

Spiritual Gifts / COB / 09.07.14

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Title]** If you could have any magic power, just for fun, what would it be? When I was a kid, I was intrigued by being invisible, but I really wanted to fly. I thought the birds had the good life.
- Let's think about ministering to others. If you could do anything and see God use it to grow people in faith, what would you want to do? I would love to be a musician, who could bring a crowd to its feet as I led them in worship. On the Passion CDs, there are some live recordings in which the whole crowd erupts in cheers or some people spontaneously yell out "Jesus!"
 - Thinking within the way God has equipped me, my dream is similar, that I could preach in such a way to get the same reaction; that when I was done with a sermon, y'all would shout out that you want five more minutes, like concert crowds beg for one more song, that during the sermon, you would be so stimulated intellectually and so moved emotionally, that you could barely contain your excitement! Now I know from watching your reactions every week that I am a long way from that; but maybe God will bring me to that level someday.
- † Have heard of spiritual gifts in the Bible? As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, in 1 Corinthians 12.1 NET: "With regard to spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed." We are going to spend a lot of time in 1 Corinthians 12 today, so you might want to turn there in your Bible; if you want to use the NET like I am, raise your hand and my volunteers will bring you one.
- As Paul wrote, "With regard to spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed." Yet I believe that many Christians today have some confusion about spiritual gifts; and both conservative Christians and our more charismatic friends have some misconceptions.
 - So we will explore eight questions about spiritual gifts today. I have given you a handout with those eight questions and room for making notes. If you did not receive it, raise your hand.

First Question: What is a spiritual gift?

- † **[Slide 2: what]** Our First Question is, "What is a spiritual gift?" The key to understanding spiritual gifts is remembering that they are supernatural, not natural, but supernatural. As we will see, they are given to believers by Christ through the Holy Spirit, thus they are of God, not of nature.
- These so called gifts are distinctive in Scripture, definitely not the same as natural abilities. You are born with natural abilities and you can refine them over time, but a spiritual gift you get only after you come to faith in Christ.
 - So what are they? Spiritual gifts are ways that [1] God consistently works [2] supernaturally in and through you, [3] to bless others and build their faith. [repeat]
- † Let's try an example. If I may say so, I was one of the best economics teachers I ever met. I got rave reviews from my supervisors and my students, which is a neat trick. So, let's assume I was a terrific economics teacher, ok? Does that necessarily mean I have the spiritual gift of teaching? No, not necessarily. I am not nearly as skilled at teaching the Bible as I was at economics, but suppose I was, suppose I was the best Bible teacher you ever met, I still might not have the spiritual gift of teaching.
- The question is not how well I am teaching, it is what God is doing with my teaching. If my teaching regularly inspires people to take a step of faith, if God consistently uses it to draw people closer to Christ, *then* I have a spiritual gift of teaching. If not, I just have natural ability.

- † I knew a man who had a spiritual gift of evangelism. Every week he was leading people to faith in Christ, not just in church, but in coffee shops, at the beach, wherever.
 - He taught me how to do evangelism, and now I have as much skill as he does, but I don't get nearly the results; sometimes I get to lead someone to Christ, but not as often as he does. This is how God wants to use him in a supernatural way. My natural abilities and training experiences might match up, but God does not choose to work through me the same way.
 - † So a spiritual gift is a way that God miraculously, consistently, works through you for his purposes.
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Second Question: What is the purpose of a spiritual gift?

- † **[Slide 3: purpose]** That leads to our Second Question, "What is the purpose of a spiritual gift?"
 - Turn to 1 Corinthians 12.7. Speaking about spiritual gifts, Paul said [NET]: "To each person the manifestation of the Spirit [that is, a spiritual gift] is given for the benefit of all."
 - 1 Peter 4.10-11 NET [in part]: "Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of the varied grace of God... so that in everything God will be glorified through Jesus Christ."
 - † We see that spiritual gifts are for the benefit of others, so that God will be glorified through Christ.
 - This implies we should not seek to benefit from using our gifts. If I have the gift of healing, do I set up shop in a banquet room at a hotel and charge a fee for healing people? No. Do I say I will heal all of you today if you have enough faith and generosity? No. If LeeAnn has a gift cherished by others, should she hope that will make her more important in the church community? No. If we have a gift, we use it to bring glory to God through Christ by blessing others.
 - It was not Billy Graham's goal to be known as a great evangelist, he just was faithful to use his gift. Toby Mac sings, "It's never been my dream / To see my face in magazines / It's always been about the music / Hoping God would use it / To set some people free" ["Thankful to You"]. We use our spiritual gifts to bless others and thus bring glory to God through Christ.
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Third Question: What are the gifts?

- † **[Slide 4: 1 C 12.8-10]** Third Question: "What are the gifts?" In what ways does God choose to act through us supernaturally for his own glory? The Bible contains several lists of gifts, so let's read.
 - Take a look at 1 Corinthians 12.8-10 in your Bible [NET]: "For one person is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, and another the message of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another performance of miracles, to another prophecy, and to another discernment of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues."
 - **[Slide 5: 1 C 12.27-28]** Now 1 Corinthians 12.27-28 [NET]: "Now you are Christ's body, and each of you is a member of it. And God has placed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, gifts of healing, helps, gifts of leadership, different kinds of tongues."
 - Turn to 1 Corinthians 14.26 NET: "When you come together, each one has a song, has a lesson, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all these things be done for the strengthening of the church."
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- **[Slide 6: Romans]** Romans 12.4-8 NET: “For just as in one body we have many members, and not all the members serve the same function, so we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually we are members who belong to one another. And we have different gifts according to the grace given to us. If the gift is prophecy, that individual must use it in proportion to his faith. If it is service, he must serve; if it is teaching, he must teach; if it is exhortation, he must exhort; if it is contributing [giving], he must do so with sincerity; if it is leadership, he must do so with diligence; if it is showing mercy, he must do so with cheerfulness.”
 - **[Slide 7: Ephesians]** Ephesians 4.11 NET: “It was he [Christ] who gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors [shepherds] and teachers...”
 - 1 Peter 4.10-11 NET: “Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of the varied grace of God. Whoever speaks, let it be with God's words. Whoever serves, do so with the strength that God supplies, so that in everything God will be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.”
- † **[Slide 8: types]** Peter breaks the gifts into two useful categories, and I think we could say that from these passages, we get the following list:
- Speaking/revelation: apostle, wisdom, knowledge, prophecy, discernment of spirits, teaching, speaking, evangelism, exhortation/encouragement, tongues, interpretation of tongues
 - Serving: faith, helps, leadership, service, giving, mercy, shepherd/pastor, music, healing, miracles
- † In the Bible, most lists are not meant to be exhaustive. The Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5 represent the character of God imparted to us by the Spirit, but there are many other aspects to God’s character. The many lists of sins are only representative, not exhaustive. I believe the same is true here. We have a lot of gifts listed, but I think God can work through us in many more ways.
- For example, Moses repeatedly prayed for others and saw results. So might there be a gift of intercession or prayer?
 - **[Slide 9: types]** Another example: I told you about my friend Al a few weeks ago. He was so shy he could not speak to us in small group, but he kept coming back, and I think one reason was we met in the home of two ladies who had a gift for hospitality. I don’t mean they were good about arranging chairs or keeping the place neat, I mean that every person LeeAnn and I brought there over the years said later that they felt completely welcome, comfortable, and safe.
 - Another example. Exodus 31.2-5 NET: [God speaking about making the tabernacle] “See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God in skill, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship, to make artistic designs for work with gold, with silver, and with bronze, and with cutting and setting stone, and with cutting wood, to work in all kinds of craftsmanship.”
 - I think God gave Bezalel a spiritual gift to artistically create the Tabernacle in such a way that it would draw people into faith. In the same way, I think of the mediaeval builders who put up the cathedrals in Europe: they did things architecturally that nobody thought was possible, and it created such awe inspiring beauty that people came thousands of miles to worship God.
 - I think God can use us any way he wants to use us to build people’s faith.

† **[Slide 10: tongues]** I have not provided you with descriptions of each gift, because I don't want you to be limited by one person's interpretation. Let God work through you how he wants, and that will lead to your understanding. But let's talk about tongues for a moment.

- In the New Testament, there are a few examples of groups in which everyone spoke in tongues, but these were not the gift of tongues. Rather, what we see if we understand the historical context, is that these were miraculous manifestations of the Spirit for proving that God was extending his New Covenant grace to all people groups, including the believing Jews [Acts 2.4], Samaritans [Acts 8.14-16, implied] and Gentiles, which means everyone else [Acts 10.46]. Also, these "tongues" definitely were known languages [Acts 2.6].
- If you look in your Bible at 1 Corinthians 12.30, you can see that the spiritual gift of tongues was not for all believers. NET: "Not all have gifts of healing, do they? Not all speak in tongues, do they? Not all interpret, do they?" In the Greek text, the answer clearly is "no."
- Now 1 Corinthians 14.27-28: Here we see that public use of the gift of tongues, if genuine and guided by the Holy Spirit, was accompanied by a Spirit inspired interpretation of the tongues by someone else. NET: "If someone speaks in a tongue, it should be two, or at the most three, one after the other, and someone must interpret. But if there is no interpreter, he [with the gift of tongues] should be silent in the church. Let him speak to himself and to God [in his mind]."
- Understanding these points will prevent the misconceptions that affect many churches.

† **[Slide 11: prophecy]** Let's also talk a moment about prophecy.

- Most Old Testament prophecy was not predictive, rather it was a calling back to the covenant God had made with his people, a calling back to living by God's scriptural revelation. If God were to use believers today through gifts like prophecy, wisdom, or knowledge, the purpose would be to call us back to our covenant with him, to call us back to living by his scriptural revelation and to believe in the promises made through his prophets and apostles in scripture.
- Because the canon of scripture is closed [the Bible is complete], nobody will hear from God today something that is for everyone. And if we do think we have a prediction from God, we better be right! In the Old Testament, God said to kill prophets who spoke falsely in his name.

Fourth Question: Have some gifts disappeared?

† **[Slide 12: disappeared?]** Our Fourth Question is, "Have some gifts disappeared?" Many conservative Christians, including the administrators at my seminary, believe God has stopped manifesting certain gifts, which they say were needed only while the New Testament was being written and the church established.

- Usually, these Christians specify that God no longer gives gifts of revelation, wisdom, knowledge, prophecy, discernment of spirits, tongues, interpretation of tongues, apostle, healing, and miracles. That's a big portion of the list we get from scripture, which causes me to wonder; I think these gifts would be useful today just as they were 2000 years ago.

† This doctrine developed out of two concerns. One is that churches which believe these gifts are still active – mostly charismatic and Pentecostal churches – sometimes act in ways that conservative Christians think are not glorifying to God.

- But is this a valid reason to refute the existence of a gift? If God really gives a person the gift of healing, then whatever God does through that gift will glorify God; and if the person does not

have the gift, but acts like he/she does and acts in ways not glorifying to God, that has nothing to do with a genuine gift. I think we can condemn dishonesty and irreverence without questioning the validity of God working in strange and miraculous ways today.

- † The second issue conservative Christians assert is that if God is still giving revelation today, like a prophecy, that weakens our view of the sufficiency of Scripture or the canonicity of Scripture.
 - They argue that if scripture is sufficient, then there is no need for God to reveal more through spiritual gifts. But is this true? Scripture is sufficient for the purposes God gave it: so we can know God, his way of salvation, and his way of life. The fact that God has told us these things doesn't mean God shouldn't now help us to understand something that is happening, to know what to do to please him when we have a decision to make, or to heal us if we need it.
 - In fact, don't we believe the Holy Spirit does all these things directly for us? We just have trouble believing he would do it through someone else. But who are we to limit God, especially given God's tendency as shown in the New Testament to help us through others? If God can lead me to go to seminary, why couldn't he ask my pastor to encourage me to go? If God can warn me about a wrong decision, why couldn't he put that warning on the heart of a friend too?
 - And there is no threat to the canon of scripture. Even much of what Jesus said did not become scripture, so we know it is possible to have revelation from God that is not scriptural. We believe the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments are all the scripture we will ever get from God. Nobody today is going to hear something new that is universal for all people.
 - But God might still want to use prophecy to call us back to scripture, or give a counselor wisdom and knowledge to share with a counselee. As a pastor, I often need the Holy Spirit to empower me to teach, exhort, and counsel others. And I think sometimes he does. If he didn't, I don't see how I could be effective in ministry.

- † **[Slide 13: 1 Corinthians]** I consider myself a conservative evangelical Christian, but I disagree with the view of my fellow conservative Christians on this issue. Besides the points already raised, I think it is important to note that there is no scriptural basis for the belief that God has ceased using specific gifts. If anything, scripture seems to say that the gifts will remain until Christ returns.
 - Turn to 1 Corinthians 1.7 NET; Paul told the church: "you do not lack any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation [the return] of our Lord Jesus Christ."
 - Now turn later in the same letter, to 1 Corinthians 13.8-10 NET: "Love never ends. But if there are prophecies, they will be set aside; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be set aside. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part, but when what is perfect comes, the partial will be set aside."
 - What is perfect and anticipated to come to us? Christ. So it seems from both these passages that the gifts are said to remain until Christ – the perfect one – returns.
 - Even if you disagree with me, I hope you can agree with Chuck Swindoll, a conservative pastor who once was the president of Dallas Seminary. He said we might doubt whether God works in certain ways today, but if God wants to heal through someone he will, and who are we to question it? We wouldn't want to be like the Pharisees in John 9, worried about what day or age it is instead of rejoicing in the miracle!

Fifth Question: Who receives spiritual gifts?

† **[Slide 14: who?]** Our Fifth Question is, “Who receives spiritual gifts?”

- Turn to 1 Corinthians 12.4-7. We first note that every believer gets spiritual gifts. NET: “Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are different ministries, but the same Lord. And there are different results, but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the benefit of all.”
- Every believer has at least one spiritual gift; and it can be evident to those who yield to the Spirit even if they are not mature in their understanding. As indicated in 1 Corinthians 1.7, even the very immature Corinthian church had abundant evidence of spiritual gifts. Only believers receive gifts because it is the work of the Holy Spirit in them.
- Second, nobody has all the gifts; rather we each get specific gifts. As we saw earlier in 1 Corinthians 12.29-30 NET: “Not all are apostles, are they? Not all are prophets, are they? Not all are teachers, are they? Not all perform miracles, do they? Not all have gifts of healing, do they? Not all speak in tongues, do they? Not all interpret, do they?” The answer clearly is no.

Sixth Question: How do we get gifts?

† **[Slide 15: how?]** Our Sixth Question is, “How do we get the gifts?” The answer is that Christ gives us the gifts through the work of the Holy Spirit.

- Ephesians 4.11 NIV: “So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers...”
- 1 Corinthians 12.8-11 NET: “For one person is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, and another the message of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another performance of miracles, to another prophecy, and to another discernment of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. It is one and the same Spirit, distributing as he decides to each person, who produces all these things.”

Seventh Question: How do we know what gifts we have?

† **[Slide 16: us?]** Our Seventh Question is, “How do we know what gifts we have?” There are many assessments available on line and through ministry groups, but I have never seen one that was any good. Usually they confuse spiritual gifts with either natural abilities or passions or both. Also, they usually are limited to the gifts listed in the Bible, or just a portion of those gifts.

- † One way to assess yourself is to ask how has God worked through you in the past? If you lay hands on blind people and they suddenly can see, then I think you know what your gift is, right? Even more subtle gifts can make themselves known over time. If you frequently find yourself in situations where you make a difference by comforting or consoling people, your gift might be mercy; if people tell you that your teaching helps them take steps in faith, your gift might be teaching. That brings up another method of assessment: ask others in the church how they see God working through you!
- † Of course, the only way to sense this pattern is if you are out there doing all types of ministry work all the time. What if you are new to faith or haven't been that active? Then here is a theory you might try out. Saddleback Church came up with this concept, called SHAPE. S is for Spiritual Gifts; H is for heart or passions; A is for natural abilities; P is for personality; E is for experiences.

- The idea is that God has SHAPed you for the work he has for you, so there should be some aspect of yourself that is consistent across each category. If I have a heart for teaching, natural abilities in teaching, a good personality for teaching, and experiences and training in teaching, then it is likely that I have a spiritual gift for teaching, in that God would make use of how I have developed. This is not foolproof, but it is better than the on-line assessments.
 - So if I were you, I would take the handout I gave you today and start by listing everything you love to do under the title of heartfelt passions. Include everything: for example, I would list gardening, reading books, watching movies, and being out in nature. Then list all the things you are good at doing under the title of natural abilities; I am not a good gardener, but I am good at reading books and watching movies. If you see common elements in these two lists, I would consider whether there might be an associated spiritual gift.
- † But please hear this: don't be discouraged if you are not sure about your gifts. You don't need to know your gifts to have a successful Christian life or ministry. The most important thing is to do what Scripture commands, to live as Scripture teaches, because then you will come into ministry opportunities and God will bless you in them as he sees fit. If you start seeing amazing things happen in one area, that probably is your gift, but it is your obedient service that is important.
- LeeAnn and I knew a couple in Florida who had a premature baby, who for several months was in a special children's hospital about an hour away. This was a difficult time for them, worried about whether the baby would survive, trying to visit every day while taking care of their other children and working. When the baby finally was out of danger and could come home, the mother – who was very young in faith – told me that what helped her keep herself together and keep trusting in God was that so many people in the church provided them with meals every night of this crisis. Simple serving helped build this lady's faith and blessed her whole family.

Eighth Question: What is our responsibility?

- † **[Slide 17: use]** Our eighth and final question for today: "What is our responsibility?"
- 1 Peter 4.10 NET: "Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of the varied grace of God."
 - If you know of your gifts, you need to be willing to use them for God's mission and the wellbeing of each other. We must all seek to participate in ministry, using our spiritual gifts when prompted by the Holy Spirit. This is essential for the health of our community.
- † **[Slide 18: compelled]** Please note, however, that in the Bible, people are not able to choose when to exercise their gifts; these are not natural abilities that we can control, we can only be obedient to when the Holy Spirit prompts us to action.
- In 1 Corinthians 9.16 NET, Paul said, "For if I preach the gospel, I have no reason for boasting, because I am compelled to do this. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" Paul had a burning compulsion inside to preach the gospel. So he did. If he tried to resist it, oh the suffering, he says, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"
 - I have felt a similar compulsion. One time, I thought the Spirit was leading me to invite a friend to church, so I did. The sermon was exactly what my friend needed to hear, but he didn't come. As I was driving home, I strongly felt the Spirit leading me to talk with my friend. I drove to my his house, walked in, turned off his television, sat on the floor, and gave the entire sermon to him and his girlfriend; it just came out. I really had no choice, it had to come out.

- † **[Slide 19: pride]** Whatever our gifts, we must not become prideful. Turn to 1 Corinthians 12.20-25 NET: “So now there are many members, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I do not need you,’ nor in turn can the head say to the foot, ‘I do not need you.’ On the contrary, those members that seem to be weaker are essential, and those members we consider less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our unpresentable members are clothed with dignity, but our presentable members do not need this. Instead, God has blended together the body, giving greater honor to the lesser member, so that there may be no division in the body, but the members may have mutual concern for one another.”
- If the gifts make us proud, we defeat their purpose: we are to bless others and glorify God, not bless ourselves or glorify ourselves.
 - **[Slide 20: love]** We must use gifts in love, not pride: 1 Corinthians 13.1-3 NET: “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but I do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so that I can remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I give over my body in order to boast, but do not have love, I receive no benefit.”
- † **[Slide 21: commission]** In humility and love, we all pursue one primary ministry which Christ gave to all believers, to make disciples. Matthew 28.19-20 NET: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”
- So we are to engage in evangelism, teaching, and mentoring. God designed you uniquely so that he could use you uniquely in this primary ministry! That means, even if you don’t have the gifts of evangelism or teaching, you can be an effective disciple maker for God as he works through whatever gifts you do have, as he uses you in the unique way he desires.
- † **[Slide 22: serve]** You also have secondary ministries, ways that God wants to use you to bless the church, to build up individuals and thus the community of the body of Christ, to love others as yourself. Whatever gifts you have, there are ministries in this church for you, there are people in this church that you can bless. So find ways to use your gifts in serving others and glorifying God!
- † In areas in which you have no gifts, be obedient anyway. We are all called to evangelize, not just those with the gift; we are all called to teach, not just those with the gift; we are all called to show mercy, we are all called to be hospitable... If God chooses to do something amazing through you, praise God! But either way, our responsibility is to be obedient to do what he is asking us to do.
- At a 9/11 memorial service, LeeAnn felt a compulsion from the Holy Spirit to walk up on stage during a time of music and start praying for the whole church! When I saw her up there, I knew something good was about to happen, because this had to be God, LeeAnn would never have gone up there in front of hundreds of people by her own choosing. Her prayer had such an impact on the whole church that the pastors were amazed and asked her if she wanted to give a repeat performance on Sunday! This was LeeAnn being obedient even though God asked her to do something outside of her comfort zone and known gifts.
- † **[Slide 23: title]** Let’s pray that God would reveal our gifts to us and make good use of us, and that we could be obedient in every way and thus contribute in many ways to the ministry and community of the church...