

Spirit Gifting

a Bible study guide
on how God empowers
people for Christian service



The albatross.

Longest wings in nature. Flies up to 130 kph. May cover more than 800 kms in a single day. A parent may fly up to 16,000 km to find and give one meal to its chick.

It inhabits Heaven, but touches Earth. It covers 100s of kms without flapping. Instead of flapping, it *glides*. It moves efficiently and gracefully across oceans—by

**catching
the wind.**

Spirit Gifting

... a Bible study guide on how God empowers people for Christian service

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< GOD'S ACTION >

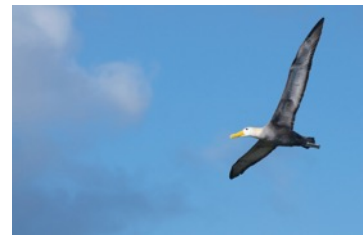
**Through Christ he has filled Heaven and Earth
with gifts ... he gives each of us our own gift**

< OUR RESPONSE >

**With God's gifting in hand, we train and we
serve through Christ's body—the church**

You have one Master, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. . . . But that doesn't mean you should all look and speak and act the same. Out of the generosity of Christ, each of us is given his own gift. . . . The One who climbed down is the One who climbed back up, up to highest heaven. He handed out gifts above and below, filled heaven with his gifts, filled earth with his gifts . . . to train Christians in skilled servant work, working within Christ's body, the church, until we're all moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God's Son, fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ. . . . We take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do. He keeps us in step with each other. His very breath and blood flow through us, nourishing us so that we will grow up healthy in God, robust in love.

—The Apostle Paul, Ephesians 4:5–16, The Message





Should you do this study?

Maybe not!

If you're looking for a "discover your spiritual gifts" approach, this is not it. In Scripture, when the Spirit gifted people, they knew it.

If you're wanting to be told precisely what to believe on the subject, you'll be disappointed. This guide follows an "inductive" Bible study method. That means you'll need to do some work, some study, some thinking, some reflection, some praying. But there are big rewards when you do it.

A prayer to our God ...

Open my eyes so I can see whatever you want me to see. Teach me what I need to know about Spirit gifting. I'd like my life and personal ministry to come into a fresh new stage as a result. Amen.

How can this guide be used?

The most important part is the Bible part—the Anchor Texts, 10 of them. These keep us anchored in the Word of God, so we don't drift and get into trouble.

Don't hurry through these Anchor Texts! Allow ample time for each of them, a pen in hand. Be sure to do the Bible reading indicated.

By the way, did you pause on the previous page, the Ephesians 4 prime Scripture? If not, turn back there now. Take a highlighter or a pen, and mark key words and phrases. Pray this stirring description into your life.

This guide can be used for personal study. But there's extra benefit from group study. If a skilled facilitator is available, that's great—as long as the person acts as a *facilitator* and not a lecturer!

At the end, if this guide has helped you, recommend it to someone else. Spirit gifting is a subject seldom understood, and we need to help change that.



ANCHOR TEXT #1

EXODUS 31

FILLED AND SKILLED— THE BEZALEL TEAM

Ever hear of Bezalel? His name means "in the shade—shadow, or protection—of Strong God". We start our Spirit gifting study in this surprising place—with the Israelites on their journey to the Promised Land. They have come out of four centuries of slavery, their culture shattered. Now, they're about to construct God's holy sanctuary from scratch. Here are the highlights, in God's own words, from Exodus 31:1–6.

- ➔ "I've personally chosen Bezalel"
- ➔ "I've filled him with the Spirit"
- ➔ "... giving him skill and know-how and expertise in every kind of craft"
- ➔ "Not only that, but I've given him Oholiab . . . to work with him"
- ➔ "And to all who have an aptitude for crafts I've given the skills to make all the things I've commanded you"

Question. If this was the only story in the Bible about Spirit gifting, what would we know about the subject?

Reading. Now look at Moses' take on this—Exodus 35:30–35.

- ➔ How far did this gifting go? _____
- ➔ What different, extra gift was given to Bezalel and Oholiab? _____ Why do you think the extra gift was provided? And, what does this extra gift tell us about gifting in general? _____

The rest of the story. See Exodus 36:1–2. Then, read Exodus 37. Imagine the activity and the creativity.

- ➔ Hundreds of years later, in the time of King Solomon, Bezalel was honoured! 2 Chronicles 1:5.

Reflection and prayer. How does the Bezalel story apply to you? Tell God your thoughts.



window two

Which Bible version?

For this study, use whatever version you wish! God is thrilled to have us get into his Word, any time and by any means. The Message translation is used here for the most part because it's easily read and understood. Its fresh language may lead to new perspectives. But again, feel free to use any version you prefer—or use a variety of versions—and be blessed in your study.

Why gift?

You'll notice a sky and water theme in the comments part of this guide. Imagine going to a boat show and seeing a fantastic sailboat you would love to own. But sadness, big sadness—it's way beyond your means. Then, when you get home, you're stunned. That same boat is on a new trailer in your driveway. There's a note attached: "To you, my friend. No charge. Free and clear. Enjoy it. Value it. Use it. Blessings!"



This is *gift*. Unexpected. Valuable. Treasured. Unforgettable. Giving is a love language. It makes an incredible statement about the giver.

Eternal life from God is gift. So is empowerment for Christian service. "We all live off his generous bounty, gift after gift after gift." John 1:16. I can neither earn nor pay for God's gifts. If I try, I spoil the gifts.

God's gifts come with a clear purpose—to be received with joy, and out of that joy to be given again. 2 Corinthians 9:10. That's stunning.

A praise to our God ...

Thank you for giving me a life free from shame and from worry about judgement. And then, for trusting me with the Spirit's gifts for service. I'm honoured. I love you, and I want to pass your gifts along.



ANCHOR TEXT #2

JOEL 2

"I'M SENDING A GIFT"

Joel—a minor prophet with a major message. He lived several centuries before Christ was born on Earth. The people he preached to were in serious need of spiritual renewal. Can you identify?

- ➔ **"Look, listen—I'm sending a gift."** Joel 2:19. Do you think this announcement would get their attention? The gift included autumn and spring rains (former rain and latter rain, NKJV), great harvests, and victory over enemies.
- ➔ **But "that's just the beginning: After that—I will pour out my Spirit on every kind of people: Your sons will prophesy, also your daughters. Your old men will dream, your young men will see visions. I'll even pour out my Spirit on the servants, men and women both."** Joel 2:28–29.
- ➔ "And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." Joel 2:32, NKJV.

Question. Note the three outcomes mentioned—three supernatural gifts for service. Write these three here.

-
- ➔ Think about verse 32 (above). How do the three gifts help people call on the Lord and be saved?
-

Question. First God's Spirit, then gifting for service. What's the connection between the two?

- ➔ Could I expect to be genuinely gifted with unique abilities for service, without first being drenched with the Spirit himself? _____
-

Question. Why do you think God was so strong and specific about non-discrimination in his gifting? "Every kind of people ... sons, daughters ... old, young ... servants ... men and women."

- ➔ Do you think the church of the time was startled by the wide-ranging nature of God's pronouncement?
- ➔ Do you think *you* could receive an outpouring of God's Spirit, and be gifted with abilities to help people call on the Lord and be saved?

Reflection. Check out the reading on page 26 of this guide. Write your personal response here—and pray.



ANCHOR TEXT #3

MATTHEW 10

“HE GAVE THEM POWER”

The spiritual renewal Israel needed so badly, and that God promised through Joel and the other prophets, arrived with Jesus! But he had no intention to work alone. He chose followers to be “intimately linked” with him to get the job done. *Read all of Matthew 10.*

“Jesus called twelve of his followers and sent them into the ripe fields. He gave them power to kick out the evil spirits and to tenderly care for the bruised and hurt lives.” Matthew 10:1.

➔ Write here the three things Jesus did:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

➔ How would you feel if you experienced the first two of these, but not the third?

➔ What kind of “power” do you think Jesus gave them? Here’s some help: The biblical Greek word (*exousia*) can also be translated ability, authority, privilege, mastery, competency, liberty, or strength. Which of these do you appreciate most?

“Go to the lost, confused people right here in the neighborhood.” Matthew 10:6.

➔ Do you know of some “lost, confused” people in your neighbourhood? Some “bruised and hurt lives” close to you? Could Jesus be calling you to a personal mission with some of these people?

“Freely you have received, freely give.” Matthew 10:8, NKJV.

➔ Here’s gifting! A two-way operation. What have you freely received as a gift from God, that you could convey to others? _____

“You don’t need a lot of equipment. You are the equipment. . . . Travel light. . . . This is a large work I’ve called you into, but don’t be overwhelmed by it. It’s best to start small. Give a cool cup of water to someone who is thirsty, for instance. The smallest act of giving or receiving makes you a true apprentice.” Matthew 10:10, 41–42.

Response. Calling ... Sending ... Empowerment. What’s your present experience in each of these?



window three

Who’s a minister?

Minister — “one who serves”. A follower of Christ, intimately linked with him, who helps continue Christ’s mission by the Spirit’s power.

Beginning centuries ago, the Christian church centralised power in a professional “clergy”. Church members didn’t mind. They were happy to rest and receive — ignoring Jesus’ teaching that mission and miracles are assigned to *believers*. Mark 16:16–18.

Hear Paul on this. “The real believers are the ones God leads to work away at this ministry, filling the air with Christ’s praise as we do it. We couldn’t carry this off by our own efforts, and we know it.” Philippians 3:3.

Believers working away in ministry and “filling the air with Christ’s praise”. It might be a bit more joyful than sitting on the sidelines and filling the air with the devil’s criticism and distractions — would you agree?

Got power?

Big ships. Incredible. There’s a 14-cylinder diesel engine for supertankers that puts out



108,920 horsepower. Your family car engine might have 130; wouldn’t do in a supertanker.

It’s probably how Solomon felt. “You’ve given me a staggering task, ruling this mob of people.” He pled with God for two gifts — wisdom and knowledge. God gladly gave the king these Spirit gifts, and more. He got the power; he matured into an outstanding ruler for Israel. 2 Chronicles 1:9–12.

If you can’t be a supertanker, you could do tugboat ministry. A tugboat is powerful for its size, and strongly built. It might have as little as 680 or as much as 27,000 horsepower. But a few tugboats working together can move a supertanker safely into port, or out to sea.

Staggered by your task? Receive the power. Travel light. Start small. You’ll be amazed.



window four

How's the quality of your life?

On a scale of 1 to 10, how's the quality of your life? By "quality" we mean provision of everyday needs, plus your sense of personal fulfilment. Write your number here. _____

It's relative, of course. Relative to your upbringing, your culture, your society, your neighbourhood, your expectations.

Now think of people in nations torn by war, devastated by drought and famine, or wracked by corruption and poverty. Places where you can't get up in the morning with fair confidence that you or your loved ones will be secure or alive by the end of the day.

From where you are presently placed in life, do you, like Jesus, feel compassion "for the hungry crowd"?



As Jesus himself taught, there's another hunger in our world. A hunger of the soul. A hunger for the Word of God. A

hunger for love and for meaning. This kind of hunger might live at the next desk in your office or at your school. In the house two doors down from yours. In the gang headquarters that you wish would disappear from your town. Maybe in your church. Perhaps even in your home.

"There is no need to dismiss them. You feed them!" What a challenge. But also, what a privilege. What do you have, that you can offer? It might be only a few fish and a few loaves—a hastily put together lunch. But at least you have a lunch. And look what can happen when Jesus gives it Heaven's blessing.

A praise to our God ...

Thank you for all you've given me. And thank you for the joy of giving it back to you, and offering it to a world in need.



ANCHOR TEXT #4

MATTHEW 14

"YOU FEED THEM!"

It's one thing for Jesus to call us, send us, and empower us for service. But what if he placed us in front of thousands of hungry people and said, "You feed them!" It happened not once, but twice in his ministry. Across the two events and the four gospels, we have six descriptions about what happened—Matthew 14 & 15; Mark 6 & 8; Luke 9; John 6.

"There is no need to dismiss them. You give them supper." Matthew 14:16. "You feed them!"

➔ This was not *their* solution! See their solution in Matthew 14:15; and their objection in Mark 6:37.

Let's put the two events together, from all the accounts, and extract the elements. . . .

- 1) Jesus feels compassion for the hungry crowd
- 2) Disciples say, "Nothing we can do!"
- 3) Jesus says, "Not true—you feed them all!"
- 4) Disciples say, "We've found one lunch, that's it"
- 5) Jesus says, "OK, bring what you have to me"
- 6) Jesus says, "Get the people into groups"
- 7) Jesus looks up to Heaven, gives thanks, and hands out food to disciples—lots of food, more than the people can use
- 8) Disciples take what Jesus gives them, and give it in turn to hungry people
- 9) Everyone eats—as much as they want and need
- 10) Disciples gather leftovers so nothing is wasted

Discuss. What do these remarkable miracles teach us about discipleship, gifting, and the Kingdom of God?

Question. Why do you think Jesus did not snap his fingers and produce a nice meal in everyone's lap? Why take extra time and perform extra work? See Jesus' piercing questions in Mark 8:11–21.

Personal response. In this stage of my life, what can I bring to Jesus, that he will bless, multiply, and return to me for use in his Kingdom?



TIMES TWO—HEAVEN'S RATE OF RETURN

Here in Matthew 25:14–30 is “the parable of the talents”. This is not the English word “talents” —the biblical word refers simply to money. A business owner goes on a trip. Before he leaves, he gathers three workers and “delegates responsibilities”. Jesus said this story describes the Kingdom of Heaven.

“To one he gave five thousand dollars, to another two thousand, to a third one thousand, depending on their abilities.” Matthew 25:15. Here’s gifting!

- ➔ What do you make of the expression, “he gave ... depending on their abilities”? Compare with Exodus 28:3 and 31:6. _____

The first two servants “went to work”. By the time their boss returned, they’d doubled the value of the investment. The boss affirmed each of them — *“Good work! You did your job well. From now on be my partner.”*

Discuss. In a normal partnership, who invests? Who assumes risk? And who reaps the rewards? How is the Kingdom of Heaven like this?

- ➔ For an even higher rate of return in the Kingdom partnership, see Matthew 13:8 and 19:27–29.

Sad episode. . . . The servant trusted with one thousand dollars. Misreading his boss’s character and intentions —and afraid of failure —he keeps the money hidden away, safe and useless. Not even the bank rate of interest comes from that! The man is fired. “Get rid of this ‘play-it-safe’ who won’t go out on a limb.”

Then the boss takes the thousand dollars and reinvests it with “the one who risked the most” —partner No. 1. (At this rate annually, how long would it take for that investment to reach \$1 million?) Matthew 25:24–28.

Discuss. In practical terms, how can you and I engage in an investment partnership with God? How can we go out on a limb and “risk the most”?

- ➔ One answer comes from the very next teaching of Jesus. Read Matthew 25:31–46.
- ➔ Another answer might be learned from a fascinating incident that involved careful saving and extravagant spending — see Luke 7:37–48.

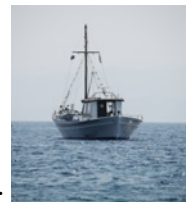


window five

Invested on the right side?

Partnerships often go bad. But partnering with Christ will never let us down.

Important: Let Christ be your lead partner, and take his advice. Remember when he told disciples to cast their fishing net on the *right* side of their boat? John 21:2–6. Hilarious, actually. But they made the change anyway—and realised an amazing catch. The right side—starboard, the side of risk, effort and adventure. See Romans 8:14–15 in The Message.



What is Spirit gifting?

- ➔ Is it my *personality, talent, and abilities*, happily committed in service for God?
- ➔ Is it my *training and experience* over the years that I give back to God for his use?
- ➔ Is it *unexpected, surprising new abilities* that God gives me to help grow his Kingdom?
- ➔ Is it *supernatural capacity for partnership with God in miracles* that ease suffering and advance the Gospel? (See Ephesians 3:7–8.)

The Bible’s answer appears to be Yes, Yes, Yes, and Yes! There’s no absolute definition of gifting in God’s Word—but plenty of stories and examples showing all four of these possibilities, often in marvellous combination.

Remember, God is still Creator! He’s creative Giver No. 1. When it comes to Spirit gifting, don’t expect predictable boxes wrapped in plain paper, all alike, conforming to the regimented thinking in which we sometimes seek our safety.

Maybe God is saying ...

Wherever I work purposefully through my disciples by my Spirit—there’s gifting! Get ready for “holy mystery” (Luke 7:16). Don’t be distracted by definition. Be ready for my gifting, however and whenever it comes—and you’ll find joy in growing my Kingdom.



SPIRIT WITHOUT LIMIT

Think about our Anchor Texts so far. Bezalel—filled and skilled incredibly. The prophecy of Joel—the Spirit poured out dramatically. Jesus sending out his disciples—empowered significantly. Jesus providing food for the hungry through his disciples—an abundance spilling over. The Kingdom of Heaven like the business owner—a doubled return given back for even greater investment. Which leads us to this astonishing observation from Jesus. . . .

“Don’t think he [the Father] rations out the Spirit in bits and pieces. The Father loves the Son extravagantly. He turned everything over to him so he could give it away—a lavish distribution of gifts.” John 3:34–35.

- ➔ Other versions: “God does not give the Spirit by measure. . . . God gives the Spirit without limit.”
- ➔ “‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Rivers of living water will brim and spill out of the depths of anyone who believes in me this way, just as the Scripture says.’ (He said this in regard to the Spirit. . . .)” John 7:37–39.
- ➔ “We can’t round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit!” Romans 5:5.

Discuss. (1) What’s included in the “everything” the Father has turned over to the Son, to be passed on in gifts to us? (2) Do we *want* to be in on Heaven’s “lavish distribution”—individually and together?

The big question. *How?* With this superabundance promised, ready, available, and waiting for each of us, how can we receive it?

- ➔ “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” Luke 11:13, NKJV.
- ➔ “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt; open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.” Psalm 81:10, NKJV.

Pray and respond. Right here, right now, could we begin a daily pathway of asking for and receiving the Spirit without limit? Will I make this a turning point in my life?



window six

Are there dangers?

You’d better believe it. There’s an enemy out there, working through his evil spirits to undermine the true work of God’s Holy Spirit. Matthew 24:24; 2 Corinthians 11:13; 1 John 4:1–3; Revelation 16:13–14; 18:2–4.

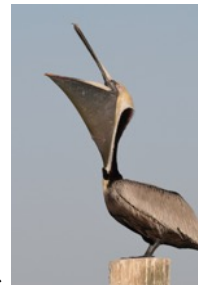
Our task is to stay on guard against deception, testing everything by the Word of God—while at the same time staying open and welcoming for the genuine gift of the Spirit.

Jesus gave two big warnings. First: Don’t be deceived by false messengers. Second: Never, from your suspicion or from prejudice, label any work of my Spirit as the work of the enemy. Mark 3:22–30; 9:38–40. Also, see Philippians 1:15–18; 1 Thessalonians 5:19–21.

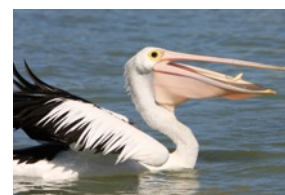
Praise God—the Spirit is committed to keep true searchers in the path of truth. John 16:13.

Got a mouth to fill?

Most birds, such as robins, drink by lowering their beaks into water, then raising them. A dipping-tipping-sipping method. Some birds, like doves and pigeons, get water by sucking it up through their beaks. A drinking-straw method.



Australian pelicans and other breeds of pelican, with their huge bills and pouches, are different. In a big rain, they can be seen opening their mouths wide and letting it all pour in! Even without rain, it’s easy for them to lower those broad, deep beaks into fresh



water, taking in a huge draught any time to satisfy their thirst. It’s a bucket method.

When it comes to the Spirit and his gifting, God says we can be pelicans! “Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.” Psalm 81:10, NKJV.



Why gifting?

Power. Ability. Skill. Giftedness. What for? What's the need? What's the goal? Why the urgency? What's the task?

If your answer has something to do with a comfortable, serene, contented church, forget it. That's not Jesus' description of church.

Here's his description: "A church so expansive with energy that not even the gates of hell will be able to keep it out." A church that confronts hell; opens its doors with a set of keys given by Jesus; smashes barriers between Heaven and Earth; and delivers complete and free access into God's Kingdom for people held prisoners by the enemy. Matthew 16:18–19; Luke 4:18–19.

It's war! And we're the armed services. Ephesians 6:10–13. We're on a mission. We have our orders — Deliver freedom. Things could get bloody. But we have Heaven's gifting — we have the power.

Assignment. On the left side in the columns below, write needs or problems you see in the world. On the right side, write gifts of ministry that help meet those needs or problems. An example gets you started.

temptation, addiction	prayer partnership
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____



ANCHOR TEXT #7

JOHN 16

HEAVEN'S DELIVERY SYSTEM

In the last few weeks before Jesus proceeds to the Cross, we hear his heart cry. Now, he's down to the most important things. Truth ... resurrection and judgement ... his return ... sacrifice, service and suffering ... faith, love and joy ... holiness and obedience ... intimacy with God ... prayer, church and witness. And — underlying every subject — the unified action of Father, Son, and Spirit. Look over John 12–17, and be inspired by Jesus' heart!

Previously, Jesus has taught "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father." Luke 10:22, NKJV. But now he takes things a step further. Speaking of the gift of the Spirit, he makes a pronouncement:

"It's better for you that I leave. If I don't leave, the Friend won't come. But if I go, I'll send him to you. . . . He will take you by the hand. . . . He will take from me and deliver it to you. Everything the Father has is also mine. That is why I've said, 'He [the Friend, the Spirit] takes from me and delivers to you.'" John 16:7–15.

Discuss. Heaven's Delivery System! What is it? How does it work? How do we figure in this system? How might this look if we apply it to our everyday lives?

- ➔ **Personal response.** Will you receive the Spirit's chosen delivery to you? What might the delivery consist of, at this time in your life and ministry? Who, in turn, are you delivering to? Pray over this.

Question. How can each of us actually sign up in Heaven's Delivery System? See Jesus' incredible answer and promise — John 16:23–24.

Phenomenal filling. John 20:19–23. Talk about gifting! Read here what happens on the evening of Jesus' resurrection day. Visualise the setting; place yourself there. Describe your feelings, impressions and convictions. *This is a delivery* — as promised.



RECEIVE THE PROMISE

In the weeks after his resurrection, Jesus makes three startling statements about the church and its witness.

- 1) “Wait for what the Father promised: the promise you heard from me.” Acts 1:4; also Luke 24:49.
- 2) “John baptized in water; you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit. And soon.” Acts 1:5.
- 3) “And when the Holy Spirit comes on you, you will be able to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, all over Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the world.” Acts 1:8.

Question. First prayer-filled waiting. Then Spirit baptism. Then mighty witness. What do you think would have happened if the disciples had skipped the first two, and tried to go straight to the third? Do you think this 1–2–3 order applies in our own experience?

➔ “You will be able. . . .” Or, “You will receive power.” The biblical Greek word used here is *dunamis*—the dynamite, the miraculous ability to do explosive things in mission. This is our empowerment, our enabling—our gifting.

Read the story in Acts 2:1–12. Place yourself there. What are you seeing, hearing, and feeling?

- ➔ **Acts 2:33.** Note Peter’s explanation—“Raised to the heights at the right hand of God and receiving the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father, he [Jesus] poured out the Spirit he had just received. That is what you see and hear.” Heaven’s Delivery System ... with Pentecost being a huge delivery.
- ➔ **Acts 2:16–21.** See how Peter makes a connection with Joel 2—our Anchor Text #2. This is the *promise* of the Spirit. What does it mean to you?

“Peter said, ‘Change your life. Turn to God and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so your sins are forgiven. Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is targeted to you and your children ... whomever, in fact, our Master God invites.’” Acts 2:38–39. Also see Mark 1:4–8.

Pray and respond. Have I received *both* of these gifts—sins forgiven, *and* baptism by the Spirit? Do I believe these twin blessings are targeted to me?



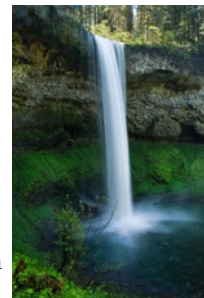
window eight

Another Pentecost?

Strictly speaking, Pentecost was a unique experience in history. Those circumstances, like the Cross and resurrection of Jesus, will never occur again.

But Jesus compelled the church of his time to go beyond strict thinking—to biblical thinking and spiritual thinking. Did he limit the promise of his Spirit to an imminent shut-off date? Did Pentecost *completely and finally* fulfil the promise of Joel 2? Does our world need the Spirit’s outpouring less now than 2,000 years ago? Can you imagine the Gospel going to all the world with less than a “flourishing finish”? Philippians 1:5–6.

Look at God’s final appeal to Earth. “‘Come!’ say the Spirit and the Bride.” *All who desire* may come, and drink. And from those who receive flows a torrent of the water of life—the Holy Spirit with his gifts and power. Revelation 22:17; John 7:37–39.



One thing’s sure. If I’m convinced there will never be another mighty outpouring of God’s Spirit for the world, it’s most unlikely there will be a mighty outpouring of God’s Spirit *for me*. (See page 26 of this guide.)

The apostle Peter has this answer from Pentecost itself: “The promise is targeted to you and your children, but also to all who are far away—whomever, in fact, our Master God invites.” Acts 2:39. Sounds like a standing invitation through all generations—including you and me. Would you agree?

A prayer to our God ...

I don’t understand this completely, but you promised your Spirit! Today, baptise me freshly into Jesus, in whatever way you choose. Turn me into a river of living water for my world.



window nine

What’s your parentage?

Sometimes we recognise a child as talented. There are many variables, but talent often reflects the capabilities and training coming from parents—a mystery of genetics and environment; and frequently, a surprise.

Are you talented? As a statement of personal faith, you can reply “Yes! Look at my parentage! I’m a child of God!”

You may be “ordinary” or even challenged in intellect, physique, education, and technical or creative skills. But spiritually speaking, you have the first-class genetics and environment needed to excel in service for your Father in Heaven. Matthew 11:25–26; 18:1–4.

As a parent proud of his talented child, God longs to see you grow up healthy and productive. He trains you, then calls you into areas of service suited to your personality and interests—and adds his Spirit gifting.

- ➔ “Out of the generosity of Christ, each of us is given his own gift. . . . His very breath and blood flow through us, nourishing us so that we will grow up healthy in God.” Ephesians 4:7, 16.

Can you see what’s hidden?

Shallow seas surround our continents. These hold most of the life found in the oceans.

You’re probably thinking whales, sharks, seals, dolphins, turtles, and fish. But there’s something more important—a life form basic to the food chain that produces about three-quarters of the oxygen in our atmosphere.



Algae. These simple plants—including seaweed—are hidden but essential. They quietly fulfil their given purpose, day after day, away from the spotlight, ultimately supporting all life on Earth.

Algae are not mentioned in Romans 16! But perhaps you can see them there.



ANCHOR TEXT #9

ROMANS 16

GALLERY OF THE GIFTED

Romans 16 might be even more of a surprise than Anchor Text #1, the Bezalel Team (Exodus 31). You might have never heard of Bezalel. But you almost certainly have never heard of Epenetus, Andronicus, Junia (or Junias), Ampliatus, Urbanus, Stachys, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis, Philologus, Nereus, Olympas, Tertius, Gaius, Erastus, and Quartus. If it’s any comfort, you might recognise Phoebe and Aquila. And there are at least a few easy names—Julia, Rufus (and his mum), Priscilla, and Mary.

“**Holy embraces all around!**” Romans 16:16. Is this chapter just a coincidental postscript to a book of theology and counsel? Or could it be one of the most inspiring chapters in the Bible? Read the chapter. See Paul’s unassuming testimony to the picture of a beautifully functioning church—a church through which the nations of the world can know the truth and be brought into faith (verse 26).

- ➔ **Discuss.** What do you think a picture of a beautifully functioning church might look like?

Assignment. On pages 13 and 14 of this guide you’ll see an exercise that provides for you to write your own compilation of Spirit gifts. Pause here to complete just the *Romans* section, on page 14.

- ➔ **Review the names in Romans 16.** How many of the people mentioned have Jewish names; how many have Greek or Latin names? How many women? Any evidence of hierarchy—such as leaders higher than helpers, men higher than women?

- ➔ **Think about Acts 9:31**—“Things calmed down after that and the church had smooth sailing for a while. All over the country . . . the church grew. They were permeated with a deep sense of reverence for God. The Holy Spirit was with them, strengthening them. They prospered wonderfully.”

- ➔ **Discuss.** Is this picture possible today?

“**A sight to take your breath away! Grand processions of people telling all the good things of God!**” Romans 10:15. Is your name part of the grand procession? Can you see the names of others there?



What are the safeguards?

Marine standards. Safety checks. Emergency drills. Life rafts. Personal flotation devices. You don't head out to sea without them. In our journey of gifting, it's critical we keep safeguards in mind. "Guard the treasure you were given! Guard it with your life." 1 Timothy 6:20. Three examples of safeguards. . . .

1) Rely on God, not God-projects

- ➔ "I can see it now—at the Final Judgment thousands strutting up to me and saying, 'Master, we preached the Message ... our God-sponsored projects had everyone talking.' And do you know what I am going to say? 'You missed the boat. All you did was use me to make yourselves important. You don't impress me one bit. You're out of here.'" Matthew 7:22–23.



2) Look for lost souls, not spectacular signs

- ➔ "The mood of this age is all wrong. . . . All you're looking for is something to titillate your curiosity, satisfy your lust for miracles." Luke 11:29; also see 1 Corinthians 1:22.

3) Give priority to fruit, not gifts

- ➔ Discipleship is not proved by *any* Spirit gift, but by love that translates into trusting obedience. John 14:15; 15:10; 1 John 3:14.
- ➔ Above the highest gifts is the better way—love in action. 1 Corinthians 12:31–13:13.
- ➔ The critical "fruit of the Spirit" guards the gifts of the Spirit. Galatians 5:22–26; see also Colossians 3:12–14.

A prayer to Christ our Lord ...

In your gifting to me, keep me guarded and humble. May I be driven by compassion, not by pride; by love, and not by competition.



ANCHOR TEXT #10

1 CORINTHIANS 12

BODY BEAUTIFUL ... 1 OF 2

We've arrived at anchor point No. 10 in our Bible journey on gifting. At our start, we paused in the Old Testament to be sure of our direction. Next, we lingered in the gospels to explore the ministry and teaching of Jesus. Then, we cruised through Acts and Romans to see how gifting played out in the early church. Now, we spend more time with the apostle Paul to advance our understanding from his gifting and knowledge.

- ➔ *A collection of teachings.* We've chosen 1 Corinthians 12 (verses 4–31) as our Anchor Text. But to get a bigger picture, read also these two additional snapshots—Romans 12:3–21, and Ephesians 4:1–16.

"The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ's body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence." Ephesians 1:23.

- ➔ **Assignment.** This amazing statement forms an excellent context. Draw a simple diagram or picture that illustrates Ephesians 1:23.
- ➔ **Discuss** the elements in Ephesians 1:23. What do they mean? And, how do *you* fit into this picture?

Teaching #1 ... Wherever we see true gifting, there we see God's Spirit. "God's various gifts are handed out everywhere; but they all originate in God's Spirit. God's various ministries are carried out everywhere; but they all originate in God's Spirit. God's various expressions of power are in action everywhere; but God himself is behind it all." 1 Corinthians 12:4–6.

- ➔ **Question.** What's best to have most prominently in our minds—the gifts of ministry we receive, or the Spirit of God behind them all? And, why?

Teaching #2 ... No disciple of Christ misses out on gifting. "Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people!" 1 Corinthians 12:7.

- ➔ **Assignment.** Think of three people you know who are believers. Then, write one or more areas of gifting that you think God has granted through the Spirit to each of these three.



ANCHOR TEXT #10: CONTINUED

1 CORINTHIANS 12

BODY BEAUTIFUL ... 2 OF 2

- ➔ Why do you think “everyone” can be in on Spirit gifting? Isn’t this dangerous? _____

Teaching #3 ... The range of gifting is extensive.

1 Corinthians 12:8. We’ve already seen a tremendous variety of gifting, from the gospels and from Romans 16. What we see Paul providing in 1 Corinthians 12 and related passages is not so much lists, as *examples*. His examples vary. Nowhere in the Bible does God say, “Here’s my complete list, and that’s it.”

- ➔ **Assignment.** On page 14 of this guide, review what you’ve already written for Romans 12 gifts. Then, expand your compilation of Spirit gifting in three more places at this time—1 Corinthians 12, 1 Corinthians 13, and Ephesians 4.

Teaching #4 ... We may strongly desire spiritual gifts—but it’s up to the Spirit as to who gets what gift, and when it’s given. 1 Corinthians 14:1; 12:11.

- ➔ The Spirit decides! What do you make of this?

Teaching #5 ... God places each custom crafted skill exactly where he wants it. 1 Corinthians 12:18.

- ➔ **Assignment.** Look at the humorous word-picture Paul paints in 1 Corinthians 12:14–17. Make a drawing about this, and give it a caption or a “quote bubble”.
- ➔ **Discuss.** What difference might it make when a congregation fully believes that in gifting for service, “God places each part of the body right where he wants it”?

Teaching #6 ... Spirit gifting operates best when we completely accept “many parts in one body”—tightly connected, interdependent, respectful, humble, compassionate, joyful, and loving. 1 Corinthians 12:19–31.

- ➔ Read this entire description. What problems over gifting do you think Paul was addressing in the church at Corinth, based on his teaching here?

Discussion ... and personal commitment. Review all six teachings above. At this time, how can I become an “excellently formed and marvellously functioning part” in Christ’s unified body? Romans 12:5–6.



Ready to suffer?

It’s easy to think of Spirit gifting as magnificent for *us*. Gets us noticed. Raises our self esteem. Elevates our significance. Glorious! But God says, Forget glory. Get ready for suffering. Luke 6:25.

According to Jesus, the most gifted prophet was his cousin, John the Baptist. But look at John’s life—saturated with selflessness, sacrifice, and suffering. Luke 3:15–16; 7:18–19, 26–28; Mark 6:17–29.

Preaching, teaching, singing, playing an instrument, leading up front. We think of the honour and covet the praise. When we don’t get the appreciation we think we deserve, we’re inclined to quit, to fade away, to carry hurt feelings for a month or a year.

Jesus gives counsel that strikes a blow against almost everything we see from most people in business, academia, politics, and religion: “Don’t think about how it looks. Just do it—quietly and unobtrusively. . . . Don’t run from suffering; embrace it. . . . Do you want to stand out? Then step down. Be a servant.” Matthew 6:3–4; 16:24; 23:11.

There is glory, but those who minister God’s gifts and those who benefit from their ministry shine brightest when they come into the habit of “giving glory to God all the way.” Luke 5:25–26.

See the creativity?

There could be up to 20,000 species of fish in the oceans that cover about 70 per cent of our planet. In aquatic design we find immense variety, stunning beauty, and even what looks like a creative sense of humour! Could this be reflected in the creation of human beings—and in our gifting, too?





“Gift after gift after gift” (John 1:16)

As mentioned in Anchor Text #10, if you’re wanting an absolute, full list of ministry gifts in the Bible, you’ll be disappointed. God gives a “lavish distribution”. John 3:35. Jesus “filled heaven with his gifts, filled earth with his gifts.” “All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people! The variety is wonderful.” Ephesians 4:10–11; 1 Corinthians 12:7–8.

When we let the Bible speak naturally for itself, we find a phenomenal variety of Spirit gifting. Old Testament, gospels, Acts, New Testament letters — in stories, events, experiences, and teachings, we see all kinds of gifting to all kinds of people.

This part of the guide gives opportunity for you to put together a partial compilation from your own Bible study, with your own interpretation and terminology. Make your compilation. Bask in the generosity of the Spirit. Pray over particular gifts that strike you. The first item serves as an example.

Old Testament

Joseph ... Genesis 41:38–41 wisdom, governance

Skilled people ... Exodus 28:2–3 _____

Bezalel ... Exodus 35:30–35 _____

70 leaders ... Numbers 11:16–17, 25–29 _____

Othniel ... Judges 3:9–11 _____

Gideon ... Judges 6:34; 8:28 _____

Samson ... Judges 14:5–6; 16:28–30 _____

Solomon ... 2 Chronicles 1:7–13 _____

Jahaziel ... 2 Chronicles 20:14–18 _____

Daniel ... Daniel 4:8–9; 5:11–14; 6:1–3 _____

Joel 2 gifts ... Joel 2:28 _____

Gospels

Jesus ... Matthew 9:35–36 _____

Believers ... Matthew 25:35–36 _____

Anyone willing ... Mark 2:3–5 _____

Apostles ... Mark 3:14–15 _____

Jesus ... Mark 4:2, 33–34 _____

Believers ... Mark 16:17–18 _____

Believers and Jesus ... Luke 12:11–12; John 14:10 _____

Believers ... John 14:12–14 _____

Believers ... John 14:26 _____

Acts

Apostles ... Acts 1:8 _____

Disciples ... Acts 2:3–6 _____

Disciples ... Acts 6:1–3 _____

Tabitha ... Acts 9:36 _____

Simon the Tanner ... Acts 9:43 _____

Cornelius ... Acts 10:1–2 _____

Anyone willing ... Acts 10:44–46 _____

Barnabas ... Acts 11:22–26 _____

Agabus ... Acts 11:27–28 _____

Apostles ... Acts 14:3 _____

Apostles ... Acts 16:6–10 _____

Lydia ... Acts 16:14–15, 40 _____

Jason ... Acts 17:6–10 _____

Aquila and Priscilla ... Acts 18:1–3; 18–19 _____

Paul ... Acts 18:5, 23; 19:11–12; 20:1–2; 28:30–31 _____

Apollos ... Acts 18:24–28 _____

Philip ... Acts 21:8 _____

Philip's daughters ... Acts 21:9 _____

Mnason ... Acts 21:16 _____

Paul's nephew ... Acts 23:16–22 _____

Romans

Romans 12 gifts ... Romans 12:6–21 _____

Phoebe ... Romans 16:1–2 _____

Priscilla and Aquila ... Romans 16:3–5 _____

Mary ... Romans 16:6 _____

Andronicus and Junia (or Junias) ... Romans 16:7 _____

Ampliatius, Urbanus, Stachys ... Romans 16:8–9 _____

Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis ... Romans 16:12 _____

Rufus's mother ... Romans 16:13 _____

Philologus, Julia, Nereus, Olympas ... Romans 16:15 (note that “with them” implies “living with them”; perhaps through loss of work or homes because of Christian faith) _____

Gaius, Erastus, Quartus ... Romans 16:23 _____

Rest of the New Testament letters

Paul ... 1 Corinthians 2:3–4; 3:10 _____

1 Corinthians 12 gifts ... 1 Corinthians 12:8–10, 28 _____

1 Corinthians 13 gifts ... 1 Corinthians 13:1–3 _____

Worship gifts ... 1 Corinthians 14:26 _____

The Stephanus family ... 1 Corinthians 16:15–18 _____

Paul ... 2 Corinthians 12:7–9 (this one's surprising – read it in The Message if available) _____

Ephesians 4 gifts ... Ephesians 4:11–12 _____

Epaphroditus ... Philippians 2:25–30 _____

Epaphras ... Colossians 1:7; 4:12–13 _____

Luke ... Colossians 4:14 _____

Nympha ... Colossians 4:15 _____

Timothy ... 1 Thessalonians 3:1–2; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6 _____

Paul ... 1 Timothy 1:2, 18 (here we're looking at the apostle's relationship to Timothy) _____

Widows ... 1 Timothy 5:9–10 _____

Onesiphorus ... 2 Timothy 1:16 _____

Philemon ... Philemon 1:1–5 _____

Onesimus ... Philemon 1:10–16 _____

Church leaders ... James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1–2 _____

John ... Revelation 1:1–9 _____



Transition time

Congratulations! You have completed the essential part of this study guide.

Have you been part of a group that has studied this guide together? Excellent! This final section is more for your personal follow-up than for the group time. But you might want to have another group get-together after reading these added pages. Share how this study has affected you. Prayerfully encourage other group members in their experience with the Spirit and his gifting.

Have you studied this guide on your own? That's also good. The guide is designed to be used either way. After you've finished with these final pages, you might want to consider arranging for a group study; or at least consider sharing this guide and your experience with one or two others.

Three things come at this transition point. . . .

- 1) Your personal response to the exercise on the previous two pages—your compilation of Spirit gifting.
- 2) A listing of our 10 Anchor Texts, for your review and reference.
- 3) Additional reading and study—pages 16–26.

Personal response to Spirit gifts

- ➔ Now is a good time to go back to the beginning of the compilation exercise on the previous two pages, and count the *distinctive* gifts. If a gift is written more than once, count it only once. Feel free to group together any gifts that appear to be so close that they are virtually the same. How many distinctive Spirit gifts of service do you come up with? _____
- ➔ For balance, keep in mind God does not appear to be into counting gifts—but into pouring them out, and growing his Kingdom in a unique way through you. Jesus used the idea of *counting* in a different way: “What counts is your life. Is it green and blossoming? Because if it's deadwood, it goes on the fire.” Luke 3:9.

Three good questions to answer for yourself. . . .

- 1) **What's my natural giftedness?** What has God made me good at? Looking over the compilation of Spirit gifting, what areas of service do I obviously gravitate to, and enjoy?

- 2) **What is God calling me to do at this time?** Where do I see the Spirit working around me and through me right now? Is there a fresh need that's been tugging at my heart for the last several months? What personal mission keeps springing up in my mind and prayers?

- 3) **What surprising ministry might God equip me to fulfil?** Is there a ministry I think I could never do, that God believes I certainly could do? Is there an invitation or opportunity that I've sidestepped, but which follows me all day long? Do I have a God-driven restlessness to receive a particular Spirit gift?



REVIEW:

THE 10 ANCHOR TEXTS

Did you commit our Anchor Texts to memory? If not, you might want to do so now—memorising titles, chapter references, and essential messages.

- 1) **Filled and skilled—the Bezalel team.** Exodus 31. God chooses and equips.
- 2) **“I'm sending a gift.”** Joel 2. The Spirit is given to every kind of person.
- 3) **“He gave them power.”** Matthew 10. Ability to care for bruised and hurt lives.
- 4) **“You feed them!”** Matthew 14. Our gifts are multiplied by Jesus.
- 5) **Times two—Heaven's rate of return.** Matthew 25. Partnership with rich rewards.
- 6) **Spirit without limit.** John 3. There's a lavish distribution for the asking.
- 7) **Heaven's delivery system.** John 16. Received from Jesus—then given again.
- 8) **Receive the promise.** Acts 2. The waiting ... the baptism ... the explosive witness.
- 9) **Gallery of the gifted.** Romans 16. Ordinary people make a functioning church.
- 10) **Body beautiful.** 1 Corinthians 12. Each person fulfils a God-directed role.



Additional reading. . . In this page, and the two that follow, is a collection of short devotional commentaries on Scripture. As you read, may your experience in Spirit gifting be affirmed and advanced. Pause to pray when something in particular captures your attention.

Three steps with Jesus

Step one

The first step is a two-word invitation: “Follow me.” Matthew 4:19, NKJV. It means, “Be my disciple.” A disciple is a follower—someone who admires someone else, and who adapts his life to that other person. We like to think of ourselves as leaders, but from childhood we all follow somebody. Parents, teachers, peers, heroes, authority figures, idols. By nature we follow a force of sin deep within us, and the evil power behind it—see Romans 7:5, 18–20. Whom do you choose to follow? The answer determines both the character of your life, and your final destiny. It’s a beautiful thing to perceive Jesus looking us in the eye with his invitation, “Follow me.” Will your answer be “Yes” today?



Step two

Step two comes with Jesus’ next words: “and I will make you fishers of men.” Matthew 4:19, NKJV. Those first disciples switched from catching fish to netting people for God’s kingdom. This is always an outcome of following Jesus—to minister, to serve, to find new disciples. It changes our focus from making a living for ourselves, to living with an eye toward others in whatever we’re doing. I am no sooner a disciple of Jesus than I’m called to become a minister for Jesus. Don’t think of it as formal ministry, like a pastor. Think of it in Paul’s words: “Take your everyday, ordinary life—



your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.” Romans 12:1. Today, you will have opportunity to bless someone in Jesus’ name. Pray for it, act on it, find joy in it, and tell someone about it.

Step three

Step one was discipleship—“Follow me.” Step two was ministry—“fishers of men.” You can see these two steps in Matthew 10:1—“Jesus called twelve of his followers and sent them into the ripe fields.” First Jesus *called* them, and second he *sent* them. But look what’s next. “He gave them power to kick out the evil spirits and to tenderly care for the bruised and hurt lives.” This is step three—empowerment, enabling, equipping. It’s also known as *gifting*, the generous outpouring of Jesus’ Spirit to replace our weakness with God’s strength. Jesus’ disciples couldn’t believe it. Even the demons submitted! This is the critical power, the gifting. Don’t leave home without it.



One, two, three

Step one: *Discipleship*—“Follow me.” Step two: *Ministry*—“I will make you fishers of men.” Step three: *Gifting*—“He gave them power to kick out the evil spirits and to tenderly care for the bruised and hurt lives.” Now is a great opportunity to ask, Where am I in these steps with Jesus? Am I in genuine discipleship, following Jesus by choice each day? Am I united in ministry, serving God in prayerful actions that help advance his kingdom? And, Am I asking for and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit to equip me for the tasks God calls me into? Think big on this, not small! Jesus said the Father doesn’t ration out the Spirit in bits and pieces, but gives this marvellous gift without limit. John 3:34.



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Notes _____



Jesus and the gifts

Received, then given

Jesus “filled earth with his gifts. He handed out gifts . . . to train Christians in skilled servant work.” Ephesians 4:11–12. This is *gifting*—the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to equip us for specific ministry in everyday life. Do you see a variety of ministries in people around you? “They all originate in God’s Spirit. . . . All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people!” 1 Corinthians 12:4, 7. This is one of



Scripture’s most significant teachings. Will you continue to give it focused attention? Are you taking it to heart for yourself? Will you keep on praying over it? Wherever Heaven’s gifts are handed out, I want to be in on it, don’t you? Remember, gifting is two-way. Jesus said, Freely you’ve received gifts of service—now freely give them away. Matthew 10:8.

Given, and given again

The word for “grace” in the New Testament is *charis*, also translated “gift”. Here’s the seed of our word charity. Very close to *charis* is the Greek word *charisma*. This is the word Paul uses for gifts of the Spirit. You can recognise our English word charisma, which means charm or giftedness. But did you know that *charisma* is also used in texts like Romans 6:23 (NKJV): “The wages of sin is death, but the gift [*charisma*] of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”? The rescue mission is one huge process of gifting—and this lies at the



foundation of our experience with God. Christ is our amazing “charisma” from Heaven, and now he gives us his own “charisma” to continue

his incredible work on Earth. Amazing grace, amazing gifts for ministry—all ours in Christ.

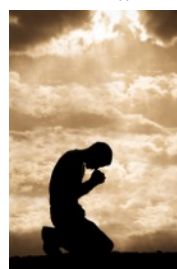
Gift, always gift

Giving is the love language of Heaven. This makes the Kingdom of God a gift-giving operation. God is gift. Christ is gift. Eternal life is gift. The Holy Spirit is gift. Gift is not just a piece of the picture, it *is* the picture! “We all live off his generous bounty, gift after gift after gift.” John 1:16. This is our context for gifts of ministry. If I imagine my goodness or talents originate with me, I ruin the picture. A gift is a gift. When I try to pay for it by my hard work or sacrifice, it’s not a gift any more. If I take pride in it as my personal creation, I sabotage it. If I focus on my gift rather than on the Giver, I spoil it. Every ability I have for ministry stays *gift*—God’s gift, every day and in every way.



Christ, only Christ

Sometimes, on TV or in other venues, we see people who claim to be Spirit-filled who come across as full of themselves rather than filled with God. It’s a turn-off. It disgusts reasonable minds. It’s a cartoon-like departure from truth. The Bible’s picture is different. See Stephen—Spirit-filled, persecuted and suffering, on his knees in submission, humbly facing death, having eyes only for God, pointing to Jesus in his glory. Acts 7:55.



This is what it means to be Spirit-filled and gifted for ministry. Jesus himself relied humbly on the Father for his words and acts; rejecting the “lust for miracles” in those around him. John 14:10; Luke 11:29. Will you commit to the same obedience, humility and sacrifice?

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Notes _____



window sixteen

The Spirit and the gifts

The real discovery

We often hear about “discovering your spiritual gifts”. But Scripture is strangely silent on this point. Scripture simply says that the Spirit hands out gifts, distributing them by his choice and wisdom—gifts of proclaiming, serving, teaching, giving, administering, and so on. There is a human response called for. We must learn about the gifts, eagerly desire the gifts, and use the gifts in proportion to the grace and faith God gives. Self-focused “discovery” misses the reality. In the early



church, when you received a spiritual gift, you knew it. The secret is to stop looking merely for gifts, and start looking for the *Gift*. Discover the Spirit for himself. Then gifts will come, and you’ll know it.

Eagerly desire the gifts

While Scripture nowhere tells us to discover our spiritual gifts, it does tell us to learn about the gifts the Spirit gives, and eagerly desire them. See 1 Corinthians 12:1; 14:1. Having received the Gift of the Spirit himself, what particular gifts of service do you desire? Teaching? Proclamation? Serving and helping? Encouraging? Giving? Leading? Wisdom? Knowledge? Discernment? Faith? Healing? Communication? Administration? Pastoring? Evangelism? Acknowledge the gifts you have received, and thank God for them. Pray for further gifts as you are led, focusing on those that most powerfully build up God’s church. 1 Corinthians 12:28; 14:1, 12. Keep in mind, the gifts are distributed according to the Spirit’s will, not our own will. Hebrews 2:4.



Guarded by the fruit

The gifts of service that were to build up the early church, almost destroyed it in the city of Corinth. There was nothing wrong with the gifts, but there was something wrong with the recipients. There were those who thought their gifts made them better than others. There were some who practiced their gift as if it were their own gift and not God’s—with no regard for order, humility, purpose, and compassion. In answer, Scripture says we’re all part of the same body of Christ, with gifts from the same Holy Spirit. There are greater gifts but not greater people. Higher than the gifts of the Spirit is the *fruit* of the Spirit, especially the most excellent fruit of love. Is that fruit guarding your gift today?



A united body

Feet, hands, ears, eyes. Each distinctive. But each an element of your one body. It’s the same with the Spirit’s gifts. 1 Corinthians 12:12–27. In the church as in your own body, it’s crazy to have fighting and division. Criticism is out—respect and appreciation are in. Resist the temptation to urge someone to practice your gift because it’s “better” or “expected”. True, we’re called to excel—1 Corinthians 14:12. There’s a place for improvement, training, and challenge. But there’s no place for competition, manipulation, or jealousy. According to our gifting, that’s how we serve—with humility, with unity. This is critical. Through your gifts and mine God grows his church and saves the world.



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Pages 19–26 is additional reading that gives Bible answers to questions about Spirit gifting. Not comfortable with some comments? Examine the biblical foundations for yourself, and arrive at your own conclusions as you are led by God’s Spirit. Acts 17:11.

Is there a specific calling for me?

Yes! It’s an answer straight from God’s Word.

We all have a *general* calling—to become missionaries in our spheres of influence, and to share the Good News. Matthew 28:19–20; Acts 8:4.

But within this general calling, the Bible is full of examples of believers whom God called to *specific*, individual missions. John the Baptist is one case; Mary the mother of Jesus another. Luke 1:15–17; 46–48.

Paul understood his life work and gifting as an apostle, but he also discerned an interesting exception—that his particular calling did not include baptizing. Ephesians 3:7; 1 Corinthians 1:14–17. Discerning what we *are* called to do also means identifying some things we are *not* called to do.

Paul prayed that believers in Ephesus would have clear and focused vision, so they would “see exactly” what it was that God was calling them to do. Ephesians 1:18. Would you like this prayer to be answered for you?

The theology of “each”

- ➔ Each servant is assigned a task. Mark 13:34.
- ➔ Each of us carries out a servant assignment. 1 Corinthians 3:5–6.
- ➔ Each person in the fellowship of believers is given something to do. 1 Corinthians 12:7.
- ➔ God places each Spirit gift exactly where he wants it—proper size, proper place. 1 Corinthians 12:18, 20, 27.
- ➔ When we gather for worship, each of us is encouraged to come prepared with a particular gift of ministry. 1 Corinthians 14:26.
- ➔ Each of us is given our own particular gift. Ephesians 4:7.

Here’s another “each” Scripture, and this one provides an excellent summary and conclusion: “Make a careful exploration of who you are and the work you have been given, and then sink yourself into that. . . . Each of you must take responsibility for doing the creative best you can with your own life.” Galatians 6:4–5.

Questions. Have you explored “who you are” as a disciple of Christ? . . . Can you at this point discern “the work you have been given”? . . . Are you willing, by the Spirit’s power, to do “the creative best you can” with the rest of your life?

How can I make a start?

If you are struggling with the question of your specific calling, be patient and persistent. There’s value in the silence and the struggle. Remind yourself about God’s promises on guidance—such as Proverbs 3:5–7; also Isaiah 30:20–21 and 48:17–18.

Keep on praying . . . commit your questions fully to God . . . believe that God’s answer will come through for you . . . tune out society’s noise so you can tune in to God’s whispers—the Spirit’s “Wind Words”. Check out Matthew 21:22; Acts 10:19–20; 16:6–7; 27:23–25; Revelation 2:29.

Seven practical counsels. . . .

- ➔ Watch for what God is doing around you or right in front of you—and consider joining that work. Proverbs 8:34; John 4:35; Romans 13:12; Colossians 3:2.
- ➔ Look for a match between your Spirit gifting and a particular need that strikes you in the “squalid and polluted society” in which you live. Philippians 2:15.
- ➔ Watch for doors of opportunity that open as you come on the scene. 1 Corinthians 16:9; Colossians 4:3.
- ➔ Pray that you will discern the right time to step out in specific service. 1 Corinthians 16:12.
- ➔ Start in small ways, with those closest to you. Matthew 10:5–6, 41; Galatians 6:10.
- ➔ Speak and act from your heart, without worry—believe that “the Holy Spirit will make his witness in and through you.” Mark 13:11.
- ➔ When you get your personal marching orders from God, don’t argue—*Go!* Acts 9:10–15.





Can I have more faith?

- ➔ “He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do.” John 14:12, NKJV.
- ➔ “God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us.” Ephesians 3:20.

There’s a breathing space above this paragraph, because what we just read takes our breath away. It wouldn’t be a bad idea to print just these two texts, and leave the rest of this page blank. If you’re not stunned, read the above pronouncements again.

The 70 disciples of Jesus were stunned, too. When they came back from their first mission trip, they exclaimed, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name!” Jesus himself was ecstatic. But he reminded them of the priority—not to get carried away by great outcomes, but to stay humbly reliant on the assurance that our names are written in Heaven. Luke 10:17–21, NKJV.

Humble reliance—the key

“He who *believes* in Me.” That’s the key that unlocks hell and opens the door for Heaven’s miracles. The source isn’t us—it’s God.

But what do we do when our faith crumbles? When it fails? When it doesn’t rise to the task?

After a public and embarrassing failure in ministry, the disciples of Jesus took their leader off somewhere in private and asked “Why?”

“Because you’re not taking God seriously” was Jesus’ reply. “The simple truth is that if you had a mere kernel of faith, a poppy seed, say, you would tell this mountain ‘Move!’ and it would move. There is nothing you wouldn’t be able to tackle.” Matthew 17:19–20.

Not taking God seriously. . . . Nothing we couldn’t



tackle. . . . Worth a lot of thought, a lot of prayer.

Another time, the disciples said, “Give us more faith.” “You don’t need more faith,” Jesus responded. “There is no ‘more’ or ‘less’ in faith.” A bare kernel of faith is all you need. Luke 17:5–6.

Discussion question. Do you need more faith? (Jesus said, *You don’t!*) What’s the issue? What’s the need? And what is that “bare kernel” solution that Jesus provided?

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- ➔ **Consider.** “Great faith is nothing more nor less than simple faith in a great God.” Does a prayer rise in your mind from this thought?
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What’s the role of prayer?

Huge! Prayer is the breath and soul of the Spirit-gifted disciple, and of the Spirit-filled church.

- ➔ The gifted Son of God sometimes had to sneak away or assertively withdraw from people in order to maintain his vital connection with the Father through prayer. Matthew 14:13, 22–23.
- ➔ The Father activates special forces when a few disciples “get together on anything at all on earth and make a prayer of it”. Matthew 18:19–20.
- ➔ Jesus was unequivocal—Ask the Father for whatever is in keeping with my teachings; ask in my name and according to my will. Then “he’ll most certainly give it to you.” Our joy in receiving will be like a river overflowing its banks. John 16:23–24.

➔ In our life-or-death battle we have weapons. Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, an assured salvation, God’s Word. And especially, prayer. “Pray hard and long.” Ephesians 6:12–18. It’s time to quit using prayer as a formality to open and close church business meetings. Prayer must become the business of our meetings! Until this happens, a church will have the same mediocrity it’s had for the last 30 years, and God will have to look elsewhere for disciples who pray.

- ➔ “The first thing I want you to do is pray! Pray every way you know how. . . . He wants not only us but everyone saved, you know. . . . Since prayer is at the bottom of all this, what I want mostly is for men to pray.” 1 Timothy 2:1–8.



Authority—can I actually serve?

“I’m just an ordinary church member. I don’t have authority to do much of anything.”

This feeling seems common among Christians, and occasionally it’s reinforced by those who have formal church authority. In its extreme, an attitude of excluding ordinary church members from significant ministry kept Christendom in “the dark ages” for a long, long time.

Jesus himself ran into trouble with this attitude. “Show us your credentials,” the leaders demanded. “Who authorized you to teach here?” Matthew 21:23. Ironically, the common people already knew the answer. The crowd was “amazed and pleased that *God* had authorized Jesus to work among them in this way.” Matthew 9:8 (emphasis supplied).

Authorized—having authority. The biblical Greek word is *exouwia*, which—as we noted in Anchor Text #3—means ability, authority, privilege, mastery, competency, liberty, or strength.



A place for “laying on of hands”

An ancient ritual of touch was often used to mark the giving of authority or liberty. See Numbers 27:18–23. This ritual was used frequently by Jesus. “He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them.” Luke 4:40, NKJV.

When the early Christian church commissioned people for service through laying on of hands, they were following the example of the Master. The touch of Jesus through his disciples signified the authority of the Holy Spirit, and his gifting.

This was how Paul commissioned Timothy with a special gift of ministry. 2 Timothy 1:6.

Christian commissioning was not an incidental matter. In Hebrews, laying on of hands is listed as a foundational truth—along with faith, baptism, resurrection, and judgement. Hebrews 6:1–3. No wonder, since the only way congregations can be healthy and growing is when church members are rightly chosen for service—and authorised,

commissioned, Spirit-empowered, Spirit-gifted.

Jesus authorised the church and its members

- ➔ Jesus gathered his disciples and said, “God authorised and commanded me to commission you.” Matthew 28:18–20. *Commission*—that is, co-mission, shared purpose and authority.
- ➔ Jesus gave the apostles “authority to banish demons.” Mark 3:14–15; also see Luke 9:1–6 and 22:29–30. Peter and his colleagues accepted this—“He commissioned us.” Acts 10:42.
- ➔ As the church grew, the Holy Spirit extended the commissioning. With fasting and praying, the church in Antioch authorised Barnabas and Saul (Paul), laying hands on them and sending them off in ministry. Acts 13:2–4. Paul identified himself as an authorised apostle. Romans 1:1.
- ➔ The commissioning went further. With prayer and fasting, Paul and Barnabas chose leaders in *each church*. And, Paul directed his associate Titus to appoint leaders in *every town*. Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5.
- ➔ God likes to choose ordinary folk, “nobodies”. Matthew 11:25–26; 1 Corinthians 1:26–28. Look at the kind of people whom he chose to be his first disciples! And, if there’s anyone he ranks highest, it’s “children”. Matthew 18:1–7.
- ➔ Jesus said powerful ministry, including signs and miracles, will accompany *believers*—not only formally designated leaders. Mark 16:16–18.
- ➔ All in the body of Christ are “holy priests”, chosen for the high calling of priestly work—God’s instruments to do his work. 1 Peter 2:5, 9.

What if I’m a leader—and nervous?

It’s natural for church leaders sometimes to be hesitant about these things—and there’s reason for that. See pages 22 and 23 in this guide, about leadership, responsibility, and discipline.

What’s important is the godly character of church leadership. Paul reminds us that even Jesus “didn’t claim special privileges.” Philippians 2:8. Paul acknowledged that while he and his fellow apostles had standing, they didn’t throw their weight around. They cared as a mother and father care for their children, giving their hearts without condescension. 1 Thessalonians 2:6–8, 11–12.

This is the attitude that honours New Testament teaching and grows healthy churches for Jesus!

“Don’t suppress the Spirit, and don’t stifle those who have a word from the Master.” 1 Thessalonians 5:19–20. Critical counsel, not easy to follow. But God provides the grace, and gives the wisdom we need.



How can we guard the gifts?

“Holy Father, guard them. . . . Guard them from the Evil One.” These words are from Jesus’ prayer for his disciples. John 17:11, 15.

“Guard the treasure you were given! Guard it with your life. . . . Guard this precious thing placed in your custody by the Holy Spirit.” This was Paul’s cry for Timothy. 1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 1:14.

When do we set a guard?—when something valuable is subject to threat. When I’m entrusted with treasures—such as children, funds, ministry gifts—I must protect them, I must set a guard around them. We call this *responsibility*. Jesus explained: “Great gifts mean great responsibilities; greater gifts, greater responsibilities!” Luke 12:48.

Spirit gifting under threat

The enemy is not happy about Spirit gifting. He will attack it however he can. Here are some ways in which we play into his hands. . . .

- ➔ **Pride of position.** Manoeuvring for a higher role. . . . Giving ourselves fancy titles. . . . Craving popularity and human approval. Matthew 20:20–28; Luke 22:24–26; John 5:41–42; 12:43. In the Corinthian congregation, self-importance created monsters. 1 Corinthians 12:19. The apostle Paul wouldn’t be drawn into it. “It matters very little to me what you think of me, even less where I rank in popular opinion. I don’t even rank myself. Comparisons in these matters are pointless.” 1 Corinthians 4:3.
- ➔ **Assurance by ministry.** This is the tragic perception that giftedness and superb service make up part of the foundation by which we become assured of eternal life. “I can see it now—at the Final Judgment thousands strutting up to me and saying, ‘Master, we preached the Message. . . .’ And do you know what I am going to say? ‘You missed the boat. All you did was use me to make yourselves important. You don’t impress me one bit. You’re out of here.’” Matthew 7:22–23.

- ➔ **Busyness crowding out intimacy.** With first-class motives and a sense of holiness, Martha became absorbed in busy service for Jesus—while her sister Mary sat quietly in front of the Master, “hanging on every word he said.” Jesus affirmed Mary—“One thing only is essential, and Mary has chosen it.” Luke 10:39–42.
- ➔ **Rivalry and competition.** Posting a score for baptisms. . . . Making ministry comparisons from envy and pride. . . . People “so full of themselves they never listen to anyone.” John 4:1–3; Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 4:18. Jesus rebuked this kind of thing. “How do you expect to get anywhere with God when you spend all your time jockeying for position with each other, ranking your rivals and ignoring God?” John 5:44. Paul turned the popular view upside-down when he declared that humble, hidden ministries are more critical—and those who work in the background deserve equal dignity and honour. 1 Corinthians 12:22–23.
- ➔ **Lack of holy character.** This sums up the preceding sins. It’s an issue of trying to exercise gifts of the Spirit while going day after day without deep experience in the *fruit* of the Spirit. No wonder God gives these essentials for leadership: Trustworthiness . . . fullness of the Spirit . . . good sense. Acts 6:3, 5. Be “bold and loving and sensible.” 2 Timothy 1:7. “Keep a firm grasp on both your character and your teaching. Don’t be diverted.” 1 Timothy 4:16.

Consider. Is God speaking to me personally in any of these counsels?

Solutions from the Word

Hallelujah—God provides solutions! The New Testament is full of practical safeguards, including this one: “Don’t appoint people to church leadership positions too hastily.” 1 Timothy 5:22.

- ➔ **Be personally “dead and buried”**—only then can you grow and reproduce. John 12:24–26.
- ➔ **Travel on one track together**—with humility, discipline, unity, rhythm, efficiency, grace, and maturity. Ephesians 4:1–6, 13.
- ➔ **Observe God-given qualifications** for ministry roles. 1 Timothy 3:1–12; Titus 1:5–9.



- ➔ **Practice consistent personal discipline**—like soldiers, athletes, farmers. 2 Timothy 2:4–7.



How can we relate to criticism?

The most important thing to remember about criticism is that Jesus received it all the time. Some saw his gifting, then went away furious and sputtering. Some expressed how impressed they were—then in their next breath, cut him down. Jesus’ own parents and siblings were at times hurt, upset, unimpressed, or unconvinced. Matthew 12:13–14; 13:54–58; Mark 3:21–22; 5:17; Luke 2:47–50; John 7:5.

It’s not hard to find unfounded fury, sputtering, skepticism, and criticism in the church of early times, and in the church of today—often related to discipleship, gifting, and ministry.

As soon as the Holy Spirit was poured out, suspicious minds demanded, “What’s going on here?” Acts 2:12; 5:24. In answer, the wisdom of Gamaliel stands like a beaming lighthouse: “If this program or this work is merely human, it will fall apart, but if it is of God, there is nothing you can do about it—and you better not be found fighting against God!” Acts 5:38–39; also see Acts 23:9.

Excellent counsel, good for the church today.

It would be nice if problems came only from the unconverted. Then we could put all those people in a box with a label, and take no notice. But there’s shocking news—upsets and disputes can occur among the Spirit-filled. Paul and Barnabas—close friends and colleagues most of the time—fell into sharp disagreement on a practical ministry decision. “Tempers flared, and they ended up going their separate ways.” Acts 15:36–41; Galatians 2:11–13.

The love challenge

God has a simple, beautiful answer, and it lies in 1 Corinthians 13. Yes—this is “the love chapter”, the chapter we love to love. We love it at weddings. We love it at cosy gatherings. We love it in private meditation. We love it as poetry.

But when the Spirit gave this dramatic piece of literature to Paul, it wasn’t intended to make its readers feel good. 1 Corinthians 13 lies in the

setting of 1 Corinthians 11, 12, and 14—where Paul had to do some solid teaching to keep the church at Corinth from falling apart over immaturity and disputes surrounding gifting and worship.

The love chapter was an emphatic challenge to a spirit of pride, competition, division, distraction, and abuse in the church. It was written to get a dysfunctional congregation on its knees in confession, before a compassionate God.

Assignment. Read 1 Corinthians 13, as if for the first time. Don’t think weddings—think church! Ask yourself these questions. . . .

- ➔ How does the congregation of which I’m a part measure up to the description of this chapter?

- ➔ How do I personally stand, in my relationships over the past year? _____

- ➔ Why is love even more important in a church than gifting, and higher than faith and hope?

- ➔ For the next 12 months or so, how can I co-operate with God to help bring more of the spirit of 1 Corinthians 13 into the congregation of which I’m a part? _____

The leadership challenge

Leaders attract criticism because they lead. Poor leaders receive criticism, good leaders too. Children pick up on a spirit of criticism in their home or congregation. They believe the criticism, then we wonder why they don’t grow up to love their church. God’s alternative is marvellous. . . .

- ➔ “Appreciate your pastoral leaders who gave you the Word of God. . . . Be responsive to your pastoral leaders.



Listen to their counsel. They are alert to the condition of your lives and work under the strict supervision of God.

Contribute to the joy of their leadership, not its drudgery. Why would you want to make things harder for them? Pray for us. We have no doubts about what we’re doing or why, but it’s hard going and we need your prayers.” Hebrews 13:7, 17–18.

- ➔ “Love suffers long and is kind . . . does not envy . . . does not behave rudely . . . does not seek its own . . . thinks no evil . . . bears all things.” 1 Corinthians 13:4–7, NKJV. Praise God!



How can we be true to our calling?

Jesus used a graphic word picture to describe the “hazardous work” assigned to his disciples. “You’re going to be like sheep running through a wolf pack,” he said. Imagine this! His advice: Be at the same time cunning like a snake, and inoffensive like a dove. Matthew 10:16. Now that’s a balance.

Jesus mentioned the verbal abuse he suffered through his ministry; and amazingly, he encouraged his followers to “be content—pleased, even” when they suffered the same. “Don’t be intimidated. Eventually everything is going to be out in the open. . . . Don’t be bluffed into silence by the threats of bullies. There’s nothing they can do to your soul, your core being.” Matthew 10:25–28.

- ➔ **Consider.** Am I secure in my “core being”? Am I resting in Christ my Protector, no matter what? _____

The character we bring

Critical subject: The character we bring to our gifting. If we become intoxicated with our status or influence, it’s easy to assert ourselves beyond our “proper size” and “proper place” in the body of Christ, the church. Paul says we can morph into a monster—one big “eye”, one huge “ear”, one humongous “hand”! *Ugly*. 1 Corinthians 12:17–20.

Self-important “eyes”, “ears”, or “hands” become spiritual bullies—abusers. They tend to see things through a narrow lens restricted to their interpretation of policy and procedure, rather than comprehensively through the expansive lens of God’s Word, the ministry of Christ, and the working of the Spirit.



Paul was as rigorous as anyone for truth and order. But he equally understood the “wide-open, spacious life” given by Christ. “So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding.” 2 Corinthians 6:11; Colossians 1:19.

What is spiritual abuse?

- ➔ Spiritual abuse happens when we convey the authority of God without the compassion of God—pouring on the guilt, but not pouring out the love. 2 Corinthians 2:7–8. “Work with a smile on your face,” said Paul. He insisted that even those with authority over servants produce no abuse, no threats. Ephesians 6:7, 9.
- ➔ Spiritual abuse happens when we take our own strong opinions and put them across as the voice of God; when we generate more and more rules for others in response to lack of spirituality; when we set up our gifting as a god to be admired and followed; when the presence of Jesus and his Spirit gets lost in a maze of religious machinery or endless points of discussion. If you’d like examples, read Matthew 23, with tears, understanding that spiritual abuse put our Lord on the Cross.
- ➔ Spiritual abuse is in the same general category as verbal abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse—because it is *abuse*. “Those who use and abuse each other . . . don’t qualify as citizens in God’s kingdom.” But praise God—even abusers can be cleaned up and given a fresh start through our Master Jesus and his gift of the Spirit. 1 Corinthians 6:9–11.

“Stay at your post”

How do we relate to people who urge us into specific ministries for which we do not believe we are called or gifted? First, bless them. Second, ignore their urging. Wish them well, pray for them, affirm with God your own calling and gifting, and walk away with peace in Christ, refusing to take on a load of unearned guilt.

- ➔ Paul says, if you teach, then teach! If you help, then help! Don’t be distracted into roles God assigns to others. You are an “excellently formed and marvelously functioning” part of Christ’s body. If you are a “toe”, be the most effective “toe” you can be! Don’t let someone try to turn you into a “stomach”. “Each of us finds our meaning and function as part of his body. . . . Let’s just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without . . . trying to be something we aren’t.” Romans 12:4–7.
- ➔ The first apostles declined to be distracted from their two primary ministries. Paul refused to barge in on the assignments of others. He instructed Timothy to stay at his post, sticking with his three primary gifts. Acts 6:1–4; 2 Corinthians 10:15; 1 Timothy 4:13. *Calling and focus*. It’s the best and happiest way to serve.



What about those challenging gifts?

Here are some comments—necessarily brief—on three gifts that might challenge our understanding.

Prophecy

Paul placed prophecy higher in importance than other gifts—and he encouraged the church to especially desire this gift. 1 Corinthians 14:1.

The Spirit gift of prophecy has at its heart a direct line of teaching from God, which translates into warnings about the present and the future. The early church prophet Agabus, for example, was told by the Spirit about a coming famine. Acts 11:27–28. Agabus was one member of a group of prophets—it seems to have been a common gift. Just in case we need reminder, women and young people were specifically included in the prophecy gifting, as in the gifts in general. Acts 2:17; 21:8–9.

When we look at the lives and stories of prophets, we see a broad range of courageous and visionary proclamation about truth, destiny, world events, and godly living—the Spirit of Jesus driving it all. Revelation 19:10. Comfort and compassion accompany prophetic warnings.

Prophecy is not an easy gift to handle. The prophets of history suffered for the God they served. Prophecy assumes an increasingly urgent role as the return of Jesus draws near. Revelation 1:3; 22:7, 10.

Healing

Jesus provided a full range of healing—mental, emotional, physical, spiritual. Matthew 4:24. And the work of the apostles included a prominent ministry of healing. Acts 5:12, 15; 19:11–12.

In harmony with the Old Testament use of oil to symbolise significant actions of the Spirit, the disciples often used anointing oil when they ministered healing for the sick. James reinforces this practice for the Christian church. Mark 6:13; James 5:14–18.

Don't overlook what James talks about right before his instruction about healing—the value of

patience and perseverance in suffering. As the Job saga reminds us, it's important to keep in mind what the Lord will *finally* bring about—believing that in every personal crisis, the Lord is full of compassion and mercy. James 5:10–11.

God always heals those who put faith in him. Psalm 103:1–6. In our own time we find that sometimes we're blessed with healing that comes immediately, or in short order. Other times we're blessed with healing that comes over a brief course of time. And always by promise, we're blessed with final healing that comes with the new Heaven and the new Earth. Revelation 21:1–5.

Most of us do not see ourselves as healers. That's a good thing, so the glory goes to God and not to us. But if we could see ourselves as God views us, we might recognise that time after time, we've been used as agents of the Holy Spirit to convey mental, emotional, physical, or spiritual healing to people around us. In momentous times like the Exodus and the ministries of Elijah, Jesus, and the apostles, healings were often dramatic. Now, whether dramatically or quietly, God continues his gift of healing for those who put faith in him.

Tongues

A complex subject—with tiny space available here. Most important: See tongues as a gift of *communication*. The human tongue signifies speech, proclamation, message-sharing. We need gifts of communication. Pray that our own tongues will be freed by the Spirit to speak plainly about Jesus! Mark 7:32–35.

At Pentecost, the Spirit came as tongues of fire. What followed was an explosion of the Gospel, as foreigners heard the message in their native languages. This was a miracle of evangelism that jump-started the Christian church. Acts 2:1–11.

Later, the gift took on different characteristics. At Corinth, it may have transitioned into a mysterious language of Heaven and of angels, that deepened experience and became a channel of interpreted messages from God. See 1 Corinthians 13:1, and chapter 14. Bible commentators are divided on this. While a genuine gift, tongues produced unfortunate disruption as practiced in Corinth.

Note that no Spirit gift—including tongues—can be regarded as the evidence of genuine faith. See page 11 of this guide, for scriptures that



describe the evidence of discipleship.

However it comes, let's pray for the Spirit's enabling to *communicate* with and for God!



window twenty-four

When may we expect the power?

Final reading. . . The following is a selection from “The Gift of the Spirit”, chapter 5 of the book Acts of the Apostles, by Ellen G White. (Headings on this page are not in the original chapter, but are supplied.)

Human lives as signs and wonders

“The promise of the Holy Spirit is not limited to any age or to any race. Christ declared that the divine influence of His Spirit was to be with His followers unto the end. From the Day of Pentecost to the present time, the Comforter has been sent to all who have yielded themselves fully to the Lord and to His service. To all who have accepted Christ as a personal Savior, the Holy Spirit has come as a counselor, sanctifier, guide, and witness. . . . The men and women who through the long centuries of persecution and trial enjoyed a large measure of the presence of the Spirit in their lives, have stood as signs and wonders in the world.”

All can be filled with God’s Spirit

“The lapse of time has wrought no change in Christ’s parting promise to send the Holy Spirit as His representative. It is not because of any restriction on the part of God that the riches of His grace do not flow earthward to men. If the fulfillment of the promise is not seen as it might be, it is because the promise is not appreciated as it should be. If all were willing, all would be filled with the Spirit. Wherever the need of the Holy Spirit is a matter little thought of, there is seen spiritual drought, spiritual darkness, spiritual declension and death. Whenever minor matters occupy the attention, the divine power which is necessary for the growth and prosperity of the church, and which would

My prayer and blessing for you ...

Lord, bless this disciple as he or she launches into a fresh phase of Spirit-filled service! May this believer soar gracefully in response to God’s Son, receiving—and putting into service—gift after gift after gift. Praise God! Amen. EG

bring all other blessings in its train, is lacking, though offered in infinite plenitude.

“Since this is the means by which we are to receive power, why do we not hunger and thirst for the gift of the Spirit? Why do we not talk of it, pray for it, and preach concerning it? The Lord is more willing to give the Holy Spirit to those who serve Him than parents are to give good gifts to their children. For the daily baptism of the Spirit every worker should offer his petition to God. Companies of Christian workers should gather to ask for special help, for heavenly wisdom, that they may know how to plan and execute wisely. Especially should they pray that God will baptize His chosen ambassadors in mission fields with a rich measure of His Spirit. The presence of the Spirit with God’s workers will give the proclamation of truth a power that not all the honor or glory of the world could give.”

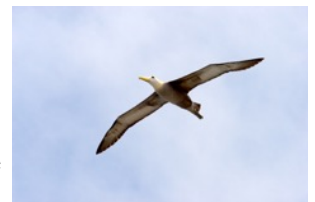
Pray for an outpouring

“It is true that in the time of the end, when God’s work in the earth is closing, the earnest efforts put forth by consecrated believers under the guidance of the Holy Spirit are to be accompanied by special tokens of divine favor. Under the figure of the early and the latter rain, that falls in Eastern lands at seedtime and harvest, the Hebrew prophets foretold the bestowal of spiritual grace in extraordinary measure upon God’s church. The outpouring of the Spirit in the days of the apostles was the beginning of the early, or former, rain, and glorious was the result. . . .

“But near the close of earth’s harvest, a special bestowal of spiritual grace is promised to prepare the church for the coming of the Son of man. This outpouring of the Spirit is likened to the falling of the latter rain; and it is for this added power that Christians are to send their petitions to the Lord of the harvest “in the time of the latter rain.”

Fresh grace, daily power

“Those only who are constantly receiving fresh supplies of grace, will have power proportionate to their daily need and their ability to use that power. Instead of looking forward to some future time when, through a special endowment of spiritual power, they will receive a miraculous fitting up for soul winning, they are yielding themselves daily to God, that He may make them vessels meet for His use. Daily they are improving the opportunities for service that lie within their reach. Daily they are witnessing for the Master wherever they may be.”



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