

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church / January 3, 2021 / Pastor Jeff Harrison
Equipping Message

Discovering Spiritual Gifts, Part 2 (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, 1 Peter 4)

Resolutions and spiritual gifts

Happy New Year! At New Years, many think about resolutions. We've had so many challenges in 2020, and there are so many needs, that perhaps in 2021 you really want to make a difference here in our church and community.

Or because of 2020's challenges, maybe some of your relationships aren't as connected, and so in 2021 you really want to grow your relationships, being built up and encouraged by others as you build up and encourage people here too.

Or through 2020's challenges, maybe you grew more distracted and distant with God, and so in 2021 you want to experience more of God's love, as well as Him working through you.

If any of those resolutions resonate with you, then this is a great Sunday to be here as we continue exploring the topic of spiritual gifts. There are many differing perspectives and experiences with spiritual gifts. So like last Sunday, if you have any disagreements or complaints about what I share, send those to Dave@nwchurch.org, and Pastor Dave while on vacation today will be glad to immediately address your concerns. ☺

I'm just kidding, I'm glad to engage if you'd like to explore spiritual gifts together. It was great getting to connect with some of you this past week, and helpful as I thought about today.

Brief review

Last Sunday we saw that God's Spirit gives His people spiritual gifts. They can be enrichments of already given abilities you had before following Jesus, or new capabilities. Either way, God's Spirit is now working through you in these gifts to impact others.

Like the individual parts of a human body, we all have functions and we need each other's gifts here in Christ's body to build up this church and to represent Jesus to our community.

And with spiritual gifts, we also saw last Sunday that love is essential. Without love, we'll get caught up in prideful comparison of gifts, selfish use of our gifts, refusing to serve in areas where we aren't gifted, and judging and having conflict with people with different gifts and ministry passions.

Then finally we discussed two things to help you discover your spiritual gift. First, prayerfully study the biblical teaching on spiritual gifts, which we're continuing today.

Second, try serving in various ways, paying attention to the input and the impact that emerges as you serve. The kinds of input you receive from others and are drawn to seek out are clues to how God is working through you. And the kinds of impact that you have on others and that you personally experience are also clues to God's gifting in you.

Preliminary thoughts

With that review complete, if you've got a Bible or Bible app, open to the New Testament book of Romans chapter 12. If not, no worries, we'll have the verses on the screen. If you're new to reading the Bible, the big numbers are chapter numbers and the little numbers are verse numbers.

God's Word says that every believer is a gifted one, and so this morning we're going to cover each of the spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament gift passages, which are Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4.

Let's look now at Romans chapter 12 verses 6-8, on spiritual gifts. **(6-8)**

⁶We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

In verses 6-8 we see some spiritual gifts listed: prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, and showing mercy. If you compare this gift list here in Romans 12 with the gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4, you'll notice that there's some overlap, but also that the gifts listed in each passage varies.

Because of this variety, some think the gift lists in these four passages are not exhaustive, but rather common examples of spiritual gifts. So some add to the list things like artistic gifts, based on Exodus chapter 31, where a man is filled by the Spirit with artisan gifts to lead the tabernacle preparation. And some add the gift of hospitality, because it's commanded near two of the spiritual gift lists. So the point is that it's possible there are additional spiritual gifts beyond the ones we'll cover today.

But now let's dive in and cover the gifts listed in the four passages. Rather than go through each passage one by one, we'll instead cover the gifts in categories, with each gift we cover being found in at least one of the four spiritual gift passages.

The three categories for the gifts come from Dr. Robert Clinton from Fuller Seminary, who has studied a great deal on spiritual gifts and Christian leaders.¹

Love Gifts

Dr. Clinton categorizes the spiritual gifts into love, power, and word gifts. The love gifts are used by God to demonstrate His love as God works through His people. They manifest God's love in practical ways to all people.

Some people who do not yet know God need to experience God's love at work through His people to be opened up to God. The love gifts include the spiritual gifts of helps, mercy, giving, and administration.

For each spiritual gift we'll describe the gift with assistance from Dr. Clinton's work, and then briefly talk about some inputs and impacts you may experience if you have that gift.

As we're going through, note any gift that resonates with you, keeping in mind that you don't necessarily have to experience every input and impact I describe to have a gift. As we begin, let me pray that God would use this time to further clarify how He's gifted each of us...

Helps – The first spiritual gift we'll cover is helps, sometimes called service. This spiritual gift can be expressed through meeting practical needs both inside and outside of the church, both in simple ways and in areas where you have a unique talent or skill. A church needs many with this gift to thrive and show God's love to the community.

If you have helps, you may feel a supernatural desire to help others, and may find God's joy in helping the church or individual people in practical ways. You may enjoy serving behind the scenes, feeling no need to receive public credit.

You may be told that you have a talent to see how service is needed and find yourself jumping in to meet those needs before even being asked. You may be bothered by seeing people at church sitting on the sidelines for an extended period, not jumping in to help with the needs. And you may hear, "I don't know what this ministry would do without your help."

¹ Everything from Dr. Clinton in the message is found in his book *The Making of a Leader*, 2nd edition.

Mercy – The next gift is mercy. Those with this gift manifest God’s empathy and compassion for those who suffer, and comfort and serve those in distress in God’s power. Like with helps, those with a mercy gift may have more capacity to help people than a typical person does, but should still seek to discern who God is leading them to help so that they don’t take on too much.

If you have mercy, you may be drawn to broken people and situations that others feel uncomfortable with and want to avoid. You may feel the closeness of God when ministering to people in pain. You may find that people talk with you about their problems, even strangers as you wait in line for coffee.

Others may share that you just knew how to help when they were hurting: when to listen, when to serve, when to share a merciful word. Your heart may just go out to all who suffer, and perhaps especially to a specific group, like those experiencing racism, or parents who have lost a child. And you may be really bothered when others seem uninterested in helping these hurting people or say something insensitive to them.

Giving – The next gift is giving. Those with this gift manifest God’s generosity as they generously give financially to God’s kingdom work and to those in need.

If you have this gift, you may feel God’s joy when you give, excited to share with others from the blessings God has given you. Even though you’re already giving generously to our church and multiple missionaries, you may still be pumped when a new missionary invites you to give, rather than stressed by yet another financial request.

You may think Christians shouldn’t teach on the tithe, since it’s not commanded in the New Testament and limits people’s focus to only giving 10%. And you may struggle to understand why other Christians wouldn’t say “only” 10%, like you just did. 😊

Others may ask you to show them how to effectively manage their finances. You may enjoy managing yours not to maximize your savings, but so you can consistently give and be able to give in new ways as God prompts. In some cases, those with this gift are also given by God the ability to make a large income.

Administration – Next is administration, sometimes called governments or guidance. Those with this gift are given divine strength and ability to skillfully organize tasks or people, freeing others to use their gifts and succeed because of your planning.

Like we talked about last Sunday, you may have this gift if you join a ministry and either think “I’m glad we’re organized” or “Why can’t we get more organized around here!?” You may find joy in helping the people or the systems and process involved in a ministry to get more organized to fulfill the ministry’s mission.

People may say you’re good with details and thinking through the steps needed to reach a goal, or people may look to you to implement plans or to serve in roles like with the finance committee. Occasionally someone thank you for your willingness and ability to do the hard work of planning well.

So those are the love gifts: helps, mercy, giving, and administration. Recently Pastor Roderick Barnes preached here at Northwest out of Acts chapter 6, where Deacons distributed resources to widows in need. Those Deacons likely had one or more of these love gifts operating.

So, does anyone here, or at home, think you might have any of these love gifts? If so, we praise God for you, because we and our community need God working through you to show His love.

Power gifts

The next category is power gifts, which Dr. Clinton describes as demonstrating the credibility, power, and reality of the unseen God. Some who do not yet identify as followers of God need to experience God’s power at work through His people to be opened up to relationship with God. The power gifts include miracles, healing, faith, tongues, interpretation of tongues, and discernment of spirits.

This seems like a good time to mention again Dave@nwchurch.org for any disagreements or complaints. ☺ If you think from your understanding of Scripture and experience that a specific power gift no longer operates today, no worries, we’re just doing brief explanations, so we’ll be past it in no time.

Miracles and healing – The first two we’ll look at are the gift of miracles, sometimes called power, and the gift of healing. Miracles include divine power for things like casting out demons and changing the natural order and healings is divine power for healing.

Looking at the lives of the Apostles, they couldn’t always do the miraculous or heal. So people with these gifts should recognize that these gifts are subject to God’s will and seek to be sensitive to God’s working.

It’s also appropriate for a church’s Elders and people who don’t have these gifts to pray for God to do the miraculous, leaving it in God’s hands how He will answer our prayers.

You may have one or both of these gifts if you have an unusual ability to sense God’s power at work, or that God sometimes uniquely releases His power through you to authenticate His message or to set people free. You may have the gift of healing if you have a deep desire to see God alleviate physical problems and believe that He wants to heal and pray for the sick regularly, sometimes seeing powerful results to those prayers.

Faith – Next is the gift of faith. This is more than the faith that Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead that every Christian has. The gift of faith is a unique, divinely given capacity to sometimes recognize what God intends to do and to trust Him for it until He brings it to pass, no matter how difficult.

The gift of faith is often expressed through praying for the things that God has given you faith to believe, and so some people talk about a gift of intercession in connection with faith. If you have the gift of faith, you may spend a lot of time in prayer, especially praying for things that you’re confident that God wants to bring to pass, perhaps in the life of someone you know, or in a nation you pray regularly for.

You may find that the Spirit brings to mind situations or people and prompts you to pray for them right then, sometimes later discovering why prayer was important in that moment. You may be the kind of person who enjoys praying through every name in the church directory. Others may describe you as a “prayer warrior” or as having a resilient faith. And you may get frustrated when others don’t share your expectation that God will move.

Tongues & interpretation of tongues – The next two gifts are tongues and interpretation of tongues. Looking at Scripture, tongues can be the divinely given ability to speak a language you

haven't learned so someone can hear the gospel or as a sign authenticating a new group coming to faith in Jesus; or tongues can be an utterance from God in an unknown language to encourage your personal relationship with God.

1 Corinthians says these utterances from God should only be done when the church gathers if there is someone present with the gift to interpret tongues, so that the entire body will be edified through the message. Interpreting tongues is the divinely given ability to interpret a message given in an unknown language.

Tongues is a spiritual gift, and no one has all the gifts, so it's wrong when people teach that you don't know Jesus if you don't speak in tongues. If you speak in unknown languages or can interpret when others speak in tongues, then you probably have these gifts.

Discernment of spirits – Next is discernment of spirits, sometimes called distinguishing between spirits. Those with this gift have a God given sensitivity to truth and error or to when good or evil spiritual forces are at work, using this gifting to protect the church.

If you have this gift, you may quickly sense false teaching or a false prophet and feel a strong desire to protect the church from them. You may be able to discern before others when God or when evil forces are at work in a room. You may be able to discern quickly when someone is acting like they're godly but really has bad motives or is in habitual sin.

You may also seek God's discernment on what to do with what He reveals to you, whether you are just to watch out, or to pray or take other action in response. Others may describe you as spiritually sensitive, or as insightful, or as really concerned about false teaching.

So those are the power gifts: miracles, healing, faith, tongues, interpretation of tongues, and discernment of spirits. If go through the Apostle Paul's life in the New Testament, you'll see him at points exercising many of these power gifts.

So does anyone here, or at home, think you might have any of these power gifts? If so, we praise God for you because we and our community need God working through you to display our unseen God.

Word gifts

A few of the spiritual gifts in the final category, which is words, can also be placed in the power category. Dr. Clinton defines word gifts as those gifts used by God to reveal truth about

Himself and His purposes that edify people and instill hope concerning God's present and future activity. They communicate about God and for God.

And some people who don't yet identify as God's followers need to experience God communicating through His people to help clarify Who God is and start a relationship with Him.

The word gifts are apostle, leadership, prophecy, shepherding, teaching, exhortation, words of knowledge and of wisdom, and evangelism.

Apostle – So the office of apostle was held by a few in the time of Jesus, but the gift of apostle continues today. It is the God given strength and ability to do things like start new ministries, plant churches, or be sent across cultures to establish gospel witness.

If you have this gift, you may find yourself often being a leader of leaders, perhaps at a large institution or in more than one ministry or place. You may feel dissatisfied when not in the lead role and may be drawn to pioneering new things and taking big risks to reach people for Jesus.

You may desire to go to places where there is little or no gospel witness, and others may describe you as a visionary pioneer or as having an entrepreneurial spirit. Pastor Manuel's dad has this gift, having planted and led over the years about 20 churches in Chile.

Leadership – The next gift is leadership, which is the God given capacity and responsibility to influence a specific group of people toward God's purposes for the group.

If you have this gift, you may find yourself often influencing others and being asked to lead. You may experience God giving you a big picture vision for what He wants to accomplish through a group of His followers and a desire to influence the group in that direction. Others may describe you as being good at winning over and motivating others, or as being good in a crisis. You may get frustrated by seeing someone leading poorly and may come alive when you get to care for and lead people.

Dr. Clinton found that those with the gifts of apostleship or leadership almost always have one or more additional word-based spiritual gifts that further help them in influencing others towards God's purposes as they lead.

Prophecy – The next gift is prophecy. Those with this gift have a God given capacity to express truth of a predictive, explanatory, or corrective nature from God. God works through this gift to admonish, edify, and correct people. The New Testament gift of prophecy is not on par with Scripture, so God’s Word says it is to be tested.

If you have this gift, you may feel comfortable with and even want to deliver challenging truths in public contexts. You may be discerning, able to clearly see what is right and wrong, and may feel burdened to make people aware of their sin in the hopes they will repent.

You may love sharing a word that shows those who do not yet identify as God’s followers about God’s existence and truth. You may resonate with the idea that God often gives specific messages for specific situations. Others may describe you as a bold preacher or no-nonsense truth teller or as insightful about what consequences will come if changes aren’t made.

Shepherding – The next gift is shepherding, sometimes described as pastoring. Those with this gift are empowered by God to influence a group by caring for, nurturing, edifying, and directing them in God’s ways.

If you have this gift, you may feel a sense of long term responsibility from God to care for a specific group of people, showing them concern and encouraging their spiritual growth.

You may really like Jesus’ story of leaving the 99 who were fine to help the one in need. Others may describe you as relational and caring but also willing to warn when needed. Others may describe you as a good model of the Christian life. If you have this gift, you might be known by the name of Dave Smith ☺ though someone does not have to serve in a pastoral role to have this gift. And often people with shepherding gifts also have our next gift, teaching.

Teaching – Teaching refers to the God-given capacity to express God’s truth in ways that clarify, explain, and expose it so that it can be understood and applied to life.

If you have this gift, you may be energized by, or at least willing, to spend the time to study God’s Word. You may come alive explaining God’s Word through speaking up front, or leading small group conversations, or one-on-one, or in writing. You may like teaching God’s Word to any age or group, or have a specific age or group where you have more fun and effectiveness teaching.

As we talked about last Sunday, you may have a theological “Spidey sense” that goes off when someone uses a Bible verse incorrectly. And you may have higher standards for teaching than others, being bothered when Bible teaching isn’t totally correct or clear. Others may say that you help them to understand God’s Word or encourage them to study the Bible more.

Exhortation – Next is exhortation, sometimes called encouragement. This gift is the God-given ability to encourage and comfort people through application of scriptural truth, or to urge people to action in applying scriptural truth to their lives.

If you have this gift, you may get excited about sharing with others how to live out their faith, motivating them to work out God’s truth in their everyday life. If you teach, your teaching may be characterized more by “how to”, application than by explanation. In a counseling role you might be good at comforting others in their pain with your words or helping others to see what they should do next.

Others may tell you that your words really encouraged their faith when they were struggling, or that something you shared helped them see how to live out their faith in a practical way. You may be bothered by seeing people discourage others or wish people would encourage you in the ways that you encourage others. If you’re familiar with Acts, Barnabas is the classic example of this gift.

Words of knowledge and of wisdom – The next two gifts are words of knowledge and words of wisdom. Those with these gifts are gifted by God to know what God thinks about and wants to communicate in situations.

If you have one or both of these gifts, you may enjoy learning about the Bible and helping people see how to apply its wisdom to specific situations. You may really desire to help guide others away from unwise directions. Others may describe you as knowledgeable about Scripture, or as a wise person of insight.

You may also sometimes hear from God specific information about someone that helps you minister to that person, like God giving you a sense that someone is thinking about suicide, or God prompting you to recommend a specific book to someone that changes their life.

You also may sometimes hear God’s desired direction in a given situation, and be able to share that with others in a way that lessens confusion and prompts desire to follow God’s way.

Evangelism – Our final gift is evangelism. This is a God given capacity to influence others with the message of salvation in Jesus.

If you have this gift, you may have a burden to share the gospel and to pray for people who do not yet identify as followers of Jesus. You may be drawn to seek out and develop relationships with people who do not yet know Jesus, and may get frustrated with Christians too far in their “holy huddle” only with other Christians.

You may not experience the same nervousness and fear sharing about Jesus that others do. You may hear, “You’re so good at initiating spiritual conversations and sharing the gospel, I don’t know how you do it.” You may come alive sharing about Jesus in large groups, or small groups, or one-on-one, or all the above. And you may see multiple people come to faith in Jesus, finding deep joy in this.

So does anyone here, or at home, think you might have any of these word gifts? If so, we praise God for you, because we and our community need God working through you to share Who God is, what He’s doing, and what His will is for us.

Next Step

Now we’ve covered the spiritual gifts listed in the four New Testament gift passages. Well done, gold star for everybody. ☺ Hopefully this has helped you move towards greater clarity on what your gift or gifts might be.

If you know your spiritual gifts, like last Sunday, your next step is to exercise them. There’s nothing greater than knowing and serving Jesus, and we need your gifts for that pursuit. The fewer of us exercising our gifts, the weaker our church body will be. So our families, small groups, ministries, church, and community needs your gifts!

If instead you don’t yet know your gift or gifts, like last Sunday, your next step is to serve, paying attention to input and impact. Maybe what we’ve covered today has helped you narrow down where to explore serving. And remember, the Bible does not say you must know your gift before you can contribute.

At the beginning of last Sunday’s message, I mentioned having dinner with some folks who’ve been in church for some years and do not yet know their spiritual gifts. I can say confidently that each of them is already contributing in our church family, as gifted ones.

But think of how that impact could grow as they get more clarity on their gifting, and begin to cultivate those gifts, and learn from others with the same gifts, in all of it God working through them to bring about a growing fruitfulness and joyful purpose in their lives. One that blesses them, our church, and community as the very Spirit of God works through them, bringing impact that carries into eternity.

That sounds like a New Years resolution worth pursuing. Imagine the kingdom possibilities and Spirit power that could burst forth if all of us were to fully, lovingly exercise our spiritual gifts. So let's pray about that, and then Jack will come lead us in the Lord's Supper....