

“A gift for me?”

I'll never forget the day I met Jorge! He came to my small group and I immediately sensed that he was special. We became close friends, and the synergy between us could be felt! We worked together perfectly, me with my strengths of encouragement and mercy, and he with his gifts of administration and teaching. Whenever we had group discussions, Jorge brought out facets of the lesson none of us had noticed, and his normal reticence to speak in front of people slowly melted away throughout our study. I poured my life and energy joyfully into Jorge, and was amazed at the person and man of God I saw emerge. After 3 sessions, I tapped him on the shoulder and told him he was ready! God had groomed and prepared him to lead his own group, and he could do it!

Welcome to session six, where we will talk about an exciting subject that will give you a blueprint for ministry: spiritual gifts! We all know God wants us to get busy for Him... but often that knowledge just results in guilt, as we don't know **how!** But by the time you leave here today, you won't feel guilt at not doing “enough” for God because of fear of failure, but you will see how exciting and fulfilling working within God's specific plan for **you** can be! Maybe you've heard the plea for nursery workers before your morning service and felt like, “Oh, I should do that! They seem so desperate for helpers!” but you have never enjoyed the baby stage and dirty diapers! Or maybe while enjoying the morning worship music and have pangs of guilt for not singing in the choir. Maybe you have wanted to work with teenagers, but instead of guilt, you have fears of failure. “What if they don't respect me and I'm not good enough?” Well, today you will be encouraged by some good news! You have been given gifts! The same God Who called you to work for Him has given you equipment! Who isn't excited to open gifts?? When you see them under the tree on Christmas morning, do you want to wait to open them out of fear of what may be inside? I didn't think so, so let's get to opening yours from the Greatest Giver of Gifts...your Creator!



Fellowship

1. What comes to your mind when you think of the words “spiritual gifts”?



Discipleship

Meeting new people and encouraging them when they are down has never been a problem for me. I love to stand at the door of the church and shake hands, handing out bulletins and listen to the stories of their lives. I love everything positive, and conflict makes me nervous. Whenever I sense that someone else is uncomfortable or sad, that makes me sad and uncomfortable! God, in His great sense of humor, has “blessed” me with people around me throughout the years who are direct opposites of me! They will tell it like it is even if it steps on peoples’ toes. They give out opinions freely while I cringe and stand ready to pick up the pieces if the other person seems offended. I feel like I must be watchman so that those “rude people” don’t hurt any feelings. I saw those “others” as obstacles to my goals of nurturing and positive affirmation! I even prayed for them that God would make them more like me! **THEN...**I learned about spiritual gifts!

First of all, what are spiritual gifts? Well, when we accepted Christ into our lives, right off, He blessed us with gifts! I love people like that: you meet them, and immediately they hand you a gift! Think of them as tools, or equipment, for your future role as a son or daughter of God. Just as you need a racquet for tennis or a club for golf, God is not going to send you out with a Great Commission to work for Him without something to work with! I wouldn’t tell my kids to sweep the kitchen floor with no broom, and God in the same way won’t tell us to do certain things for Him without equipping us.

But here’s point #2: Spiritual gifts are to be used alongside other peoples’ gifts--complimentary gifts! Paul explains it well in I Corinthians 12. He says how there are many different kinds of gifts...but they all come from God. Their purpose is to help others. And, just like the physical body has different “members”, the Church does too! I mean, who in their right mind would expect an eye to walk or an ear to see? Each part of the body has a different function...all for the good and health of the body. The parallel is a great one...and a great reliever of guilt, too! Verse 24 says,

“God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.”

As we can see, our gifts were created by God! It was His idea to make you how you are! Also, they were not created to be used alone! It’s not God’s plan to have stressed out and burned out Christians.

I saw a great example of gifts working together when a woman from our church had a high-risk pregnancy and was bed-ridden for the last 3 months! She had 3 active kids, a husband who worked long hours, and was devastated (and panicked!) by the news that she was only to leave the couch for 5 min. intervals for these 3 months! Thankfully, she had diverse friends! One with the gift of service took on the role of shuttling her kids to and from soccer practice and school; another with the gift of administration organized a rotating meal schedule among the other members with the gift of service. A woman filled with the gift of mercy came to just sit and talk and hold her hand when fear for her unborn baby seemed overwhelming. One man with the gift of giving donated money for a maid to come once/week to help the husband keep up with the household chores. This

is a perfect example of how we can rejoice in diversity! What if everyone only had the gift of mercy and wanted to come and hold her hand...and do nothing else? Where would the sense of encouragement be for the family? Wouldn't they just feel frustrated that people said they cared, but they could "see" it? But when we bring everyone together we see a job well done.

Thirdly, we need to accept *our* gifts and live how God has wired us. On Christmas morning, when we see our children open the gifts we've carefully selected for them according to their personalities and likes, how would we feel if they immediately looked to their sibling's gifts and said, "But what about *his*? I like *that* one!" We would be hurt and chagrined.

Along the same lines, spiritual gifts don't compete. This is God's work, and He gets to decide how He would like to use each one of us. A foreman at a construction site doesn't expect to hear arguments from his workers about how he would like to do someone else's job instead of his own. Building the church is God's construction site, not ours. If we truly believe it's all about Him, we won't compete, but rather rejoice when others succeed! I can welcome the people through the door of the church and do my part well, but when the pastor uses his gifts of exhortation and brings the message of salvation "home" I will feel nothing but satisfaction that our gifts worked together! Pastors don't have time to hand out bulletins and run out the door after church to give words of affirmation or meet every need of the members, so God has placed each of YOU there to work alongside Him.

How can you know what your spiritual gift is? There are, I believe, 4 key questions that will help you discover what they are. First of all, think back throughout your life to when your work has been *fruitful*. What work have you done in the past that bore results? Secondly, *what gives you energy and joy*? I feel like I could talk to people all day long and not tire of it. Working within your gifts will leave you feeling energized, not worn out and frustrated.

Thirdly, *what do your friends say* your strengths and gifts are?

Everyone has to start somewhere, and don't be afraid of what may SEEM like failure! Just get busy. Choose a ministry that appeals to you and soon you'll get a feel for what your spiritual gifts are. The only failure is in failing to try. We've been recruited to be part of the best army in the universe, with the equipment for assured victory! How's that for motivation?

2. In I Corinthians 12:4-7, why do you think Paul keeps repeating that all spiritual gifts come from the same spirit of God?

3. Verse 7 says that God gives spiritual gifts "for the common good". How will this affect the practicing of our individual gifts?

4. Read I Corinthians 12:14-26. What can we learn about spiritual gifts from the human body?

5. If all gifts are equally important, why is it so easy to feel we are less important or useful?



Ministry

6. What has kept you from jumping into ministry in the past?

7. How has your thinking changed in the last hour?



Evangelism

8. Take a moment to go around the group and share what strengths/gifts you sense in each of the other members. And meditate at home about how your gifts can be used to reach the lost.



Worship

9. Take time to pray for each other as we go out to use the equipment God has blessed us with. Afterwards, finalize your plans for the celebration next week.