

Equipped to unwrap your gifts

At this time of year, many of us are shopping for Christmas gifts for our family and friends. It's difficult to believe that it's a year since we were last doing this - time is flying by so quickly! Most of us enjoy giving gifts at Christmas-time as an expression of our love or gratitude, and it's great fun trying to work out what others have given us from the shape and feel of the presents. But as we unwrap our Christmas gifts, how much thought do we give to our spiritual gifts?

The apostle Paul is addressing Christian believers when he says, "*A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church*".¹ Paul says what these gifts are in his letters to Christians in various churches - at Rome;² Corinth;³ and Ephesus.⁴ Every Christian has at least one spiritual gift, but we don't read anywhere in the Bible of spiritual gifts being given for personal satisfaction or personal advancement. Their main purpose is to build up the church.

The church is like a body with many parts, each with its own specific function, but working interdependently with all the other parts. But, how do you get to know what *your* part is in this body? Have a go at answering the following questions.

- Do you desire to live every day in a close relationship to Jesus Christ?
- Do you believe that the Spirit gives at least one gift to every Christian?
- Are you prepared to gratefully accept *whatever* gift the Spirit has determined to give you and to use this gift for the good of others in the church?
- Will you pray for wisdom to discover and develop your gift(s)?
- Do other Christians affirm particular gifts in your life?

If you've answered "YES" to all these questions, look for opportunities to serve; you might be surprised at what gifts become apparent if your attitude is to put God first.

Sometimes we need to just try it before we can be certain about what gift(s) the Spirit has given us. Hands-on experience will often determine whether or not we're gifted in a particular area.

In our eagerness to discover and apply our spiritual gifts, we need to remember Jesus' command to remain closely connected to him.⁵ No matter how gifted we are, we will accomplish nothing of eternal significance if we think we can do it on our own. A living, vibrant relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ is absolutely essential if we are to use our gifts to serve him along with other members of his body, the church.

As we exercise our gifts for the good of others, it's worth remembering that they should never become more important than spiritual fruit. One of the fruit segments in the New Testament book of Galatians is love.⁶ It's no coincidence that in the middle of Paul's discussion about spiritual gifts to the Corinthian church, he devotes an entire chapter to love.⁷ This is how we're meant to exercise our gifts - in love. We daren't use them in any other way. Have you begun to unwrap your spiritual gift(s) yet?

¹ 1 Corinthians 12:7 (NLT)

² Romans 12:6-8

³ 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28

⁴ Ephesians 4:11

⁵ John 15:4, 5

⁶ Galatians 5:22

⁷ 1 Corinthians 13