

Spiritual Gifts

What They Are
and How to Use Them

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About the Author



DAN DARLING is the director of The Land Center for Cultural Engagement at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the author of several books, including *The Characters of Christmas*, *The Characters of Easter*, *The Dignity Revolution*, and *A Way With Words*. His columns appear in *World* and he is a contributor to *USA Today*.

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He is a pastor who has served churches in Illinois and Tennessee. He lives with his wife, Angela, and their four children in the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

How to Use This Study

This Bible study book includes seven weeks of content for group or individual study.

Personal Study

Except for the first week of study, each week of content begins with personal study. Each week provides five opportunities for personal study. Each includes Scripture, a brief reading, and reflective questions.

These daily activities can be completed in as few as ten minutes per day and are designed to help you grow in your understanding of what the Scriptures teach about spiritual gifts.

The personal studies will form the basis of the group study each week.

Group Sessions

The end of each week includes a personal study guide that provides questions and directions for group members participating in this study. If you are a group leader, you should feel free to lead your group using these two pages or if you would prefer, there is a fuller guide to leading each group section located in the page of this book starting on page 97.

Leader Guide

A leader guide is included in the back of this resource to help those leading others through this study. Each group session uses the following format to facilitate simple yet meaningful interaction among group members and with God's Word.

START. This section includes questions to get the conversation started and to introduce the main topic of the session teaching.

DISCUSS. This section includes questions and statements that guide the group to explore relevant biblical truth and apply what they've studied over the previous week as they've interacted with the personal studies.

CLOSE. This section wraps up the group study with a takeaway question and prayer prompt.

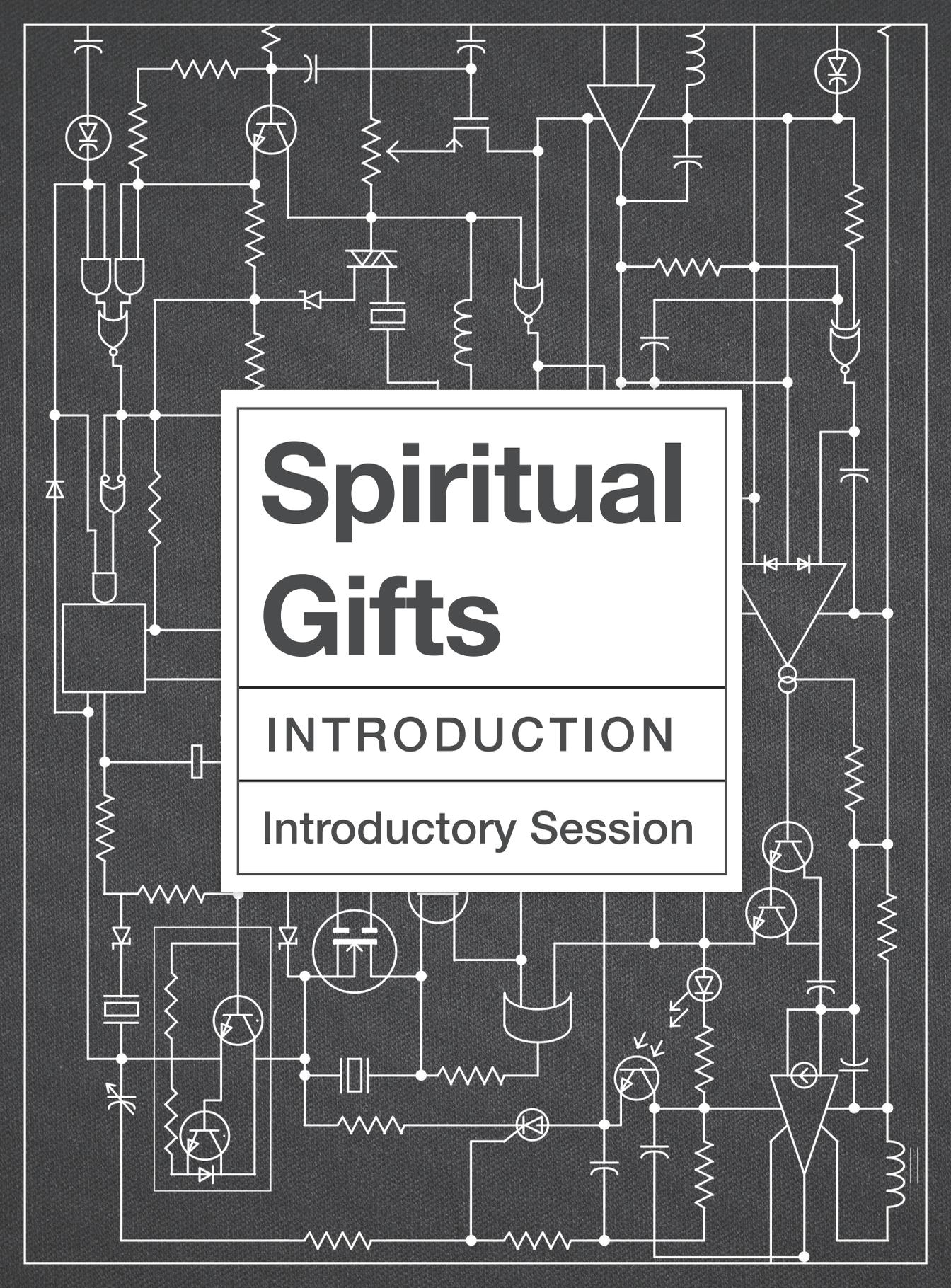
A Word about Spiritual Gift Inventories

Many people studying spiritual gifts use a spiritual gifts inventory. This study is compatible with any number of spiritual gifts inventories. While these are helpful, they should not be viewed as a test to determine your spiritual gifts. Rather, they are tools to help you get a better idea about what your spiritual gift or gifts might be. No inventory can tell you what your spiritual gift is.

A better way to identify your gifts is through studying the Scripture, honestly evaluating yourself, serving in the church, and seeking counsel from other mature Christians. An inventory is only an indicator of your giftedness.

If you choose to use a spiritual gifts inventory, use it as a supplement to this study either to give you a starting point (if taken before the study) or an affirmation of what you've learned (if taken after the study). The important thing to remember is that a gifts inventory by itself is inadequate to discover your gifts.

**An instrument that includes the gifts mentioned in this study
is available for free at lifeway.com/spiritualgifts.**



Spiritual Gifts

INTRODUCTION

Introductory Session

Introductory Session

Start

Welcome to this study of spiritual gifts. This is a topic that can be confusing and complex, but it doesn't have to be!

Have you ever studied spiritual gifts? What was that experience like?

If you have a church background, what did your particular church believe about spiritual gifts?

Discuss

Why should Christians study spiritual gifts?

Studying the spiritual gifts can help us see how God has equipped the entire body of Christ for kingdom work.

Read Romans 12:6 and 2 Timothy 1:6.

“According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts” (Rom. 12:6), Paul tells us. To Timothy, his young protégé, he urged him to “rekindle the gift of God that is in you” (2 Tim. 1:6). God has given every single follower of Jesus a spiritual gift.

How might understanding spiritual gifts help us pursue the calling God has placed on our lives?

Why are we often tempted to think of ministry as reserved for those who are “full-time” Christian workers?

Have you ever tried to figure out what your spiritual gift is? If so, share about that experience.

We usually approach studies like this hoping to find our own gifts, but why might it be helpful for us to also learn about the gifts God has given others?

The purpose of this study is to both help you discover your unique calling within the body of Christ and to help you appreciate and work alongside others with different callings as Christ weaves together our gifts to build up his church.

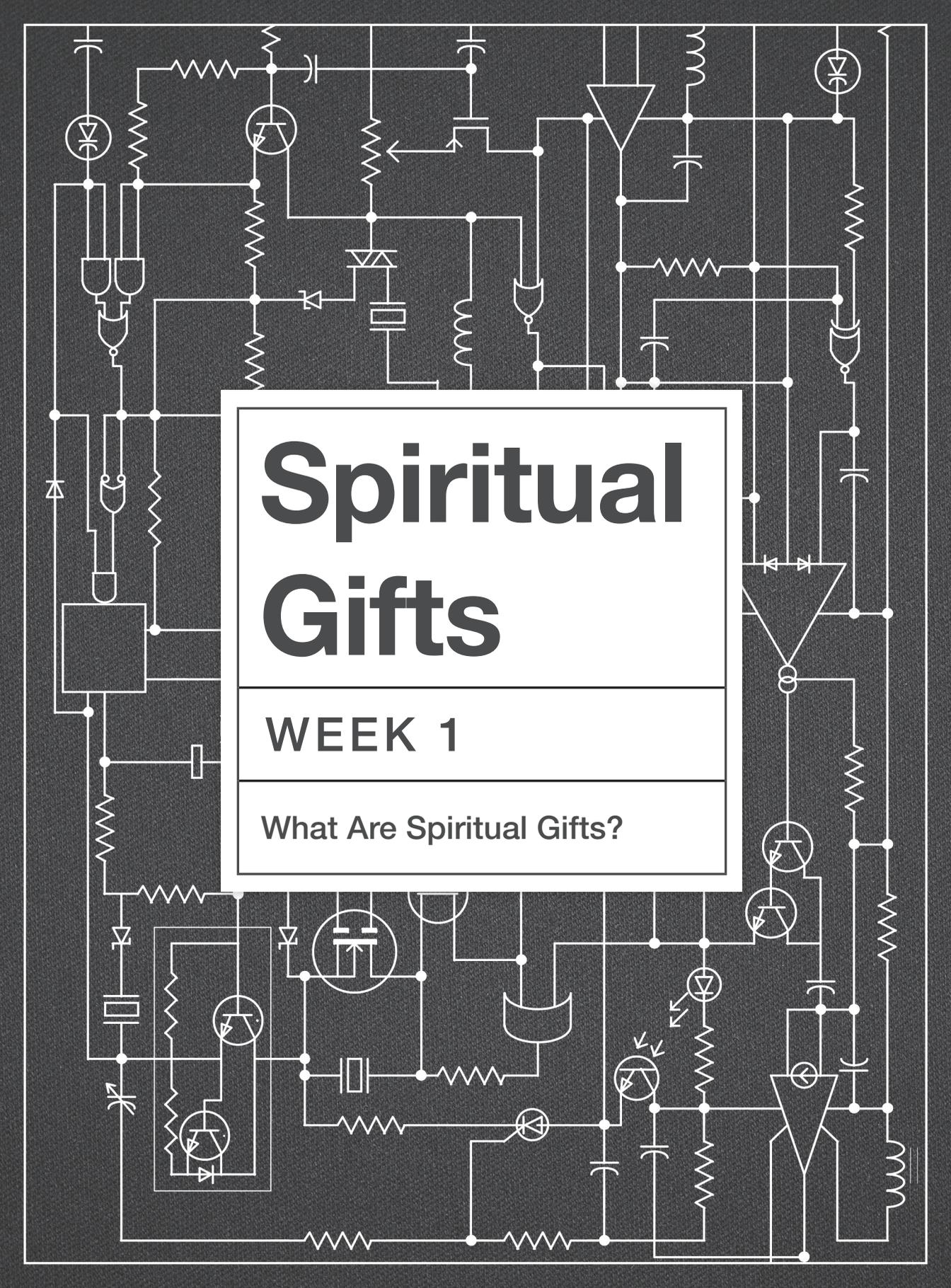
Close

What are some unanswered questions you hope to see answered in this study of spiritual gifts?

What are you excited about learning?

Many people use spiritual gifts inventories to identify their spiritual gifts. While one is not included in this study, an inventory has been made available for free at lifeway.com/spiritualgifts

Remember to complete the five days of personal study before your next group meeting.



Spiritual Gifts

WEEK 1

What Are Spiritual Gifts?

Spiritual Gifts

Day 1

The Source of the Gifts

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 4:7-8

Jesus is the only person who ever lived who ever possessed every spiritual gift.
—David Francis

Before we identify our spiritual gifts and exercise them to build up the body of Christ, we should understand where spiritual gifts come from. The Bible tells us in Ephesians 4 that after Jesus conquered sin, death, and the grave, He ascended to heaven and sent the Holy Spirit to empower His new people—the church—to spread the good news of the gospel around the world:

Now grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. For it says:

*"When he ascended on high,
he took the captives captive;
he gave gifts to people:*

To equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness.

EPHESIANS 4:7-8,12-13

The equipping of the saints for ministry fulfills a promise given by God in the Old Testament through the prophet Joel who declared that one day the Spirit of God would be poured out on His people (Joel 2:28). This prophecy is what Jesus had in mind when He promised that His disciples would not only do the works He did, but even greater works when He left them to go back to the Father (John 14:12-14). The news that He was going to leave, die, rise again, and ascend to heaven would have shocked those closest to Him. How could it be that they would be better off without His physical presence? We get the answer when the prophecy of Joel and the promise of Jesus was fulfilled at Pentecost:

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

ACTS 1:8

You will receive power refers to the empowering of every follower of Jesus from Pentecost until Jesus returns. Every single Christian has the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling inside and has been given spiritual gifts—gifts from Jesus—to enable us to “do the work of the ministry, to build up the body of Christ, to reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son.” The very second you became a Christian, the Holy Spirit entered your life and gave you supernatural gifts to fulfill your unique calling within the body of Christ.

The ultimate purpose of our spiritual gifts, then, is not about “being true to ourselves” or gaining prominence in the church or building a platform to elevate ourselves. Jesus has bestowed us with the gifts of the Holy Spirit so we can know Him better and be empowered to share the gospel around the world.

Understanding and exercising our spiritual gifts should always move us toward worship of the One who gave us our gifts. We don’t do ministry in isolation or on our own, but within the community of the church, with Christ our King as the head of the body.

What are some ways we are tempted to divorce Jesus from the gifts He has given us?

How do our spiritual gifts connect to our mission to build the church and share the gospel?

How is Jesus’s conquering of sin and death and the grave related to the spiritual power we experience through the Holy Spirit?

Spiritual Gifts

Day 2

The Spirit of the Gifts

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 12:1-4

Where the Holy Ghost implants a divine life in the soul, there is a precious deposit which none of the refinements of education can equal.

—Charles Spurgeon

Let's break down what exactly spiritual gifts are. Today, let's focus on the word spiritual. We get this terminology from the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 12 where Paul describes the gifts:

Now concerning spiritual gifts: brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be unaware.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1

The word for spiritual in the Greek (the original language of the New Testament) is *pneumatika*. It's a word that literally means "spirituals" or "spiritual manifestations" or "spiritual experience." Spiritual gifts are not merely ordinary physical talents (though those also come from God), but are special power to fulfill the mission God has given believers as they serve as part of Christ's universal body.

Through common grace God has bestowed every single human being with character traits as well as physical and mental and intellectual abilities. However, only those who have put their faith in Christ have spiritual gifts. Therefore, spiritual gifts are supernatural abilities given to believers to serve the church and build the kingdom of God through the spread of the gospel.

The source of our gifts—the Spirit of God—should both excite us and humble us. It should excite us to know that God has equipped us for the mission to which He has called us. Listen to this encouraging word from 2 Peter:

His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness

2 PETER 1:3

Consider this: God has not only called you to a supernatural mission, but He has also given you supernatural tools—spiritual gifts—to complete that mission. And this is not just for prominent leaders in the church, but every single believer. You might be reading this and saying to yourself, “I don’t have any spiritual gifts. I don’t know what my purpose is. Surely I can’t be of any use to the kingdom of God.”

This line of thinking is understandable but wrong. Every believer possesses spiritual gifts.

The fact that these are *spiritual* gifts should also make us humble. The moment we strut around church or start to take credit for ministry, we should remember that we didn’t give ourselves our spiritual gifts. Just like our salvation was a gift that required Jesus’s sacrifice, so too our gifts are not something we created, but were given to us by God.

Knowing the gifts came from Jesus and are empowered by the Spirit frees us to stop comparing ourselves to other Christians, it frees us from self-loathing and thinking we are not useful to Jesus, and it frees us to be the man or woman God has uniquely created us and gifted us to be.

How did this reading help you understand the spiritual nature of the gifts?

Natural abilities and spiritual gifts are both from God, but what distinguishes one from the other?

How should the source of our gifts humble us?

How should it encourage us?

Day 3

The Grace of Gifts

SCRIPTURES: Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:7-8

Yesterday we learned that spiritual gifts are . . . spiritual. They are supernaturally empowered abilities to fulfill God's mission through the body of Christ. Gifts are not just ordinary things humans do—also from God—but something God allows His people to do in an extraordinary way.

Today we focus on the fact that spiritual gifts are . . . gifts. That's right. To be gifted by God for ministry is to possess something we didn't earn or deserve, much like our salvation. The Bible uses three terms to indicate that the gifts are gifts of grace:

- Romans 12:6-8 uses the term *charismata*
- Ephesians 4:7 uses the term *charis*
- Ephesians 4:8 uses the term *domata*

All of these words are ways to describe the concept of grace. We typically think of grace as an attitude of forgiveness. Grace can mean overlooking flaws and God's ability to save us from our sin (Amazing Grace, that saved a wretch like me).

But grace is a much more expansive term in the Bible. It is often used to describe something given. Sometimes it is even used to describe sacrificial, charitable giving. When it comes to spiritual gifts, the Bible is telling us that they originate from God's generosity. Not only does He save sinners from eternal judgment, He also bestows His redeemed children with rich blessings. Paul wrote about Jesus's sending of the gifts to His church as though they are part of the spoils of war—the King returning triumphantly from His mission handing out the rewards of His victory over sin, death, and the grave (Eph. 4:8). This is grace.

So when we consider spiritual gifts, we should view them as our supernatural ability to fulfill the mission of God, not as something we should demand or angle for, but precious, undeserved offerings from our Savior. To be called into His mission is not a drudgery, it's a delight.

They are gifts of grace. They remind us that serving God and serving others is something we get to do, not something we have to do. Again, just as the supernatural source of our gifts should humble us, the nature of our gifts should humble us as well. No Christian can “think of himself more highly than he should” (Rom. 12:3). because how can we be proud when the source of our gifts is not ourselves and the very giving of our gifts is an act of divine love?

What do you think of when you think of the word grace?

How does “grace” as a descriptor of spiritual gifts change the way you think about them?

How does grace keep us from being prideful about our spiritual gifts?

What are some ways we are tempted to forget both the source and nature of our spiritual gifts?

Spiritual Gifts

Day 4

The Purpose of the Gifts

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 4:11-16

We have learned in this study that spiritual gifts are spiritual. They are supernatural abilities to fulfill the mission of Christ. We learned that they are gifts. Like salvation, there is nothing we have done or could do to earn the spiritual gifts given to us by Christ. And we have learned that they are given to us by our Savior. He is the head of the church, and we are His body.

Today we will examine closely the purpose of spiritual gifts. Why has God chosen to empower us with supernatural power? Paul explains this in his letter to the Ephesians:

And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness. Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ. From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love by the proper working of each individual part.

EPHESIANS 4:11-16

Note the purposes of spiritual gifts given in this passage:

- Equipping people for God's work and mission
- Sanctification (growing of our faith)
- Unity in the faith
- Spiritual maturity

This should shape the way we approach spiritual gifts, both as we seek to identify our own unique gifts but also as we help other Christians identify theirs. Our gifts were not given for our glory but for the glory of God and the good of others. We use our gifts to serve others. Regardless of what your gift is or where God has placed you, you have been given a gift from God to fulfill the mission of the church.

Paul used the image of a body—the whole body fit together with every part serving a purpose. This is God's vision for the church in this age. Notice how Paul says that the outcome of every Christian living in obedience to Christ and exercising their spiritual gift for the benefit of the body is a healthy church, ready to fend off false doctrines in an age of confusion.

Read through Ephesians 4:11-16 again and pay special attention to the action words that describe the purpose of spiritual gifts. How do these change the way you might see your spiritual gifts or the gifts of others?

In what way does your local church embody this?

Spiritual Gifts

Day 5

The Outcome of the Gifts

SCRIPTURES: Ephesians 4:15-16; Galatians 5:22

If the purpose of the gifts is to build up Christ's body, what is the outcome of the gifts? In other words, what should spiritual gifts produce?

We might think that spiritual gifts in the life of a church will help a church grow numerically. While more people attending church is awesome and something every church should work for, Paul says that the outcome of the spiritual gifts is something else: love.

Listen to Ephesians:

From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love by the proper working of each individual part.

EPHESIANS 4:16

A healthy church, with members exercising their gifts, not for self-promotion or glory, but for the spiritual growth of the body and for the mission of proclaiming Christ in the world, will be identified by love. Love for each other. Love for Christ. Love for those who are without salvation.

In other words, the gifts of the spirit should produce the fruit of the Spirit that God desires to produce in all His children.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The law is not against such things.

GALATIANS 5:22-23

Using our spiritual gifts should not produce prideful Christians who seek their own gratification and glory, but spirit-filled believers whose lives reflect our Lord in love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The right use of our gifts are reflected in a body of believers known by their commitment to speaking and living the truth in love. The presence of these spiritual fruits is a sign that God is being glorified with someone's spiritual gifts.

This is the test of a Christian community that takes Jesus seriously and is earnestly fulfilling its mission on the earth.

How do the spiritual gifts relate to the fruit of the Spirit?

Why are we tempted to separate these two?

How does this shape our quest to know our spiritual gifts?

Group Session

Start

What are spiritual gifts? This week we will study how the Bible defines them.

What was the highlight of your week of study?

What was something new you learned this week?

Discuss

Use the following Scripture passages and questions to review what you learned in your personal Bible study about spiritual gifts.

Read Ephesians 4:7-8.

**According to these verses, where do spiritual gifts come from?
Why does that matter?**

The first truth about spiritual gifts is that they come from Jesus Himself.

**If Jesus is the source of our spiritual gifts, what does that tell us
about how we should use our gifts?**

The second truth we learned this week is that spiritual gifts are different than ordinary talents and abilities that every human being possesses. Spiritual gifts are a supernatural ability to fulfill the mission of God through the body of Christ.

**What makes spiritual gifts different than other natural talents or
developed skills you may possess?**

Third, we should recognize the grace of the gifts. To be gifted by God for ministry is to possess something we didn't earn or deserve, much like our salvation.

If our gifts are gifts of grace, how should that shape our attitude about our own gifts as well as the gifts of others?

Read Ephesians 4:11-15.

According to these verses, how should our spiritual gifts be used?

What are some ways that gifts could be used contrary to this purpose?

God has given us spiritual gifts for the following purposes:

- Equipping people for God's work and mission
- Sanctification (growing of our faith)
- Unity in the faith
- Spiritual maturity

Read Ephesians 4:16.

Lastly, we saw that exercising spiritual gifts should create unity and love in the church. Gifts are used for the spiritual growth of the body and for the mission of proclaiming Christ in the world. In other words, the gifts of the Spirit should produce the fruits of the Spirit.

How does using spiritual gifts according to Scripture create unity and love? Share a time when you have seen this happen.

Close

What is your biggest takeaway from our past week of study?

Remember to complete the five days of personal study before your next group meeting.