

The excitement was almost unbearable. Frank, a family friend, would be here any minute now. Nearly 20 minutes had passed since he had phoned to say he was on his way with our Christmas gifts. What would he bring this time? What would he bring for my sister? For me? All these questions went around inside my 8-year-old head. One thing was sure – Frank loved our family, and his gifts were a genuine expression of that love. Just being a member of the family meant that we each received a gift of Frank’s choosing – even our pet bird got a packet of seed!

The Nature Of The Gifts

Being a part of a family brings so many privileges. Belonging to the family of God is no exception. Because we’re in His family, we receive gifts which empower us to live and minister effectively. When we become Christians, we not only receive the Holy Spirit within us (1 Cor.3:16), but He brings gifts with Him, distributing them to us in the way He chooses (1 Cor.12:11), for the purpose of empowering us for ministry to the body of Christ (Eph.4:12).

empowered for ministry

CLEAR THINKING ABOUT SPIRITUAL GIFTS

By Florence MacKenzie

Most of the spiritual gifts are mentioned in the letters to the churches at Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus (Rom.12:6-8; 1 Cor.12:8-10; Eph.4:11). While this list might not be exhaustive, I have found it helpful to group these gifts into seven different packages: 1. *Directing God’s People* – administration, leadership, and apostleship; 2. *Communicating God’s Word* – evangelism, prophecy, and teaching; 3. *Understanding God’s Ways* – wisdom, knowledge, and distinguishing between spirits; 4. *Caring for God’s People* – encouragement, mercy, and pastoring; 5. *Supporting God’s People* – giving, helping, and serving; 6. *Demonstrating God’s Power* – faith, healing, and miracles; and 7. *Speaking God’s Language* – tongues and interpretation of tongues.

One person’s gift-mix might be made up of gifts from one particular package. Another might have gifts from more than one package.

There are many well-constructed questionnaires available which can be very helpful in identifying our spiritual gifts. However, we also need to consider our motives in wanting to discover what our gifts might be. Do we want to use the knowledge of our gifts to boost our self-esteem? Even worse, might we be interested in getting “one up” on others in the church? Let us be willing to accept with gratitude *whatever* gift the Spirit has given us for the good of others. We also need to pray for wisdom in discovering and developing our gifts. God will gladly answer prayers like that (Jas.1:5).

Another thing you might find helpful is whether other Christians affirm particular gifts in your life. Do they think you have the gift of evangelism, or mercy, or encouragement? Sometimes other Christians can assess our spiritual giftedness much better than we can.

The Source Of Power

As we exercise our spiritual gifts, we should do this with lives that are fully surrendered to the Holy Spirit. It’s sobering to realize that, even in the process of using the gifts He’s given us, we can still end up just “going through the motions” of ministry if we think we can do it on our own. Spiritual gifts are like power tools – they don’t work properly unless they’re plugged in.

Imagine trying to mix cake ingredients with an electric mixer that wasn’t plugged in! Your mixer might be the tops in kitchen gadgets, but without the power it won’t get the job done. The same is true in exercising our spiritual gifts. In order to achieve anything of eternal value, we need to make sure we are plugged into the divine power source. How do we do it? It’s as simple as A, B, C...

Appreciate the fact that power is available to you in the person of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and that this is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead (Eph.1:19-20). The more we invite the Holy Spirit to take increasing control of the various parts of our lives, the more *His* power will flow through us.

Be aware of short-circuits that can cut off the power supply. One of these is not facing up to sin in our lives by rationalizing wrong attitudes and practices. Only when we confess specific sin to God do we open the way for the power to be restored. Another short-circuit is not submitting to God for Him to use us as He wants. Pride, self-reliance, and downright self-promotion can leave us ministering in our own strength rather than in the power of the Spirit.

Cultivate close contact and communion with Jesus Christ (Jn.15:1-8). This passage of Scripture shows there is a vital connection between remaining in Christ and bearing fruit. This involves adoring, praising, thanking, worshipping, talking, listening, obeying, trusting, and staying in permanent close connection with Jesus. Of necessity, this means spending quantity as well as quality time with Him. We will then bear the fruit that the Spirit wants to produce in us.

The Way Of Love

Although spiritual gifts are the tools we need for effective ministry, they should never become more important than spiritual fruit. Without the fruit of a Christ-like character, we cannot use our gifts in a God-honoring way. One of the fruits in Gal.5:22,23 is love. It’s no coincidence that, in the middle of Paul’s discussion about spiritual gifts to the Corinthian church (1 Cor.12 and 14), there is that wonderful love chapter 13. This chapter shows us ‘the most excellent way’ to use our spiritual gifts – the way of love. Love is supremely important in the area of spiritual gifts, because without it jealousy, bickering, and division will soon take over. None of the spiritual gifts were meant to divide – their purpose is to build up the body of Christ, the Church.

When I was a child, I used to get very excited about Frank’s Christmas gifts. How much more exciting it is to receive spiritual gifts from God that I can use to serve Him and minister to others in His family! Now, that’s what I call living empowered for ministry!

Editor’s Note: We’ve included this article not only for your own personal use, but also to be used for training newer Christians.

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