

SPIRITUAL GIFTS



WHAT THEY ARE, WHY THEY MATTER,
AND HOW WE USE THEM

© 2021 Brandon Cooper. All rights reserved.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®.
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Any emphasis in Scripture quotations has been added.

Permissions: You are permitted to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way, do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, and do not make more than 1000 physical copies. For web posting, a link to this document on our website is preferred. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By Brandon Cooper. ©Follow After Ministries. Website: www.followafter.net. E-mail: brandon@followafter.net.

Cover image:
Todd Quackenbush, unsplash.com



SPIRITUAL GIFTS

LESSON 1	Nature of the Gifts – What They Are (1 Corinthians 12:1-31)	1
LESSON 2	Purpose of the Gifts – Why They Matter (Ephesians 4:7-16)	9
LESSON 3	Practice of the Gifts – How We Use Them (1 Peter 4:7-11)	17

SUGGESTED READING LIST: SPIRITUAL GIFTS

- ☐ *Showing the Spirit*, D.A. Carson
 - ☐ *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, J.I. Packer
 - ☐ *Baptism and Fullness*, John Stott
-



SPIRITUAL GIFTS

LESSON ONE THE WORD

HEARING THE WORD

In this study, we will explore spiritual gifts: what they are, why they matter, and how we use them in the church. As we will see in these three lessons, it is imperative that we understand *that* God made us to serve his Church, and *how* God made us (uniquely, as individuals) to serve our church.

Each lesson, you will spend time in self-examination in light of our passage. Read the text carefully, then prayerfully answer the meditation questions below. We will ask the first four questions (taken from 2 Timothy 3:17) each lesson, followed by a final synthesis question before the written reflection. (For more on this practice of meditation, as well as how we turn our meditation into prayer, you can work through the Gospel Foundations study.)

This lesson, as we study the nature of the spiritual gifts, we will examine a portion of the longest treatment of spiritual gifts in the Bible, 1 Corinthians 12-14. Read and meditate on 1 Corinthians 12:1-31 to prepare.

Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ² You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. ³ Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

¹² Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

¹⁵ Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” ²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should

have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. ²⁸ 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. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ Now eagerly desire the greater gifts. And yet I will show you the most excellent way.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-31

Teaching: What does God want me to *understand*? (What does this passage mean? to its original audience? for us today? What does this passage tell me, explicitly or implicitly, about the character of God?)

.....

.....

.....

.....

Rebuking: What does God want me to *repent of*? (As I examine myself in light of this passage, what sinful behaviors, thoughts, feelings, or idols do I need to confess and repent of?)

.....

.....

.....

.....

Correcting: What does God want me to *do*? (Is there anything this passage tells me I should think, feel, or believe? Is there a command to be obeyed?)

.....

.....

.....

.....

Training: How does the *gospel* motivate my new obedience to Christ? (How does this passage point to Jesus and the gospel? Is there a promise to believe? How will that promise encourage and sustain me in my new obedience?)

.....

.....

.....

.....

Summarize Paul’s teaching about spiritual gifts from this passage in 5-8 bullet points. Use your own words.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

What exactly are the “gifts of the Spirit”? Paul is concerned that the Corinthians are developing an uninformed approach to them (verse 1). We can certainly infer from this that we shouldn’t be uninformed either.

It is clear from Paul’s teaching in all of 1 Corinthians 12-14 that the church in Corinth had developed a bad theology of the Spirit. It seems they had determined that certain spiritual gifts were a sure sign of the most spiritual people. Paul takes pains to show this is not the case. In fact, the surest sign of the Spirit’s work is the confession that Jesus is Lord (presumably lived out in a lifestyle of obedience to our Lord), not some specific spiritual manifestation.

In addition, although there are different gifts—and even though we might be tempted to rank them in terms of how extraordinary they appear—the same *grace* stands behind them all. (Paul actually prefers the term “grace gifts”—usually translated simply as “gifts”—to “spiritual gifts,” probably for this reason.) Indeed, the same *God* stands behind them all: God the Spirit, who distributes them; God the Son, who (as Lord) receives their service; and God the Father, who works in all of them. Each member of the Trinity is on display when we use our gifts to serve God and his church!

And, lest we miss that last point, Paul tells us explicitly in verse 7 that our gifts are *for the church*—the “common good.” We are not given gifts to puff ourselves up, but to build others up. We’ll talk quite a bit more about this in the next lesson.

This is why there are so many different gifts, or “manifestation[s] of the Spirit,” as Paul says in verse 7. We all have many different needs spiritually, and so God provides various gifts to meet those varied needs. As we consider the different gifts listed in verses 8-10, it is vital we understand this is not an exhaustive list. In fact, Paul adds a few other gifts in verse 28, and others in Ephesians 4 and Romans 12. This is one reason why taking a multiple-choice test to discover which of these gifts you have is likely unhelpful. What if you have a gift other than what is listed here or elsewhere? We have no indication that the list of gifts—even in *all* the relevant passages—is meant to be comprehensive.

Paul’s point, rather, is to show how many different gifts are necessary for the common good. He introduces the metaphor of the body in verse 12 to “flesh” this out. As we all know, there are many different systems, organs, members in our bodies, and each one is necessary for our body to function (or at least function optimally). Because each part is necessary, no part receives special honor. After all, which is more important, your pancreas or your amygdala? The

question doesn't even make sense. We need both. In the same way, which is more important, the gift of teaching or the gift of mercy? Clearly, we need both. This understanding should promote unity, rather than division, within the body.

In the final paragraph, Paul points out, through a series of rhetorical questions phrased to require a negative response, that no one gift is had by all. Summarizing what he's said, then, we can discern two truths every Christian must understand: (1) Every Christian is gifted by God to serve his people, and (2) We are given different gifts in order to build each other up in different ways.

Notice, however, that Paul commands us to "eagerly desire the greater gifts" in verse 31. This seems to conflict with two ideas we've already learned: first, the Spirit distributes the gifts, so we can't choose which ones we get; and second, no gift is greater than any other gift. What is Paul trying to say then?

To get an answer, we would need to look ahead a bit to 14:1, where Paul repeats the phrase "eagerly desire." In that verse, he highlights prophecy as especially desirable, in contrast to tongues. Carefully studying that chapter, we can conclude that Paul wants the Corinthian church to desire the gifts that will *most benefit* the people they serve (i.e., the other Christians with whom they gather as a church). He seems to state this expressly in 14:12: "Since you are eager for the gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church."

God ultimately determines who gets what gift, but we can still ask for what we think would be best. This is how all prayer works, after all. And it appears we can and should strive to *excel* in gifts that would build up our church.

Practically, that means we need to pay attention to our *context*. Given the needs of our community, church, ministries, what gifts are needed? Are there holes we need plugged? Has a part of the body atrophied from under-use? Pray that God would either gift you in that way, or raise up someone else with those gifts.

One final point before we close: notice that Paul's famous "love chapter" (1 Corinthians 13) comes right between two chapters dealing extensively with the spiritual gifts. This is not accidental, as though he lost his train of thought! The "most excellent way" (12:31) is the way of *love*. It does not matter what our gifts, nor how impressively we wield them, if we do not act in love. Without love, we have nothing, are nothing, gain nothing. Love—our heartfelt commitment to the good of those we love—is the atmosphere in which we use whatever gifts we have been given.

THE GIFTS IN 1 CORINTHIANS 12

GIFT	DESCRIPTION
MESSAGE OF WISDOM	Revelatory words for specific circumstances (same as prophecy?)
FAITH	Special faith to believe a promise not recorded in Scripture
HEALING(S)	Plural; suggests different types of healing ministries?
MIRACULOUS POWERS	Plural; perhaps different workings like nature miracles and exorcisms
PROPHECY	Revelatory utterance <i>not</i> equal in authority to God's Word
DISTINGUISHING SPIRITS	Ability to test revelation to see if it is from God or not
TONGUES	Revelatory content in non-human (coded) language
INTERPRETATION	Interprets revelatory content of coded language
APOSTLESHIP	Only gift that definitively ceases in NT time; canonical authority
TEACHING	Pastor-elders, likely; generally, communicating Scripture effectively
HELPING	All kinds of assistance
GUIDANCE	Leadership (root word is steering, as a ship)

PASSAGES FOR FURTHER STUDY

- ☐ Romans 12:3-8
- ☐ 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22
- ☐ 1 Corinthians 14:1-12
- ☐ 1 Corinthians 14:13-25

DOING THE WORD

As you apply God's truth about spiritual gifts to your own life, consider especially the *attitude* that undergirds all ministry. This is where the Corinthians struggled badly, and we need to be aware of and sensitive to the danger as well.

What one aspect of Paul's teaching on spiritual gifts challenged you the most? Why do you think that is?

.....

.....

.....

Do you struggle with thinking some gifts (or ministries) are more important than others? How has that affected your view of yourself and other Christians? Do you need to repent of pride or false humility?

.....

.....

Reflect on your context. What needs do you see in your community? Are you gifted to meet those needs? If so, how? If not, will you commit to praying that God would either gift you to meet the need, or raise up someone else with the necessary gifting?

.....

.....

.....

As you use your gifts to serve the church, do you have a spirit of *love*—or of self-promotion, begrudging moralism, bitterness, or the like? How do you know?

.....

.....

.....

LESSON TWO

PURPOSE OF THE GIFTS: WHY THEY MATTER

HEARING THE WORD

In the last lesson, we considered the *nature* of spiritual gifts (what they are). In this lesson we will examine the *purpose* of the gifts (why they matter). As you prepare to read Ephesians 4:7-16, ask yourself, “How important is our unity in the faith? How important is it that we have living and accurate knowledge of the Son of God? Does it matter if we become mature as individuals and a congregation?”

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸ This is why it says:

*“When he ascended on high,
he took many captives
and gave gifts to his people.”*

⁹ (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? ¹⁰ He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) ¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

EPHESIANS 4:7-16

Teaching: What does God want me to *understand*? (What does this passage mean? to its original audience? for us today? What does this passage tell me, explicitly or implicitly, about the character of God?)

.....

.....

.....

.....

Rebuking: What does God want me to *repent of*? (As I examine myself in light of this passage, what sinful behaviors, thoughts, feelings, or idols do I need to confess and repent of?)

.....

.....

.....

.....

Correcting: What does God want me to *do*? (Is there anything this passage tells me I should think, feel, or believe? Is there a command to be obeyed?)

.....

.....

.....

.....

Training: How does the *gospel* motivate my new obedience to Christ? (How does this passage point to Jesus and the gospel? Is there a promise to believe? How will that promise encourage and sustain me in my new obedience?)

.....

.....

.....

.....

According to this passage, why did God give his people spiritual gifts?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Think back to the questions you asked yourself before you read and meditated on the passage. How important is unity in the faith? knowledge of the Son of God? maturity as individuals and a congregation? I'm hoping we all agreed this is pretty important. But that just raises the next question. If this is so important, *how do we get there?* How do we achieve unity, increasing knowledge, greater maturity? Our passage offers three truths that will help us answer this question.

GIFTED FOR A PURPOSE

First, we have to recognize that we have each been gifted for this end. If you were to look at the few verses just before our passage, you would see a poetic exaltation of our unity as the body of Christ: "There is *one* body and *one* Spirit, just as you were called to *one* hope when you were called; *one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism; *one* God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (4:4-6). You can't miss Paul's repetition of the word "one." We share a blessed, wonderful unity.

But notice what happens next: "But to each *one* of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it" (verse 7). Not only do we have blessed unity, but also wonderful, necessary diversity. We have each been given special grace to fulfill a special purpose in our unique context. God determines what gifts we receive, as we learned in the last lesson, but *some* gift is unquestionably given to each and every one of us so that we can fulfill our purpose.

Jesus' purpose is to "fill the whole universe" (verse 10)—to see his reign and rule extend to every sphere. Interestingly, all the way back in 1:23, Paul refers to the church as "his body, the *fullness* of him who *fills* everything in every way." The church is the fullness of Jesus. In other words, he fills *us* to be his presence here. We are gifted to be Christ in the world. He has given us everything we need to be and do what he has called us to be and do. That "everything" includes not only the gifts, but the equipping we need to use them well. That's where Paul takes us next.

EQUIPPED FOR A PURPOSE

Second, we need to make sure that we're being equipped to fulfill our purpose. Jesus not only gives us a *purpose*, but the *people* we need to make sure we can do it. Those people are the leaders in the church: apostles and prophets on the one hand, and evangelists, pastors, and teachers on the other. In 2:20 we learn that apostles and prophets play a *foundational* role in the formation of God's church (most especially by authoring Scripture). Evangelists, pastors, and teachers, contrarily, play an *ongoing* role. The difference is that between an obstetrician and a pediatrician.

Why does God give these leaders as gifts to the church? They are "to equip God's people for works of service" (verse 12). If we're honest, we can probably admit that this isn't the pattern in most churches today. Many of us see "works of service" (which we could translate as "works of ministry") as the domain of "professional Christians"—pastors. We hire someone else to do the ministry, while we see ourselves as benefitting from (or even consuming!) that ministry. Paul flips this idea on its head. Church leaders—whether paid or not—exist to ensure every Christian is living life on mission.

What results from this paradigm shift? We reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, and we become mature (verse 13). This makes perfect sense. Consider:

- Diversity in action for a common purpose creates a deep unity, as opposed to a surface unanimity.
- This causes us to grow together in our understanding of who Jesus is, because we are no longer limited by a single perspective (that of the professional "minister").
- And clearly we will have a better shot at maturity if we are ministering to each other collectively, using the diversity of gifts we've been given, rather than waiting for one person (the "minister") to get around to us.

Of course, this has enormous implications for our Christian journey. Every one of us should seek out the equipping we need so that we can do the work God has called us to do. A church that is functioning well is one in which small, intensely relational groups are doing life together, and individuals are getting equipped to serve the church in the way God made them uniquely (not simply volunteering where needed). That's how we attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ!

LIVING FOR A PURPOSE

Finally, we need to live for our purpose. Paul hints at what will happen if we don't do this. We'll be tossed about by the waves of circumstances, blown around by false teaching, and deceived by crafty religious conmen. And worst of all, we'll remain perpetually immature because we rely on a single person (the "minister") to teach the Word.

Hebrews 5:14 points us toward the ideal: "But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." We need to move past the "milk" stage and get to the "meat" stage of our Christian life. How do we do that? We train ourselves by *using God's Word constantly* as we minister to one another.

Then, not only will we not be bamboozled by bad theology—whether we hear it preached or read it in bestselling "Christian" books—but we will be able to speak the truth in love (verse 15). Now, when Paul talks about speaking the truth in love, he's not admonishing us to give "gentle rebukes" as needed (although that's good and proper). The truth we speak in love is the foundational truth of the gospel. As we minister the gospel to one another, becoming gospel-fluent, we grow and mature as Christ's body. That is why we must place such a pronounced emphasis on gospel fluency in our ministries. *This is the truth we need to be speaking to each other.*

In verse 16, we read the strongest statement of why identifying and practicing our spiritual gifts in the body of Christ matters so much. The whole body “grows and builds itself up in love, *as each part does its work.*” The implication is clear: if every part is *not* doing its work, we will be trapped in immaturity, our collective growth stunted. We have to mobilize every member of the church to use their gifts for the common good so that we can grow. When we have vital union, constant interaction, and each part contributing what it is meant to contribute, we see the growth God desires for us.

That sounds pretty important, doesn't it?

(At this point, you might be thinking, “Yes, that sounds really important—so *how do I do it?*” I've got good news. That's exactly where we're headed in the next lesson.)

PASSAGES FOR FURTHER STUDY

- ☐ Hebrews 5:11-14
- ☐ 1 Corinthians 3:5-15
- ☐ 1 Corinthians 14:26-33
- ☐ Hebrews 12:14-17

DOING THE WORD

Given how important it is that we all do the work God has given us, in the ways he has gifted us, take some time to reflect on your contribution to the church's growth.

How have you been equipped for works of service? How would you like to be equipped to be even more effective?

.....

.....

.....

.....

The body of Christ grows “as each part does its work.” Are you doing your work? How are you serving the church so that we become mature, growing in unity and knowledge?

.....

.....

.....

.....

In what ways have you fallen into the attitude that “ministry” belongs to the sphere of professionals (like pastors)? Is there evidence of that attitude in your approach to church today?

.....

.....

.....

.....



SPIRITUAL GIFTS

LESSON THREE

PRACTICE OF THE GIFTS: HOW WE USE THEM

HEARING THE WORD

In the last two lessons we've looked at the nature and purpose of spiritual gifts—what they are and why they matter. We wrap up our study by considering the *practice* of spiritual gifts—how we use them. This lesson will provide practical help in how to identify spiritual gifts and begin or continue using them in the service of the church.

The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.⁹ Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.¹¹ 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.

1 PETER 4:7-11

Teaching: What does God want me to *understand*? (What does this passage mean? to its original audience? for us today? What does this passage tell me, explicitly or implicitly, about the character of God?)

.....

.....

.....

.....

Rebuking: What does God want me to *repent of*? (As I examine myself in light of this passage, what sinful behaviors, thoughts, feelings, or idols do I need to confess and repent of?)

.....

.....

.....

.....

Correcting: What does God want me to *do*? (Is there anything this passage tells me I should think, feel, or believe? Is there a command to be obeyed?)

.....

.....

.....

.....

Training: How does the *gospel* motivate my new obedience to Christ? (How does this passage point to Jesus and the gospel? Is there a promise to believe? How will that promise encourage and sustain me in my new obedience?)

.....

.....

.....

.....

What practical advice does Peter give about how we should use our gifts in the church?

.....

.....

.....

.....

How should we use our gifts to build up God's church? Peter seems to suggest four ways.

First, we should use our gifts *soberly* (verse 7). The end is near, when everyone will have to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. In light of eternal realities, we cannot afford to be lazy or careless with our lives. In fact, we can give our lives away—as Paul says in Philippians 2:17, we can be “poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith”—because we know we already possess eternal life. This life doesn't need to be about meeting my needs (which Christ has already met anyway), but about serving the needs of others. One piece of that is faithful prayer.

Second, we should use our gifts *lovingly* (verses 8-9). Remember how Paul interrupts his lengthy theology of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 with that famous encomium on love? It seems Peter has the same idea. There's no point in identifying gifts or discerning needs if we don't truly love the people we'll be serving. Instead, we need to love one another sincerely, which includes patiently bearing with those who sin against us—just as God has patiently borne with us in our sin against him! This loving attitude leads to loving action too, including offering hospitality to others willingly, not begrudgingly. These verses remind us that we use our gifts in true, organic *community*—not in sterile, organizational programs. The difference is the atmosphere, and Peter (and Paul) clearly teach that the atmosphere should be *love*.

Third, we should use our gifts *faithfully* (verse 10). The key word in this verse is *steward*. Our gifts are not our own. The grace belongs to our Master, and he has entrusted it to us not for our sake, but for the sake of others—the common good. Just as the master expected a return on his investment in the parable of the talents (see Matthew 25:14-30), so God expects us to use the gifts he has given to fulfill his good purposes. We should not expect to hear that treasured accolade, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” if we haven't faithfully carried out the tasks he's given us to do!

Fourth, we should use our gifts *worshipfully* (verse 11). Because the grace is God's, the glory is his too. We need to be careful to use our gifts in such a way that *God* receives the praise when we serve. It would be very easy, for example, for a preacher to draw attention to himself by his clever turn of phrase or thundering style. However, a godly preacher, speaking the very words of God, would hope his congregation would leave the worship gathering saying not “what a great sermon,” but rather “what a great *Savior*.” One way we ensure God receives the glory is through our dependence on him; we serve “in the strength God provides,” and as a result, God is praised in all things through Jesus Christ.

With these four ways to use our gifts still ringing in our ears, let's take a moment to get intensely practical. Exactly how do I identify my gifts and put them into practice? Here are six practical tips as we close this unit.

SIX PRACTICAL TIPS FOR IDENTIFYING AND USING YOUR GIFTS

1. **Reframe the question.** As we discussed back in lesson one, the New Testament lists of spiritual gifts (in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, 28; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11; and 1 Peter 4:10) are not exhaustive, but rather representative. That means any “spiritual gifts inventory” will be limited—and as a result, *limiting*. So rather than ask, “What are my gifts?” try asking, “How can I serve the church?” Looking at the spiritual gift lists might help us begin to answer that question, but so will looking at the *context* in which we’ll serve—the specific needs we see around us.
2. **Identify the needs.** As you look at your church context, what do you see? Are there ministries (not *programs* that the church runs necessarily, but *ways* people need to be ministered to) that are either missing or struggling? Has God given you the ability and passion to step into that ministry? One way to identify needs is to consider the groups of people in your church—such as the elderly, young parents, newlyweds, or single mothers—who might require special attention or help.
3. **Pray.** As you begin to see the needs in the congregation, pray for the church. Pray for God to raise up laborers for the harvest. Pray that our leaders will have wisdom to equip the saints and guide the ministries. And pray to ask God if he might be calling *you* to meet those needs and serve in that area. If he is, pray for the gifts you will need to serve well—remember, we are to “eagerly desire” the gifts that will best serve our congregation!
4. **Consider your personality and interests.** We are whole people, not a collection of component parts. So, as you consider how to serve in church, you can and should ask questions like, “What do I enjoy doing? What would energize me as I served?” While God does call us to count the cost of following him, he doesn’t call us to be miserable in a life of drudgery! True, he might call us out of our comfort zones, and every role requires tasks that we’ll find less than perfectly enjoyable, but there’s nothing wrong with trying to discover where your gifts and passions align. When you look at the needs of the church, what gets you fired up? Start there.
5. **Do this in community.** Throughout Proverbs we read of the wisdom of seeking godly counsel. For example, “The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice” (12:15). Like the rest of the Christian life, identifying your gifts and calling should be done in community, not Lone Ranger-style. Our capacity for self-deception is limitless (consider Jeremiah 17:9). That means we should seek the input of others in this process. We might think we have a certain gift, such as teaching or leading worship, only to discover others would be. . . reluctant. . . to affirm that in us!
6. **Do something.** Even before you’re confident you’ve identified your gifts, just start serving. In fact, in the process of serving, you will discover what you enjoy doing, and others will affirm what you’re good at. God often leads us *as* we move, not *before* we move—in the same way that a rudder only steers a ship that’s actually sailing!

PASSAGES FOR FURTHER STUDY

- ☐ 1 Corinthians 13:1-13
- ☐ 2 Timothy 1:6-14
- ☐ Acts 9:36-42
- ☐ 1 Samuel 16:14-23

DOING THE WORD

In this lesson we focused on using our gifts—the practical application of the theology we’ve learned in the past two lessons. Therefore, let’s spend some time examining our practice when it comes to spiritual gifts.

Of the four ways Peter suggests we use our gifts, which do you find most difficult? Why do you think that is?

.....

.....

.....

.....

What needs do you see in the church? How will you pray for those needs going forward? How might God be calling *you* to meet those needs?

.....

.....

.....

.....

What do those who know you best think your gifts might be? How have they affirmed you in the gifts you think you have? (Or how have they challenged you, and how have you benefitted from that challenge?)

.....

.....

.....

.....

In what direction do your personality and interests lead you when it comes to serving in the church? Be specific.

.....

.....

.....

.....

What do you want to do this week to start using your gifts differently in service of the church?

.....

.....

.....

.....