

Discover Your Spiritual Gift And Use It!

Spiritual Gifts

All through this series of messages on Spiritual Gifts, I have tried to emphasise the corporate nature of Spiritual gifts. They are not prizes for deserving Christians, or just given to the super spiritual among us. They are given by the Holy Spirit for the benefit of the church and the kingdom of God. His intention in giving us gifts is that the body of Christ be built up.

Can we ask for gifts?

In the letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament we read that it's the Holy Spirit who decides who gets what gifts. **"God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will."**(Hebrews 2:4). That makes sense. The Lord knows who needs what gifts we need in a particular ministry situation. They are not for us to demand, but for him to give. However, when we look at Paul's letter to the church in Corinth we read this **"But eagerly desire the greater gifts."** (1 Corinthians 12:31) And **"Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy."** (1 Corinthians 14:1) At first reading it would seem that we can ask for gifts for ourselves. But there is something interesting about these verses. The original language is in the plural. This is not an individualistic thing, but a desire for the expression of the gifts to benefit others. What Paul is saying is, "As a group, desire that the higher gifts would be seen amongst you all. As a body, ask for the gifts that will build you all up". We are to be praying "Lord pour out your gifts on my brothers and sisters so that together we can be the hands and feet, mouth and ears of Jesus in the world." Here are some more gifts we can ask the Lord to give to his church. Yes we can ask, but we need to ask not for ourselves so much as for others.

Hospitality.

"The God given ability to care for people by providing fellowship, food, and shelter."

Here's what the scripture says. **Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. (1 Peter 4:9 &10 NIV)**

Hospitality means entertaining strangers. It's an ability to open your home to others. For those with this gift, they just love having people at home. People with this gift don't apologise if the house is a bit of a mess. They just love people. They are more interested in people than whether the food is up to restaurant standards. The first time I was Pastor of a church as a student, it was in a farming area in the country. I was about 26 years old, and an old farmer that must have been all of 60, invited Lyn and I to lunch. That lunch had such an impact on me, I can still remember it as if it were yesterday. Bill Benson loved God, and he loved people. He had a heart as big as Texas. He said, "We have only got some meat and beetroot, but come for lunch." I didn't take him literally, but when they served the meal, they served meat and beetroot and nothing else. But we had a great time together. It wasn't about the food. It was about the hospitality.

Sometimes this love for strangers is so strong that people with this gift don't mind going through hardship so they can be hospitable. At a conference in Chicago, Lyn and I were billeted with Barbara Andersen. Barbara is a grandmother who lives in a one bed roomed house. For the ten days we stayed with her she slept on the couch. We felt so embarrassed taking up her double bed. But she had this gift, and delighted in doing all she could to show us the love of Jesus. As far as these people are concerned, to entertain strangers is like entertaining Jesus. If you have this gift, you will know what I'm talking about.

People, if you have this gift, we need you to exercise it. Over 80% of people who come to Christ come through relationships, and a warm loving welcome of strangers is one of the most effective means of reaching people I know. Some of you with this gift have felt guilty that you can't easily talk about your faith. Just try practicing hospitality with your neighbours and workmates and community contacts and see what God does through that. We have had our neighbours and people from our French class in for meals, and it's amazing how simple hospitality opens doors into people's hearts.

Craftsmanship / Creative Communication "The God given ability to design and or construct items to be used for ministry or to communicate Gods truth through a variety of art forms"

If you are following in the Spiritual Gifts checklist, you will notice I have broadened the definition here. This gift covers drama, writing, art, music, photography, dance and a whole range of artistic means to captivate people and draw them to consider a relationship with God. Our God is an incredibly creative God, and he has gifted some of His children with an inordinate amount of creativity. That creativity can be expressed in a huge variety of ways. When God told Moses to build the Tabernacle he told him to contact a man named Bezalel. This is how the scripture describes Bezalel: **"and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts-- to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship."** (Exodus 31:3 NIV)

If you want to see the fruit of this gift, walk into a Cathedral. The works of the hands of previous generations are designed to draw people closer to God. In our day we are reviving the use of this gift, with opportunities for people to use this gift in desktop publishing, design of all sorts, creative arts, floral arts, photography, banners, paintings, tapestries and so on. But this gift isn't limited to the church. If you have mechanical ability to fix someone's lawnmower, or you have ability in sewing you can use your gift to show the love of Jesus. You may be a craftsman with food. Use that gift as a means of being Christ to people. You may be able to communicate Gods truth through poetry, or song, or mime, or storytelling. Lyn and I recently saw the Oberammergau Passion play. Through drama and music, the message of the gospel is presented in the most moving and powerful way. If you have that sort of creativity, or can use your hands to make things that draw people closer to God, then do it. Develop what God has given you, and see what he does with what you do.

Intercession. "The God given ability to consistently pray on behalf of and for others, frequently seeing specific results."

An intercessor is something more than an ordinary Christian who intensifies his or her prayer life. Intercession involves a combination of identification with the people being prayed for, and an authority in prayer. People with this gift feel compelled to pray for people or situations. They have a heightened awareness of the power of prayer, and the spiritual battles that need to be fought and won through prayer. They have an absolute conviction that prayer moves the heart of God, and they are usually pretty tuned in to the work of the Holy Spirit. Often the Holy Spirit will prompt them to pray, and they will often pray until they sense a release from the burden of prayer. Intercessors persist until something happens. They are the sort of people that just know that they know that someone needs prayer.

A Christian teacher I had when I was a boy once told me about his mother's gift of intercession. He was a navigator on a Catalina flying boat in the Pacific during the Second World War. He used to tell me of times when their flying boat would have to land in enemy territory to pick up a pilot that had been shot down. He said he always had this sense that the Lord was protecting them, even in the most dangerous of situations. When he would get back from a mission, his mother would often write and tell him how the Lord woke her up, and she would pray for several hours for her son. When they figured out the times she prayed, it was usually at a time when he was in the greatest danger.

I have a cousin who has this gift. As well as holding down a full time job, he spends several hours a day in prayer, praying for his church. He described it to me like this. He said "I feel like a chef that is preparing a banquet for all of Gods people. All through the week I pray, and then I come on Sunday and see them feast on all that I have prepared for them." He just loves seeing God answer prayer. This is a precious gift that every church needs. Can you imagine how much more effective our evangelism, or our youth ministry, or children's ministry would be if we had an army of intercessors who were using their gift to extend the Kingdom? Intercessors, we need you. If you have this gift, we need you to use it.

Martyrdom. "The God given ability to undergo suffering for the faith, even to death, while consistently displaying a joyous and victorious attitude that brings glory to God."

How many of you have asked the Lord for this gift? It's a gift you only get to use once! It's actually much broader than just dying for your faith. It's an attitude toward suffering and death that is quite unusual. God has given certain members of the body of Christ the ability to display through suffering a joyous and victorious attitude that brings glory to God. One of the character traits associated with this gift is stubbornness. As soon as I said that, some of you women wrote down "My husband has this gift!" This is a gift that enables a person to be able to persist in their faith, often under terrible circumstances, and sometimes to the point of death. When Nicolae Ceaucescu was ruling Romania with an iron fist, a Baptist Pastor named Joseph Tson defied the secret police and kept preaching the gospel. Day after day he was taken in for interrogation. He was imprisoned and tortured for his faith. Because he wouldn't stop, eventually, a senior officer pulled out a pistol and put it to his head and threatened to shoot him. Joseph Tson said "Go ahead and shoot me". Already my sermons are on tape all over the country. If you shoot me, even more people will want to listen to them. If you shoot me, you will be advancing the gospel." After that, the communists didn't know what to do with him, so they kicked him out of the country.

In Acts Chapter 7 we see how Stephen had this gift. He just stubbornly refused to cave in to the pressure, and because of his love for Jesus, it cost him his life. It's been said that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. Whenever people suffer or die for their faith, thousands more turn to Christ.

Singleness / Celibacy "The God given ability to live a life free from marriage, family and sexual frustration in order to spend more time and energy in Christian ministry."

There are some single adults who are single because God has given them this gift. He has given them the ability to be quite content as a single person, enjoying their singleness and not suffering undue sexual temptation. How do you know if you have this gift? If you know deep in your heart that you would marry if the right opportunity presented itself, you probably don't have this gift. But if you find yourself contented as a single person, and you enjoy your singleness, and see it as a means of doing more for the Lord than if you had the responsibility of marriage, then you are probably like the Apostle Paul who had this gift. **"I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that." (1 Corinthians 7:7 NIV)**

Celibacy is a Charismata – a spiritual gift. It's time we recognised that in the church. For too long those of us, who are married or have been married have regarded singleness as incompleteness. One of the difficulties the Catholic Church has is that not all of those who are Priests or Nuns have this gift. Because they are required to remain single, many are leaving the priesthood in frustration. For those who have this gift, it's great, but the gift isn't for everyone, just as marriage isn't for everyone. Paul was so enthusiastic about this gift he wished everyone was single as he was, so they could get more done for the Lord. People like Cliff Richard and John Stott would agree. If you have this gift, celebrate it!

Voluntary Poverty. "The God given ability to renounce material comfort and luxury, living a life free of material responsibilities in order to devote large amounts of time, energy and skills to Christian ministry."

God gives some believers the ability to renounce comfort and luxury to such an extent that they can live at a poverty level in order to serve the poor more effectively. This is not the same as finding yourself poverty stricken. If you are poor, but are struggling to increase your wealth, you don't have this gift. People with this gift are choosing to live with the poor so they can be Christ to them. People with this gift don't see themselves as poor, but in fact think they are incredibly rich. John Wesley had this gift. When he died he left a well worn frock coat and two silver teaspoons in his estate. During his lifetime he had given away tens of thousands of pounds to the Lords work. Mother Theresa could have been a very wealthy woman, but she had this gift, and chose to live and work in the slums of Calcutta. I believe John and Susan Osborne have this gift. They have lived for nearly 35 years in the slums of Dacca and Calcutta. People with this gift have an ability to identify with the poor and reach them for Christ. Because they have so little of this world's goods, they have much more time and energy to serve Christ and serve others.

So there they are. Different gifts given to ordinary people like us, to live extraordinary lives for God. The Lord has given you everything you need to be all that you can be for his sake. So discover your gifts, develop your gifts and use them.

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