

Equipped to use our spiritual gifts (part one)

The excitement was almost unbearable. Frank, a family friend, was due to arrive at any time. Nearly twenty minutes had passed since he had phoned to say he was on his way with our Christmas gifts. What would he bring this time? What would he bring for my sister? For me? All these questions went round inside my 8-year-old head. One thing was sure - Frank loved our family, and his gifts were a genuine expression of that love. Just being a member of the family meant we each received a gift of Frank's choosing - even our pet bird got a packet of seed!

The nature of the gifts

Being part of a family brings so many privileges. Belonging to the family of God is no exception. Because we're in His family, we receive gifts which empower us to live and minister effectively. When we become followers of Jesus Christ, we not only receive the Holy Spirit within us¹ but He brings gifts with Him, distributing them to us in the way He chooses² for the purpose of empowering us for ministry to the body of Christ, the church³.

Most of the spiritual gifts are mentioned in the letters to the churches at Rome⁴, Corinth⁵, and Ephesus⁶. While this list might not be exhaustive, I have found it helpful to group these gifts into seven different packages:

1. *Directing God's People* - administration, leadership, and apostleship.
2. *Communicating God's Word* - evangelism, prophecy, and teaching.
3. *Understanding God's Ways* - wisdom, knowledge, and distinguishing between spirits.
4. *Caring for God's People* - encouragement, mercy, and pastoring.
5. *Supporting God's People* - giving, helping, and serving.
6. *Demonstrating God's Power* - faith, healing, and miracles.
7. *Speaking God's Language* - tongues and interpretation of tongues.

One person's gift-mix might be made up of gifts from one particular package. Another might have gifts from more than one package.

There are many well-constructed questionnaires available which can be very helpful in identifying our spiritual gifts. However, we also need to consider our motives in wanting to discover what our gifts might be. Do we want to use the knowledge of our gifts to boost our self-esteem? Even worse, might we be interested in getting "one up" on others in the church? Let us be willing to accept with gratitude *whatever* gift the Spirit has given us for the good of others. We also need to pray for wisdom in discovering and developing our gifts. God will gladly answer prayers like this⁷.

Another thing you might find helpful is whether or not other people in your Christian community affirm particular gifts in your life. Do they think you have the gift of evangelism, or mercy, or encouragement? Sometimes others can assess our spiritual giftedness much better than we can.

Sometimes we need to 'just do 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.

¹ 1 Cor.3:16

² 1 Cor.12:11

³ Eph.4:12

⁴ Rom.12:6-8

⁵ 1 Cor.12:8-10

⁶ Eph.4:11

⁷ James 1:5