

Discover Your Gifts

LIVE with Jesus in Community

“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.” | 1 Corinthians 12:4-6

INTRODUCTION

One of the most striking things about Jesus is the way he lived with absolute clarity about his purpose—his role in the mission of God. This clarity allowed him to stay focused on what God called him to do. He articulated this regularly: “The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10). “Let us go somewhere else...so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” (Mark 1:38). “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45). He knew that he was empowered by the Spirit for a role that only he could fulfill. Because of this, he was not distracted by the many demands of the expectations of others. He could give himself fully to his Father’s will and say no to the things that did not align with his calling.

Amazingly, the same Spirit that empowered Christ for his ministry has been given to you and me, just as he promised (John 14:16). Even more astounding is that each one of us, without exception, is empowered by the Spirit for a role only we can play in the mission of God. He distributes spiritual gifts to each of us to be used to further his kingdom and building up his people, the church (1 Corinthians 12:7). And these gifts are as varied as the people he calls. For the church to thrive, it needs communicators, administrators, networkers, musicians, business-people, chefs, and intercessors (and many more) serving in its ministries. Together we want to discern and practice using our gifts in love, that we would experience the joy of being who God created us to be, and that others may be built up in Christ.

Some gifts may feel more obviously “spiritual” or even “miraculous” gifts like the teaching of scripture, physical healing, or the gift of great faith (Romans 12: 7, 1 Corinthians 12:9). Yet scripture makes no distinction or hierarchy between the gifts God gives. In the same lists are seemingly “natural” gifts—encouragement, generosity, leadership, or administration (Romans 6:8, 1 Corinthians 12:28). Supernatural or mundane, flashy or behind the scenes, scripture says that all gifts are *essential*. As Paul puts it, we are each a member of the body of Christ. The parts of the body must work together, and no part can say to the other, “I don’t need you.” In fact, some of the parts of the body that seem less prominent are actually “indispensable” and should be treated with “special honor” (1 Corinthians 15-18).

What all this means is that, if you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit has given you gifts. You are an indispensable part of the body of Christ. There is a role in God’s mission that only you can fulfill. If you do not bring your gifts (the unique way God made you to be) to the table, the body will not have all it needs to thrive. Likewise, if you separate yourself from the body of Christ, you will not be the recipient of the gifts of others, and you will miss out on full spiritual health. We are impoverished without the Spirit’s work through one another.

If this is true, then we have both a duty and an absolute privilege to explore our gifts and seek to use them. As the Apostle Peter says, “Each should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:9). Nothing we

have (even our own abilities!) is from ourselves, but a gift from God. We try to faithfully use what we've been entrusted with, giving back to God's purposes what he's given to us. But to think of this only as a duty would be to shortchange the *joy* of growing into the person God made you to be. To know how God has gifted us – and how he has not gifted us—is to be free to be ourselves. It is the confidence of knowing we have something valuable to bring to the table, and the humility of knowing our limitations. It is the gift of having a purpose and getting to explore that purpose with greater depth our whole lives.

God wants us to explore who he made us to be so that we can experience life to the full—a life lived in love and service to others. The paradox of the Christian life is that when we begin to love and serve others with all that we are, we find the fulfillment we have been searching for. To find our lives, we pour them out for the sake of Christ (Matthew 10:39) and in caring for others we ourselves are transformed (Isaiah 58:6-9). Consider the process of exploring your gifts as an adventure to embark on with the Lord—your our whole life you will be discovering all of who he has made you to be. With deeper insight, you step more fully into the purpose he has set apart for you in his kingdom. In this way, we set ourselves on being like Christ—fully knowing who we are, being able to say yes and no to opportunities with wisdom, and committed to the unique path of God has entrusted to us.

THE PRACTICE

Growing to understand and use our gifts is a *process*. Some of us have seen or taken spiritual gifts tests in the past—and these resources can be helpful. However, in many ways they are like taking a personality test: you may get some food for thought, but real self-knowledge comes with time, trial and error, and reflection. Moreover, to give you a simple answer to know your gifts would be to cheat you of the best part of this process: intimacy and interaction with God. Below you will find five ways to engage in intentional reflection with the Lord. Feel free to use all or some of these tools and return to them periodically as you want more insight.

Before you Begin:

Remember, before Jesus entered public ministry, God declared that he was his beloved Son (Matthew 3:17). Jesus was not driven by a desire to do miracles or preach to crowds (a focus on God's gifts) or a desire to prove himself to God (a posture of earning God's love). Instead, he employed his gifts *because* he had received God's love. Take a moment now and remember this is true of you as well.

Discover Your Gifts

Look to the Past

Often, we have used spiritual gifts without even being aware of it. Consider with the Lord the following questions:

- What types of activities do you find you have a natural “bent” towards? Consider even looking at the activities you were drawn to when you were young. Was there a theme to your interests?
- What types of activities have produced the most “fruit” when you've applied yourself to them?

- Have trustworthy people affirmed your gifting in a particular area in the past?
- Ask the Lord to highlight what is from him, showing you any themes in your past that might point you to how he has wired you.

Bring It to God in Prayer

It may seem obvious, but this step can be easily forgotten. Begin by talking to God about your desire to discover and grow in your spiritual gifts. It is the Spirit who teaches us and distributes our gifts, and he can give us insight about how he has equipped us.

Consider prayerfully reflecting on:

- What is exploring your spiritual gifts bringing up for you: excitement, insecurity, confusion? Talk to God about this.
- Reflect on the passages of scripture that describe various spiritual gifts. (Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12: 4- 13:13, Ephesians 4:11-13)* What stands out to you? What have you learned about the place and purpose of spiritual gifts?
- What examples do you see of how others have used their gifts to bless the church or to bless you? Do these examples help you see how varied and creative our spiritual gifts can be?
- Ask the Lord for opportunities in the upcoming days or weeks to see your gifts at work. What does he bring your way?

Ask Your Community

As in all of the spiritual life, we need one another in order to gain clear insight into our spiritual giftings. Who are some trustworthy and mature Christians God has put in your life—especially those who know you well. Ask them any of the following questions:

- How have you explored your spiritual gifts?
- Have you seen ways God has used me in this community? What gifts do you think he has given me?
- Do you think there are ways I could be using my gifts more? Or, can you think of other things I could try out to explore my gifts?
- Would you pray for me as I continue to explore this?

Consider Your Passions

Perhaps just as important as what we are *good* at is what we are *drawn* to. God places interests, passions, even burdens on our hearts to clue us into our calling. This also might give us insight into *where* we might use our gifts.

- Consider the last week or month: What activities gave you the most joy? What made you feel most like “yourself”? What made you feel most connected to God?

- What topics make you light up, things that you could talk about at length without becoming bored?
 - Are there any issues or people/people groups that particularly move your heart with compassion?
 - Look at the areas of ministry in the church. Are there any that naturally spark your interest?
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- Try Serving Others

While reflection is right and helpful, it is also true that we will *never* discover our spiritual gifts by thinking about them. Many of the gifts that God wants to give us wait on the other side of us taking a step to love and serve others. You may not know that you love hospitality until you open your home or welcome a newcomer. You may not know you have a gift of leadership until you say yes to a need to head up a volunteer team. You may not know you have the gift of wisdom until you speak up and share an insight with your small group.

Try taking a step into an opportunity to serve and love others. What do you learn?

Consider:

- What needs do I see in the church body around me?
- Is there a way I have the capacity and resources to serve, but I have held back because I wasn't sure it was for me?
- Ask the Lord to put opportunities in your path in the upcoming days and months. What comes your way?

HELPFUL SCRIPTURES:

1 Peter 4: 8-11

“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.”

Romans 12:3-8

“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 faith God has distributed to each of you. For 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, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.”

All of 1 Corinthians 12 and 13, but in particular:

“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.” 1 Corinthians 12:7-11

1 Corinthians 12:18-20

“But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.”

1 Corinthians 12:27-31

“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.”

1 Corinthians 13: 1-3

“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.”

INTERESTING QUOTES:

“God never loses sight of the treasure which He has placed in our earthen vessels.” – Charles Haddon Spurgeon

“The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” – Frederick Buechner

“Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve. You don’t have to have a college degree to serve. You don’t have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.” – Martin Luther King, Jr.

“God's glory is most majestically displayed not through you or through me, but through US. God raises up the Church, and says to all Creation in the heavens, on the Earth, and under the Earth, this is the bride and body of My Son, bought and purchased by His blood to be My people and receive My power, and enjoy My presence, and declare My praise forever and ever.” – David Platt

“God has given a spiritual gift to the church in you, and you dare not keep it to yourself.” – Aaron Niequist

“There are many people who can do big things, but there are very few who will do the small things” – Mother Teresa

“Some people have a warped idea of living the Christian life. Seeing talented, successful Christians, they attempt to imitate them. For them, the grass on the other side of the fence is always greener. But when they discover that their own gifts are different or their contributions are more modest (or even invisible), they collapse in discouragement and overlook genuine opportunities that are open to them. They have forgotten that they are here to serve Christ, not themselves.” – Billy Graham

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

Before you try this practice:

1. What have you been taught about “spiritual gifts”? What associations do you have with this term, if any?
2. Read over the suggested passages above. What questions do you have?
3. How do you react to the idea that you and your gifts are indispensable to the body?
4. Do you have a sense of what some of your spiritual gifts might be?
5. If not, can you think of times you’ve experienced particular joy while serving? What about great fruitfulness?
6. How do you feel you are currently using or not using your gifts in this season of your life?

After you try this practice:

1. Which parts of this practice did you decide to engage with? What came to light for you?
2. What questions do you have for this community after trying this practice?
3. Consider taking time to affirm one another in the gifts you have seen in each other.
4. Given what you’ve learned, is there any way you feel called to use your gifts more intentionally?
5. Consider the following idea: God is often calling us to the place where our gifts, passions, and the needs of those around us overlap. Does this lend any more insight as you move forward?
6. Maybe you are still feeling like you lack insight into your unique gifting. Where could you try out serving others as a first step in learning more?