing changes in the way we live out our faith, we haven't learned anything. Biblical teaching is a partnership between the teacher and the student. It is a discipling model, where the teacher is on a learning journey along with the pupil. It's a spiritual partnership, where both the teacher and the pupil are submitted to the Lord who teaches them how to live. How do you know if you have this gift? Ask yourself "When I teach, do others learn?" Do you get people comment to you that your teaching has helped them become more Christ-like? If you are teaching children or young people, do you see them becoming more and more like Jesus? That's the goal of biblical teaching. If you have this gift, and you are not using it, there are opportunities for teaching with children, young people, and adults in this church. Use your gift so others can grow.

Helps / Service "The God given ability to accomplish practical and necessary tasks which free up, support, and meet the needs of others."

The gift of Service is the same as the "helping" gift mentioned in Corinthian list. It's one of the most widespread gifts found in the church. When people use this gift, others are strengthened spiritually. Your service may be in a very public way, or it may be quite hidden – locking up the church, preparing communion, making coffee, caring for someone else's children, cooking meals for needy people – the list of ways we can help is just about endless. This gift is essential for the church to function, and I'm not just talking about the institutional church. Don't just think of using this gift within the church, but use this gift all through the week, wherever God takes you. How do you know if you have this gift? It's distinguished by an attitude. If for you, serving is not a chore, but a pleasure, then you probably have it. If you love serving people, then this is probably one God has given you. If you see someone in need, and something in your heart goes "clunk" and you just long to reach out and meet that need, it's probably the gift of service. Look around you this morning and think about the people you know who have this gift. Probably many of them have served you. Write them a little thankyou note. Affirm that gift in them.

Administration. "The God given ability to understand what makes an organisation function, and the special ability to plan and carry out procedures to accomplish the goals of the ministry."

The word used in the New Testament for Administration means to steer. In the days of the Bible, the person at the back of the boat held a long oar, which gave direction to the ship. The person in command gave orders to the steersman and the ship went on the correct course. The whole safety of the ship is dependant on this job being done right. If the helmsman decides he going to read a book, or steer whatever course he likes, or not pay attention to the compass and the charts, then the ship is in danger. It is a directional and managerial ministry. People with this gift believe that if you work the plan, the plan will work. They see how everything fits together, and they are just itching to make it all work. They enjoy the process of getting to the goal.

The gift of administration is often ignored or underestimated, but without it the whole church would grind to a halt. People with this gift just love to see the whole church functioning the way it should. Those of you that have this gift, we thank God for you. Without you, we couldn't do what we do for the Lord.

Encouragement / Exhortation "The God given ability to present truth so as to strengthen, inspire, comfort or motivate those who are discouraged or wavering in their faith."

Have you figured out who the people are in our church family who have this gift? Don't you just love it when they use their gift of encouragement? They inspire the rest of us to action. They awaken spiritual interest in those of us who are losing hope in the Lord. Their words and acts of encouragement steady those of us who are being buffeted or who are faltering. They encourage the fainthearted and give strength to the weary and power to the weak. Barnabas had this gift. He inspired people by his example. He didn't teach or preach, but by his example, showed Christians how to give. There is a delightful story in Acts Chapter 15 where Paul and Barnabas were setting out on a fresh missionary journey. Barnabas wanted to take Mark with them, but Paul didn't want to because Mark had given up on the last trip. But Barnabas had the gift of encouragement. He didn't want to give up on Mark. He believed in Mark, even when the Apostle Paul didn't. With his gift of encouragement, Barnabas took young Mark under his wing, and made him into a great follower of Jesus. Those of you that have this gift – use it! We need your encouragement so much. When you get to meet the Lord in heaven, you are going to find people who come up to you and say, "Because you encouraged me, I kept trusting Jesus, and that's why I'm here!" If you have the gift of encouragement, go for it. Use it on every occasion you can.

Giving. "The God given ability to contribute money and resources to the work of the Lord with cheerfulness and liberality."

Every one of us has a responsibility to give to the work of the Kingdom, but there are some who are given the gift of giving. These people delight in giving for giving's sake. They find their lives enriched when they give. Not out of duty or a sense of self satisfaction or smugness, but because they love to see the Kingdom of God grow. If you ask yourself "How much can I afford to give to the Lords work" you probably don't have the gift. Often people with this gift don't acknowledge they have the spiritual gift of giving because they like to give in secret. This gift isn't related to how much money you have. I've discovered people with this gift who have very little of this worlds goods, but they love to give what they have. Primarily this gift applies to money, but it also relates to the giving of our time and abilities. Robert Le Tourneau, who invented so much earth moving machinery, and became a wealthy man, for most of his life gave 90% of his income to the Lords work. He used to say "It's not a question of how much money I give to God, but how much of Gods money I keep for myself". In the 1850's George Mueller was the pastor of a church of 1200 members in Bristol in England. He operated Sunday Schools that evangelised thousands of children. He housed, fed and clothed over 2000 orphans for decades. He supported 187 missionaries. Where did he get the money to do all this? He trusted God for it, and because he had the spiritual gift of giving, he gave it all away. It's been estimated that in his lifetime he gave away the equivalent of 12 million Swiss Francs. Do you see what God can do when people exercise their gifts? It's just staggering what the Spirit of God does.

Two questions people ask.

Sometimes people ask, "**Does that mean if I don't have the gift, I'm excused?**" No, we are not excused. We may not have the gift of giving, but we are still taught as disciples to use our resources for the Kingdom. If you are not giving a proportion of your income to the Lords work, that's not because you don't have the gift of giving. It's because you are being disobedient to what the bible teaches. You may not have the gift of intercession, but you and I are still expected to pray. We may not have the gift of evangelism, but we are still expected to be witnesses for Jesus Christ. As followers of Jesus we can't cop out by saying "I don't have the gift!" Even though pastoral gifts may not be my strongest point, that doesn't mean I'm excused from caring for people.

The other question people ask is this. "**But aren't these spiritual gifts the same as natural talents?**" Doesn't everyone have this ability? Spiritual gifts are not the same as natural talent. God gives natural talent to all people. They can be acquired skills or learned abilities. Spiritual gifts are only given to followers of Jesus. But God planned our lives even before we became Christians. Sometimes God will take a natural talent and dovetail it into a Spiritual Gift, if that talent is turned over to Him. When we become a new creation in Christ, everything becomes new. God begins to re-create our natural talents when he makes us new people. He can take a natural talent and make it into more than it was before. Sometimes he may give a spiritual gift that has nothing to do with your natural talent. Natural talent is unevenly distributed. Spiritual gifts are distributed amongst us all. Every believer has at least one. There are enough spiritual gifts in our congregation to get everything done that God wants done, as long as we all use what he has given us.

When I stand before the Lord, and see Him face to face, I know he's going to ask me what I did with the gifts he gave me. My hearts desire on that day will be to look around me, and see all the people who were welcomed into the Kingdom of God because I used what he gave me, and say to the Lord "Here they are Lord - that's what I did with what you gave me!" And I want to hear Him say "Well done David!" Don't you want that? Isn't that worth spending your life for? God has given you these gifts. Go ahead and use them.

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