



Discover Your Spiritual Gifts

God gives all of us spiritual gifts—but too many Christians never unwrap them.

BY SHIRLEY ARNOLD

Why is it important for you as a believer to identify your spiritual gifts? So that you can fulfill God's purposes for you. A spiritual gift is the result of God's influence on your heart to serve in a specific way that blesses the body of Christ. Knowing your spiritual gifts releases you to function in your God-given place of service.

The apostle Paul made this clear when he wrote in his letter to the Romans: "For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith" (Rom. 12:4-6, NKJV).

The search for spiritual gifting has become a great frustration in the lives of the modern church. It is the single most asked question I have heard during the last 30 years of ministry. Though the Bible is very clear that spiritual gifts are essential, it is also strangely silent when it comes to how to discover them. It does not appear to have been a particularly poignant question to the early church.

When the apostles Paul and Peter wrote about gifts, they taught more about their function than their discovery. This fact leads me to believe that membership in the early church automatically included the commitment to service. Could it be that in the serving itself, discovery comes?

One truth is certain: Every Christian is endowed with at least *one*

spiritual gift. The Bible says, "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills" (1 Cor. 12:7,11).

Though most of us operate in more than one gift, it is apparent that God's grace highlights particular areas of strength in each of us. The word "grace" used in Romans 12:6 is the Greek word *charis*, which according to Strong's Concordance is "the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life."

God's grace divinely and uniquely influences the way we think, act, perceive and serve. For example, some of us are predisposed to be more merciful toward others. Mercy just seems to come naturally to us. Others have a "knack" for organization or administration. We think more systematically and enjoy bringing order to chaos. Some of us are divinely "sparked" to see the best in every situation. We love to exhort or encourage others to keep pressing through and believing for God's best.

The Scriptures enumerate three essential purposes for the functioning of our spiritual gifts:

- » to build up (see Eph. 4)
- » to serve the body (see Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12)
- » to establish (Rom 1:11)

There is no question that each of us has a privilege and a responsibility to bring our contribution willingly to the rest of the body. Peter says we should employ our gifts for God's purposes (see 1 Pet. 4:10). In other words, if we are to be good stewards, we must put

them to work. Just as we must be good stewards over our finances and time, so also must we properly steward our spiritual gifts.

One thing is clear. If we would all properly exercise our gifts, there would be no lack of resources in the church.

At the church I pastor, TLC Family Church in Lakeland, Florida, we take the challenge of functioning in our gifts seriously. When a person joins our church community, we do a personal assessment and inventory to identify his gifts and determine where he will function best. The new member is invited to employ his gifts for the good of our local body.

Having more than 75 percent of our members in active service ensures that the load does not fall on "the few." We accomplish far more for the kingdom because "every joint supplies" his part.

Though the Scriptures are relatively silent with regard to the discovery of our gifts, there are certain assessment tools that can give us insight. Here are key questions to ask yourself:

What are my natural talents?

Your natural gifts may be a clear indication of your spiritual gifts. God told the prophet Jeremiah that he was called before he was formed in his mother's womb. That means he was divinely influenced even before he was born. So though he didn't know it until God spoke to him, he was already called. That same divine influence is in each of our lives long before we recognize it.

As a child I had a great longing



to play musical instruments and sing. Though my parents were good singers, no one played a musical instrument until I came along.

The other children in my class would squirm around in their seats at the symphony, but I would relish every moment. I looked forward to my piano lessons and never had to be told to practice. When I was born again, my “natural” talent was transformed into a gift for worship.

Sometimes we miss the obvious. Our talents seem so natural, we don’t recognize the supernatural influence and enabling behind them.

We have two daughters. One was very scheduled and preferred boundaries. The other daughter disliked structured surroundings. Both girls lived in the same home with the same parents, but they were very different.

Today one works in our administrative offices and the other works with children. They are each very gifted in their areas of service to the Lord.

I think we may overcomplicate the discovery process by trying to find some deep hidden gift that can only be “spiritually” discerned.

What is my passion?

Another way to ask yourself this question is, “What is it that stirs me to the point of being motivated to do something about it?” Passion is not simply what you like or dislike. It is a motivating force that transforms your thinking into action.

My parents function in the gift of helps. They are very observant of the things that need to be done.

One time they stayed in our home

to watch the girls while we were ministering in East Europe. We returned home and were very grateful for their assistance while we were away. About a month later, my mom called and asked me a question: “Did you even notice that Dad repaired the screen in the back door?”

I told her I was sorry I had not mentioned it before and thanked her. But the whole story was that not only had I not noticed it was repaired, I hadn’t even known it *needed* to be repaired.

My parents are now close to 80, and they head up our benevolence outreach and the kitchen responsibilities. They continue to meet needs others simply do not see. They are passionate about serving and do something about it.

We all want to win the lost, but some folks have a passion that motivates them beyond the average response. We all want to feed the hungry, but some actually cook meals and take them to the homeless. We all want to help orphans, but not all of us are compelled to travel to remote places to ensure that orphans are reached.

What is it that makes you tick? Your answer to that question will help you define your place of ministry.

Where do I sense God’s grace?

There is no question about it: My husband has a grace to counsel. How do I know? By observing his ability to sit for hours and let people talk until they are through. I do not have that same grace. I want people to get to the bottom line quickly so I can advise them.

These types of graces point directly to the gift of God in each one of us. Though my personality was somewhat shy and hesitant in front of people, God graced me to preach. I love to prepare and preach because I operate in a grace from God.

Some teachers believe that the nine gifts mentioned in Romans 12 are the nine categories into which we all fit. I believe that is a somewhat narrow view in light of the full counsel of God’s Word and His creativity. First Corinthians 12 lists nine more gifts. Paul calls celibacy a gift (see 1 Cor. 7:7). Ephesians 4 lists five additional gifts.

God's grace allows us to function in a myriad of ways that are uniquely personal. Though I sometimes lift my hands and sway as I worship, others dance in such a beautiful way that the grace is evident.

Some people might call it the anointing, but grace, opportunity and obedience release the anointing. Nothing is as powerful as a person operating in divine purpose empowered by divine grace. This kind of grace will release a God-given confidence in the moment and make a place for you in the body of Christ.

What are others saying?

There are times that others recognize our gifts before we do. Have you ever heard someone remark about the gifted way you do something? Your gifts will make themselves known to those around you. By the end of any project, it is generally easy to distinguish between those simply filling a position and those who are gifted.

When needs arise in the local church, is my name frequently suggested to address a need?

As a pastor, I look for the affirming indications that mark a member's service. It is part of the responsibility of your spiritual authorities to recognize and release your gifts to the body. Of course, if you have not been serving, it is very difficult for your spiritual authority to discern your strengths and weaknesses.

In what area have I experienced the greatest resistance and spiritual warfare?

It has long been my experience that the enemy of our souls consistently tries to discourage us from using our spiritual gifts. I'm a good example. I have been gifted by God to encourage and train leaders. My training gift has demanded that I travel all over the world. I am in an airplane several times a month in order to do international ministry in places such as Europe and India.

However, the enemy began to work even in my childhood to squelch the gifts of God in me. A spirit of fear kept me bound, and one of my greatest fears was to travel in an airplane. I would hyperventilate as soon as I got on the plane. The warfare was so intense every time I stepped on a plane, it truly robbed me.

There will be resistance to the fulfillment of your gift. Even Jeremiah had a difficult time saying "yes" to God. His personal inadequacies made him feel disqualified. Timothy had an inferiority complex that Paul continually encouraged him to overcome.

People called with the gift of healing often fight health issues. Couples called to minister to those who need help in their marriages will usually face battles in their own marriages.

Take a look at your battlefield. Where has the enemy tried to rob you? It could be another clear indicator of where your spiritual gifts lie.

Assessing yourself by answering these questions is not a failsafe way to discern your spiritual gifts. But it should help point you in the right direction. The scriptural model sug-



gests that while serving, our spiritual gifts rise up and become known. Identifying them is thus more of an uncovering than a discovery.

There is one other way you can determine your spiritual gifts—the process of elimination. As you serve in several areas of need, you will discover where you do not fit with grace.

Most of us already know where we struggle in our serving. Unfortunately, many believers use this knowledge to support their desire to avoid serving at all, especially in areas such as caring for children in the nursery, cleaning up, ushering and so on.

Because some feel called to serve in a certain area, they claim other areas are "not their calling." Let me make this perfectly clear: We are all required to serve where there are needs, regardless of our spiritual gifts.

Do you still pray, even though there are some who intercede with greater grace? Do you still give your offerings with a joyful heart, even though some seem to give with more grace? Of course you do, because it is the right thing to do—regardless. It is the rare individual who serves only in the areas in which he is most gifted.

We are all endowed with spiritual gifts and graces. Peter said we should employ these gifts for the good of the kingdom. No observers allowed! Active participation in the body of Christ is expected from every believer.

Discovering your spiritual gifts is God's invitation to participate in the powerful expression of the body of Christ. Let's remove the towel from our waists and follow the example of Jesus in the world as we serve Him by serving one another. ◀

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