

Jason Upchurch - 1 Corinthians 12:27-31 - What's My Spiritual Gift?

This morning I want to use our passage as a launching pad into a very practical discussion on spiritual gifts in general.

You know that we've been talking about spiritual gifts for many weeks as we try to understand what these gifts Paul mentions are. But the reality is that we can talk about whether tongues are still legitimately around today, we can unpack what prophesy is, or guess what words of knowledge and wisdom are. And to understand the Bible well we need to do that.

But I think what's on most peoples' minds when they think of spiritual gifts is "What is *my* gift? How has the Holy Spirit gifted me to serve the church?"

So what I want to do with our time this morning is divide our time in half. First, we'll look at this passage and 2 others and talk more about other gifts. And then, second, I'll make some practical suggestions about how to know how you're gifted.

That's what we want to know. That's what I wanted to know when I was first saved and I think that's what many people want to know as they seek to be faithful in their service to the Lord.

I mean, when we consider this list here, many of these are obvious because they are miraculous. The people who have had these gifts were probably not confused about how God has or has not gifted them.

Apostles knew they were apostles. Prophets knew they were prophets. I don't believe apostles are around anymore because we don't see signs and wonders; and part of the qualification for being an apostle is to have seen Jesus risen from the dead. No one can claim that today.

If you have the gift of miracles, literally powers in the Greek, which I argue is exorcism - casting out demons that's pretty obvious. Same with speaking in tongues and healings. I have never seen these gifts in action in Biblical way, but I have seen them misused over the years. But these don't appear to be gifts that you have to discern whether or not you have. Part of beauty of them as higher gifts is that they miraculously come out of you.

With the gift of tongues, for instance, in Scripture. It always happens naturally, like you almost can't help yourself, and it's always a human language. So if you have this gift, you probably know it.

Okay, so maybe you don't speak in tongues or cast out demons or heal people. Now what?

Well, first, let's just look at some gifting to get an idea about what's available. **Read 28**

So Paul, I think in something of an ironic way, lists these gifts to sort of put the people who speak in tongues in their place. Remember that gift seems to be the one they're having problems with. Well, notice where that gift is on the list: last. And interpretation is dead last.

In fact, in this section tongues is always at the end of the list. It's not that these gift are bad, I think it's a subtle shot at thinking someone is so great for having them.

So, remember a spiritual gift is a gift given to a believer to build up the body of Christ. Let's look at these that we haven't unpacked yet.

Teaching. This is not just teaching generically, like math or gardening. When the Bible talks about teaching related to the church it has in mind those who are gifted by the Holy Spirit to pass along biblical truths. So whether you're teaching doctrine or teaching through books of the Bible, the Spirit has equipped some people to do this in a variety of ways.

Some teach adults, some teach kids, some teach college aged people, some preach, some counsel - there's a variety of ways in which teaching happens. And there are a variety of types of teachers in how they approach what they do.

Next we see helping in **Vs. 28**. This one is not a big mystery: it's those who really desire to help other people in a variety of ways. It could be cleaning or shopping or building stuff together. The idea of help is a little different, I think, than service because helping implies coming alongside someone to work **with** them. This isn't leading anything or directing anything or organizing anything.

But if you find yourself saying, "Well, I don't want to lead it, but if you need any help let me know" this might be you. Maybe this doesn't seem like an amazing over-the-top gift, but you know who gave it to you on purpose? The Holy Spirit.

What about administrating? The Greek word that is used here is related to a word used for a ship captain. Someone who is piloting a large ship, while managing the whole crew ensuring that everyone is doing their job. This is the spiritual gift of management.

That's what administrators do: they manage people well. This isn't so much managing an office or paperwork, as much as it is managing people. Administrators can identify talents in others and encourage them into the right place. They provide helpful feedback to improve other people. They ensure that the church is like a well-oiled machine.

And just like there are a variety of ships, there are a variety of administrators. Some are really good at team building. Others are good at team maintenance. Some are good at introducing new concepts and solutions to make the whole church better.

Some of you are really good at managing different types of groups of people. You just know who should do what in order to get the objective done. I suspect many wives have this gift because God calls wives to manage the household.

Let's **turn** to **Romans 12**. We looked at this a couple of months ago, but I think it'll be helpful for us to look at it again.

Let me say a couple things while we're turning. First, these gifts are general categories. How and who you might teach could vary. The way in which you manage might be different from someone else with this gift. Maybe you're capable of managing huge organizations, someone else just manages a few people. That's okay.

We often think we've got to be the absolute best at what we do compared to everyone else. That's not true. We should do the best we can given our situation. But there's 10 toes on your body, only 2 of them are the big toe. You've got 2 hands, but one is your dominate hand. It's really okay. Some wise advice someone gave me as a young pastor is that I'm not John MacArthur or John Piper or Steve Lawson. I'm Jason Upchurch, so preach like Jason Upchurch. My goal isn't to be those other guys, my goal is to best use the gifts the Spirit has equipped me with. Same goes for all of us.

Another thing to keep in mind is that often these gifts are difficult to distinguish between non-spiritual gifts. I've had some very worldly managers who were really good at their job. I've had some professors at community college who were great at teaching. They weren't filled with the Spirit at all, though.

How do we know if we're gifted in this way? Well, the Spirit gives gifts specifically to build up the church. That's what the gifts are designed to do. So I think it's safe to say that there's a secular mirror of many of these gifts. I had a great physics teacher in high school. But he wasn't building up the church. What the Spirit empowers are people to build up the local church in the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

Okay, here in Romans we see some more gifts. **Read 3-8**

We'll skip some of the ones we've already covered. But we've got the gift of service. There may be some overlap with this gift and the gift of help we saw a minute ago. But do you like to serve other people? Maybe you like to serve in a variety of ways, maybe you like to serve in a specific way. This is a very generic gift, but it is a gift to the body of Christ nonetheless.

Maybe you like shopping for people, helping them to the doctor, cleaning their house, cleaning the church, making food. Many of you have blessed us over the last 6 weeks with meals - it has been an amazing gift to us.

The word used here is diakonia- where we get the word deacon. In the original Greek, diakonia was the word used for a waiter of tables. Whatever you need, they go get for you. Whatever people in the church need, they go get for the people. This is a good gift.

Next we see exhortation. **Read 8**

If you NIV I think it says encouragement. The word given here is kind of hard to translate, it's the parakaleo - Paraclete. That's a word that is used to describe the Holy Spirit himself. A Paraclete in Ancient Rome was sort of an advocate/lawyer/friend. Someone who was for you and fought for you and encouraged you.

Life coach sounds a little modern, so I'm not excited about that. But the idea here is someone who loves to disciple people in a more personal way and encourage them and maybe tell them some truths that are very hard but very needed.

How about someone with the gift of contribution? **Read 8**

Some people are gifted by God with not only resources in abundance, but a desire to see those resources used for God's glory.

I was listening to a Christian radio show many years ago and a pastor was talking about how he had a very, very wealthy executive in his church. And the guy took him out to dinner one night where there were no prices on the menu and said, "Look, I travel everywhere and it's hard for me to invest in people in our church and in our town for the gospel. So here's what I want to do: I'm going to make a bank account for you to write checks out of. I'm going to put \$10,000 in there and I want you to use that to help people. You write the checks and I want you to be generous, and what we'll do is once a quarter I'll take you out to dinner and you tell me the stories of how you used this money for God's glory."

What an awesome way to bless the people of God. When we're talking about generosity it's usually that God has blessed someone with some kind of material means - it could be money, cars, property, whatever - and they use it to bless people. They give the missionary on furlough their rental house for 3 months rent free. Or let give someone in their congregation their spare car. Or food or clothes.

There's a guy over at Connection Point Church who gives away winter coats. That's his thing. God put it on his heart to buy coats in the offseason - so he buys a bunch for pennies on the dollar and then gives them away.

One quick note, I don't think it's always people who are well off who get this gift. Sometimes I think people who aren't very well off have this as well. I remember being in Bible college and we're all crazy poor and there were just some guys who gave away anything. They'd give you the shirt off their back. They weren't rich. They just loved to bless other people.

If you have a heart to give stuff to bless others, this might be your gift.

The Spirit also gives us leaders. **Read 8**

Now, to be honest I think that there's probably some crossover between leaders and managers. I don't think the goal here is to make super sharp distinctions. I think there could be some overlap.

But by definition: leaders are those people who other people follow. They have charisma, vision, the ability to communicate and organize and get things done.

I think in the church, this is often a gift given to elders. But not always. There are other people that we tend to gravitate toward because they have a genuine gift of leadership and it's a blessing to the church.

If you're someone who feels compelled to get something done and recruit other people to help you - this might be your gift.

The last one here is mercy. Mercy in the Bible is usually taking care of those who are incapable of taking care of themselves: the sick, poor, needy, widows, orphans. It's a hard ministry because usually you're seeing people at the very bottom of the social order and health order.

Paul says do this with cheerfulness. Why is that? Because usually the people we're helping in this situation already feel like a burden. They already feel like a drain. And yet they still need to be served. And what better representation of the gospel than for those who are gifted in this way to do so in a cheerful manner?

Okay, let's look at **1 Pet. 4** for a minute. Here we just have all the gifts broken down into 2 simple categories which I think will be a great segway into making all of this practical. The 2 general categories are speaking and service. **Read 7-11**

So there are some things we're all called to do: self-control, sober minded, hospitality and love. That's all believers.

But when it comes to gifts he says use your gift!

if you have a speaking gift, use that. Speaking would include teaching, preaching, counseling, encouragement, speaking in tongues, interpretation, prophesy, and maybe leading.

Service is everything else: mercy, faith, healing, service in general.

If you're speaking, speak as though you are speaking on behalf of God. How would our Father - the gracious King of the universe - want us to speak? And then we speak in that way.

If we're serving, are we doing it in our own strength or are we relying on the Spirit to work through us for the results?

Okay, let's get practical. Maybe you know what your gift is, maybe you don't. Where do you begin. Some - hopefully - helpful considerations:

1) Just because you're not gifted in an area doesn't mean you can't do it.

There's lots of people who are like "Well, I don't have the gift of generosity so I'm not giving that dude my money. I'll wait for someone else." No, that's not how this works. Sometimes God places people or situations in our path that maybe aren't our gift but we can still serve these people.

Maybe you don't have the gift of teaching, but if a neighbor was like "Hey, can you tell me a little more about Jesus?" You know what you should do? Teach them. Just read the Bible, get a study Bible, get some books, talk to me, whatever. I'll get you equipped.

We're all called to teach our kids - so we do this on some level in our family. Or we should be.

"I hate leading, but this needs to get done." That's okay - people who are not leaders can actually lead from time to time.

And in a small church like ours, many times we'll need to serve in ways we're not gifted in. That's okay. In a human body that lacks some parts, the other parts make up for it. Have you seen that guy who's got no arms,

but he can drive and pull up to a drive through and order and pay. It's not smooth, but he gets it done. Sometimes God calls us to serve in ways we're not particularly gifted so that the work of the ministry goes on.

So just because you're not gifted, doesn't mean can't do it. And at some point most of us are called to serve in a way we're not particularly gifted in. Side: Sometimes doing something we're not comfortable with is how we find out that something is our gift after all.

2) What do you want to do?

I mean, just pie in the sky, if money were not an issue, if time and resources were not an issue, what do you want to do?

Here's the thing, I don't think the Holy Spirit is going to equip us to do something we really don't want to do. I think that's part of the gifting is that he gives us a desire to serve in particular ways.

He gives us a desire to be merciful by helping those who are hurting. He gives us the desire to reach out to our neighbor with the gospel. He gives us the desire to lead ministries or project for the glory of God.

I mean, even the more miraculous gifts are somewhat compulsory, aren't they? When we see speaking in tongues in the book of Acts it's always impromptu. It's not like these guys are going, "You know what we need to do now that we're saved? We need to speak us some foreign languages." No, they start doing it as though they can't help themselves.

In the early church people saw all these brothers and sisters in Christ from out of town without any provisions and they sold their land and generously gave it to the apostles to support them.

So, what do you want to do? Maybe it's medical missions. Maybe it's help people with their cars. Maybe it's sing or play music. Maybe you want to teach.

I have to tell you when I heard John MacArthur preach when I was in college I had 2 thoughts: First, I want to do that! Second, I never want to be up in front of people. You have to be kind of crazy to like public speaking. But at some point you have to get up and give it a shot. It took me 6 months to not be nervous preaching.

If you have a desire or an idea about how to serve the body of Christ, it's probably some kind of work of the Spirit in you to bless the body of Christ.

3) What are you already good at doing?

So there's some discussion about the difference between natural talents and spiritual gifts. I think we often think that the Spirit will give us a brand new set of gifting when we are saved.

That might be the case, especially with the more miraculous gifts. But I think he can sovereignly baptize our natural abilities for his glory as well.

So if you already love leading people, maybe God is calling you to lead in the church. If you were a good counselor before belief, then maybe you're a good counselor now that you're equipped with the truth of the Word of God. Maybe you liked helping others, that's okay.

Some people are good at construction, or cooking, or music, or teaching. Maybe you have an eye for decorating or art work. Did you know that the first time we see the Holy Spirit in the Bible gifting people is when he gifts 2 men to craft all the items for the Tabernacle? He gave them talent for metallurgy to aid in the worship of God at the Tabernacle. That's pretty cool.

So what do you want to do? What are you already good at?

What if you still don't know?

4) Try some things.

Sometimes it really is hard to know what our place is in the body. It'd be nice if we had like a little welcome packet from God when we're saved. "Hey, here's your gifts, here's what you should do."

But it doesn't work like that. And since we know that God gives us gifts and he expects us to use them then we might need to do some things to

I remember talking to Brian and April Thrush - the missionaries in PA with CRU. And one area they really wanted to grow in when they first got married was hospitality. But they were bad at it. So they just made a commitment to have people over once a week for 3 months. And you know what they discovered one of their gifts is? Hospitality. They love it, they're good at it, and now God has called them into full time ministry using that gift for his glory.

Try encouragement. Make it a goal to send 20 text messages this week to people you know. Send them a verse, ask how you can pray for them. Better yet, go get coffee with people and think about how you can encourage them and pray for them while you're together.

If you're curious about teaching, start small. Put together a couple teaching plans. Some notes on a passage and ask some people to listen to what you've got. Or take people through a book and facilitate a conversation about what you read.

5) Your gift might not fit nicely into a specific category.

Sometimes people have a variety of gifts or talents to serve the church that don't fit neatly into any one category. That's okay. This isn't like an enneagram test where we have to fit into some category. I think that's why Peter just breaks down the gifts into 2 general categories: speaking and service.

It's okay if you don't know precisely where you're at. When I managed a granite fabrication shop many years ago I had a few guys who weren't particularly awesome at any one part of the process, but they knew how to polish, or cut, or install. And we could rotate them around the shop to do all kinds of things to help out. They were jacks of all trades, masters of none. I'm pretty sure the Spirit does that in the Church as well.

6) Be open to feedback.

I say this because many times people think they have a gift when either 1) they really don't have that gift or 2) they really need to work on that gift.

With other gifts there's room for growth. Paul encourages Timothy to practice teaching and exhortation. He's saying: get better at it! There's room for improvement.

Same with helping. If you have the gift of helps, that's great! But make sure you're improving as a helper. And depending on who you are helping it might mean you do different things and help in different ways. Maybe you need to be more flexible or more attentive to detail.

Final word of encouragement: Don't sit on the sidelines trying to figure out your gift before serving the body of Christ here. You'll waste years thinking "I just don't know what my gift is." Don't do that. Just serve.

Find a person or people who you can pour into one way or another and bless the body of Christ to the glory of God.

Pray