

The Discernment and Stewardship of Spiritual Gifts

I. Introduction: About Spiritual Gifts

In recent years, there has been a renewal of interest in the biblical concept of spiritual gifts within our denomination. While there are different ways to understand their relevance for our church today, there is also exciting potential in exploring and testing that relevance.

Based on biblical references, as well as more recent books and articles on the topic, spiritual gifts (or “grace gifts,” from the Greek word *charismata*; or simply “gifts”) are abilities given by God to each person in the church, to help the church carry out its mission in the world. The purpose and function of the gifts is manifested in two broad areas: 1) building up the body (an inward focus); and 2) sharing the good news of God’s kingdom (whether through word or deed, action or example; whether through specific ministries of the church or through our day-to-day lives and vocations--an outward focus).

To say they are “spiritual” means that they are more than merely human abilities or attributes—they are empowered by the Holy Spirit. It follows that the more open we are to the leading of the Spirit in our lives and our church, the more these gifts will blossom and bear fruit. Using our gifts is a matter of grateful obedience to God’s purposes.

Following are some additional characteristics of spiritual gifts (gleaned both from scripture and from contemporary sources on the subject):

- Each person has one or more
- No gift is more important than another; all are needed
- They are not an occasion for pride or arrogance, but rather humility and gratefulness
- Their use will give energy and joy to the user
- While they may appear ordinary, they will produce extraordinary results (although not always seen at the time)
- While the Bible specifically identifies approximately 20 spiritual gifts, it is clear that these were merely representative examples of their rich diversity. Understood in their broadest sense as abilities for carrying out God’s mission, the only limit to their number and nature is God’s own creativity and grace.
- The “gifts of the Spirit” are different from the “fruits of the Spirit” in that the latter are attributes towards which all are to strive (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc.), whereas we are not all intended to have the same gifts

II. Questions to assist in the discernment of our spiritual gifts (We encourage each person in our congregation—adults and children, members and attenders--to take some time to work through these questions. Use whichever questions seem most helpful; it may be additionally helpful to process them in conversation with others, whether family, friends, house church, prayer partner, or pastor):

1. What are the things in life that are so much a part of who I am, and that give me joy and energy, that I cannot keep from doing them?

2. What are the things that I am “good at”--that I have a talent (or training) for?

3. What are the contexts in my life where I have most felt the Holy Spirit working through me?

4. What aspects of the church’s ministries and mission do I find most energizing?

5. What aspects do I find the most draining?

6. With which of the spiritual gifts listed below do I most identify?

7. What gift(s) could be added that would better represent me?

8. Based on my answers to the above questions, what might my spiritual gift(s) be?

9. How might I use it/them for . . .
 - A) Building up the body? and/or,

 - B) Sharing the good news through word, deed, example, or witness (whether within specific programs of the church or beyond)?

10. What is keeping me from using my spiritual gifts?

III. A representative list of some spiritual gifts

Note: this is not an exhaustive list. Some are specifically mentioned in scripture; some aren't. The number and nature of spiritual gifts is determined by the creative imagination of the Holy Spirit, in response to the needs of the church and the world.

- **Administration**—the ability to manage and organize resources with efficiency and effectiveness
- **Art**—the ability to create or perform works of visual beauty in a way that communicates the love and grace of God
- **Battle**—the ability to boldly confront those spiritual forces which oppose the will of God
- **Craftsmanship**—the ability to design, build, or repair items of practical use as well as beauty
- **Creative Writing**—the ability to use language in a way that communicates the love and grace of God
- **Discernment**—the general ability to sort, differentiate, or prioritize, and the specific ability to distinguish good from evil, what is life-giving from life-taking.
- **Exhortation**—the ability to encourage, challenge, inspire, and motivate others.
- **Exorcism**—the ability to draw upon God's power in order to expel a specific evil spirit or power
- **Evangelism**—the ability to witness persuasively to the love of God through word and also deed
- **Faith**—the ability to believe in, and ask confidently for, the sovereign, miraculous intervention of God
- **Giving**—the ability to give without hesitation or reserve, particularly of one's material resources
- **Healing**—the ability to restore others to physical, emotional, or spiritual wellness
- **Helping**—the ability to aid or assist others in need
- **Hospitality**—the ability to welcome and host others (including those beyond one's more intimate circles)
- **Humor**—the ability to bring refreshing laughter to a given context or situation
- **Interpretation**—the ability to translate the Spirit-inspired utterances of others (see "Tongues")
- **Knowledge**—the ability to gather and organize facts and comprehend truths about our world.
- **Leadership**—the ability to mobilize the passion, energy, and gifts of others towards the accomplishment of a task.
- **Martyrdom**—the ability to stand firm on one's faith convictions, with humility and despite fear of the consequences.
- **Mercy**—the ability to empathize deeply with and respond to the distress of others

- **Miracles**—the ability to do powerful works which seem to transcend natural laws and which glorify God in the process
- **Missionary**—the ability to reach beyond one’s own race, culture, or nationality to serve human or spiritual needs
- **Music**—the ability to create or perform music in a way that communicates the love and grace of God
- **Pastor**—the ability to care for the spiritual, physical, and relational well-being of individuals and/or groups
- **Prayer**—the ability to commune with God through word and silence, to intercede for the world’s needs, and to listen for God’s response.
- **Prophecy**—the ability to discern and proclaim God’s will for our church and world
- **Service**—the ability to devote oneself to the needs of others, with humility and without the need for payment or recognition.
- **Teaching**—the ability to guide others in learning about Christian faith and faithfulness
- **Tongues**—the ability to praise or pray to God in spontaneous, Spirit-inspired utterances; also, the ability to communicate in human languages beyond one’s own
- **Voluntary Poverty**—the ability to live a life unencumbered by material possessions and responsibilities
- **Wisdom**—the ability to distill human knowledge to its “divine” essentials, to see with God’s eyes, to prioritize and discern by the Spirit’s leading.
- **Other**—the ability to . . . (use your Spirit-inspired imagination!):

IV. Using our gifts in specific tasks and ministries of the Church

In its broadest sense, the mission of the church encompasses all that we do and are in our day-to-day lives, including our vocation and other time commitments, interaction with neighbors, etc. Christian stewardship involves the use of our spiritual gifts in all of these areas.

However, one of the ways the church carries out its mission is through specific ministries, some of which are focused inwardly towards “building the body,” and others focused outwardly towards sharing the good news of God’s kingdom. The power and effectiveness of these ministries lies precisely in their use of diverse gifts towards united purposes.

There is no one-to-one correlation between any one spiritual gift and a specific ministry of the church. These ministries benefit from—and indeed depend on—multiple gifts. At the same time, certain gifts will have more natural affinity to some ministries than others. (For example, the Board of Deacons benefits from persons having a variety of gifts, including Administration, Discernment, Exhortation, Humor, etc. However, persons having gifts of caring such as Mercy and Pastor will fit particularly well in this board.)