

WHAT ARE SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

by Vern S. Poythress

TO THE GROUP LEADER: This resource is designed to help you lead others to better understand one of the “Basics of the Faith” booklets published by P&R. The numbers in brackets indicate the page number in the booklet. Below each question is an answer based on what the author presents, or advice on how to discuss the question. You have the freedom to adapt the questions to best fit your group.

A good teaching technique is to distribute the questions to the group and have them write down how they would answer BEFORE reading the booklet. After reading, members can refine their answers based on their reading. As a group, members can discuss their views to affirm or modify what they wrote.

1. How would you describe a *spiritual gift*? List here all the gifts you can remember. (5)
Use this as a quick starting point. Don't correct any answers, let the rest of the session do that.
2. What is required of us to receive a spiritual gift? (5-7)
Read 1 Cor.12:7 to the group. Gifts are given for the common good of the church. They are not meant for individual pleasures; they are meant for the building up of Christ's Body. Therefore, the only requirement for receiving one of these gifts is to be a member of the Body of Christ.
3. Who decides who receives what gifts? (7-9 and 11-13)
Have someone read 1 Cor.12:4-12; 14:1. Make sure to keep 12:7 clearly before them, as it is the key to why we get what we do. We call these the gifts of the Spirit, but the whole of the Trinity is involved. **They** are the Ones who decide our gifts, because They know best what each church needs most.
4. Who gets these gifts? Does every Christian, or only some? (9-11)
Read 1 Cor.12:13. Remind them what the Corinthian church was like – a problematic and immature church. Paul says that even these carnal believers **all** had at least one of these gifts. Everyone who is in Christ is given a function in His Body.
5. Looking back at the list of gifts you wrote down in question 1, how might you rank these in order of importance to the church? Who is served by each gift – the individual, the church, or the world? (14-17)
Take the group through the pyramid on pg.14 and show the levels brought out by Dr. Poythress. Make sure they don't see any of these gifts as unimportant simply because they ranked lower. Every gift is important to the life of the church, just like every part of your body has a needed function.
6. Do you think the apostles would have had more gifts than other believers in the church? (17-20)
The apostles were commissioned by Jesus directly. (Have someone read John 14:26 and 16:13, where Jesus tells the 11 that the Holy Spirit will remind them of all He said and will also reveal more that they could not handle until after the Holy Spirit came.) These men probably exercised all the gifts as needed in a church which as yet had no New Testament. They also had little access to the Old Testament, unless they visited a local synagogue to use the copies of whatever books of the OT they had available. This is a critical point; for God used different means to help the church know what He wanted them to know and to do.
7. What would be the difference between the way the apostles operated in their gifts and the way we do? (20-28)
(This might be a difficult section for the group to grasp.) God used the apostles to bring about His divinely inspired revelation – the NT. No one else has ever been given this opportunity because the NT is now

complete - never to be added to again. What the apostles received was directly from the Holy Spirit and by this He made sure what they wrote was without error. He did the same when He gave them the words to speak. Today's teachers do not speak with the same level of authority. Our authority is the Bible alone, not the preacher. And, because we are fallible human beings, we can and do err in interpreting the Bible – the apostles didn't.

8. The men inspired to write the Scriptures wrote specifically to the people of their day. How then can we apply it to ourselves in our day? (28-30)

God the Holy Spirit is the author of the Bible, and because He is, the Bible was written with the intent it would be able to speak to people of all generations. There are many lessons we can learn from the people and events that took place 2000 to 3000 years ago. It is the same Holy Spirit Who wrote through these men Who will also show us from His writings what He wants us to do.

9. Do you believe *all* the spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament are still to be used by the church today? (30-37)

Dr. Poythress' pyramid explains the gifts on two different levels – the divinely inspired levels 1 & 2, and the general uninspired levels 3 & 4. We operate today on levels 3 & 4. However, having said that, we are not dismissing the work of the Holy Spirit in guiding our use of these gifts; He does not guide us in the same infallible way He did the apostles. What they taught was without error; what we teach might contain error because of *our* misinterpretations. So, whenever we use our gifts, we need to be all the more vigilant to pray and depend on the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us.

10. How should we respond to the use of *all* the gifts as they are used in the church today? (37-38)

Read the last paragraph on pg.38. Then read 1 Cor.13. This chapter is sandwiched between Paul's explanation of the gifts (ch.12) and the regulating of the use of the gifts (ch.14). Chapter 13 tells us how the gifts should be operating – in love – love for God and love for His Body. As it says, if we don't do these things in love, we are simply making a lot of unhelpful noise. If we don't use these gifts in love for the Body, God will not be glorified.

After going through these questions, read the text and fill in the answers in preparation for class, noting other questions you might have. [By the way, if you do have any other questions about what you read, write them down here so you remember them at class time.]

APPLICATION

Do you know what your spiritual gift(s) is? If not, here are a few of suggestions to get you started:

- What do you like to do in and for the church? Does it look like one of the gifts?
- Talk to others in the church who know you. What do they see in you that might look like one of the gifts in operation?
- Pray. The Holy Spirit *has* given you at least one gift, and He wants you to use it in His church. If anyone in the church is not using his or her spiritual gift, it cripples the church. Read what Paul says about this in 1 Corinthians 12:14-20. There is no such thing as an unimportant or unnecessary part of the body. You are important, and finding and using your gifts are critical to the life of your church. Start praying and searching to find your gift right now.

For Further Study

Life in the Father's House: A Members Guide to the Local Church, Wayne A. Mack and Dave Swavely. P&R Publishing, 2006.

Spiritual Gifts PowerPoint. Rose Publishing, 2014.

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