

## Spiritual Gifts study paper

### BACKGROUND

The subject of spiritual gifts is mentioned a number of times in Scripture. However, the Church of God has not published, explained, defined or stated a public position on the subject in this modern era.

The Constitution of the United Church of God, an International Association, specifically acknowledges that God has given members spiritual gifts, but the subject is nowhere else mentioned or explained, nor has it been addressed in Church publications.

Note the following, which appears under Article 3, The Church (emphasis added):

#### **“3.2 FUNCTIONS WITHIN THE CHURCH**

“There is one body, the Church, which is a spiritual organism. The Church has many members, to each of whom God has bestowed a measure of faith through the Holy Spirit. Through that Spirit, our Father has made us one in the body of Christ, and, individually, members one of another. **He has given us gifts that differ according to His will and has entrusted His Spirit to each of us so that we might exercise those gifts with humility, gentleness and patience in submission, first to Jesus Christ, and then to one another.** By the establishment of this Constitution, we acknowledge the truth of Scripture that all members have a different function within the Church, and that it is our Father who determines each member's function within the Church.”

The vision statement approved by the Council of Elders and ratified by the General Conference of Elders in May 2012, while not specifically mentioning spiritual gifts, encourages every member of the Church to do his or her part in the efforts of the Church as it is joined and knit together and grows in love. It reads:

“The vision of the United Church of God is ‘A Church led by God’s Holy Spirit, joined and knit together by what every member supplies, with all doing their share and growing in love to fulfill God’s great purpose for humanity to bring many children to glory’ (Ephesians 4:16; Hebrews 2:10).”

This paper examines the Bible’s teaching on spiritual gifts through a series of key questions followed by answers from Scripture and other resources. It’s submitted in the hope that this or some other revised document can contribute to the formulation of an official position and teaching of the United Church of God, an International Association, on the subject of spiritual gifts.

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

### **What can the power of God's Holy Spirit do through and for us?**

1. It comforts and helps us (John 16:7).
2. It convicts people of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8-11).
3. It teaches us (John 14:26).
4. It produces fruit in us and through us (Galatians 5:22-23; John 15:5).
5. It empowers us to use the spiritual gifts God has given us (1 Corinthians 12:7-11).

### **Why do we need to know about spiritual gifts?**

1. We are told to be knowledgeable of them. The apostle Paul tells us, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant" (1 Corinthians 12:1). Paul made it clear to the Corinthians that understanding spiritual gifts would aid them in understanding the nature of the Church and their individual roles in it.
2. We are expected to use them. In 1 Timothy 4:14, young Timothy's spiritual mentor, Paul, tells him not to neglect the gift that is in him. What gift or gifts had Timothy been given? He had the gift of God's Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 1:6-7), he was ordained to the ministry by the laying on of hands of the eldership (1 Timothy 4:14) and had the gift of evangelism (2 Timothy 4:5).
3. As stewards over what God gives, we will be held accountable for the use of our gifts. Peter writes to the Church, "Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received" (1 Peter 4:10, New Revised Standard Version). Jesus Christ, in His parable in Matthew 25:14-30, plainly tells us that we are not to bury our "talents" but to multiply them, and those who fail to do so are condemned as unprofitable servants.

### **Why does God give spiritual gifts?**

1. *God gives spiritual gifts "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up"* (Ephesians 4:7-8, 12, New International Version, emphasis added throughout). The specific gifts noted in verse 11—"He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers"—are foundational gifts that lend support, stability and strength to the entire Church. The Church is strengthened, stabilized and taught by those who have received these gifts, with Christ Himself being the

chief cornerstone on whom the Church is built (Ephesians 2:20).

Certain gifts are recognized in combination with qualifications listed in Titus and Timothy and those individuals are ordained to the job, responsibility or duty of ministry. As Ephesians 4:12 tells us, these individuals are then expected to prepare and equip God's people for the function of ministry, which is "works of service." The purpose of the ministry (those chosen for that responsibility) are to prepare and equip the membership to *minister* (to *serve*, which is the meaning of the verb "minister") so that "every part does its share, caus[ing] growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:16).

2. *Spiritual gifts are given to build the body of Christ* (Ephesians 4:1-16). In the context of gifts, Paul discusses the ultimate outcome or goal of these gifts—that we "*grow up in all things into Him who is the Head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love*" (verses 15-16).

Peter explains that "Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God," we are to "serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received" (1 Peter 4:10). We are to use these gifts to serve one another within the body of Christ and to others outside that body as we have opportunity (Galatians 6:10).

*Note:* The word translated "edifying" in Ephesians 4:12 is *oikodome*, meaning "the act of building, building as a process, also that which is built, the building" (Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, 1992, p. 1031). Paul uses the same word in Ephesians 2:21 of "the whole building (*oikodome*), being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord." His point is that spiritual gifts are given to *build the house or spiritual temple of God* and are clearly related to the scriptural metaphors used to describe the Church or *ecclesia*—a body, building or temple God is building or working through.

3. *Spiritual gifts are given because God loves us.* Consider the nature of our Heavenly Father, whose attitude toward us is reflected in a father's attitude toward his son (Matthew 7:9-11). If a son asks for something of his father, his father will do everything in his power to provide it for him. If we, as physical parents (selfish by nature) know how to give good gifts to our own children, how much more will our Heavenly Father give good things to those who ask Him!

### **What are spiritual gifts?**

*The Anchor Bible Dictionary* defines spiritual gifts as "special gifts bestowed by God on individual members of the Christian community for the edification of the whole community" (1992, "Gifts, Spiritual," vol. 2, p. 1015).

*Commentary on the New Testament: Critical and Exegetical Hand-Book to the Epistles to the Corinthians* defines a spiritual gift as "any extraordinary faculty, which operated for the furtherance of the welfare of the Christian community, and which was itself wrought by the grace of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in special individuals, in accordance,

respectively, with the measure of their individual capacities, whether it were that the Spirit infused entirely new powers, or stimulated those already existing to higher power and activity [Romans 12:6]” (H.A.W. Meyer, 1890, comments on 1 Corinthians 12:4).

*Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* explains spiritual gifts as: “Special gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit upon Christians for the purpose of building up the church. The list of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 includes wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, speaking in tongues, and interpretation of tongues. Similar lists appear in Ephesians 4:7-13 and Romans 12:3-8” (1995, “Spiritual Gifts”).

Charles Swindoll, in his Bible Study Guide *He Gave Gifts*, states, “A spiritual gift is a skill or an ability that enables each Christian to perform a function in the Body of Christ with ease and effectiveness” (1998, p. iii).

The Greek word often translated “gifts” in reference to spiritual gifts is *charisma*, meaning “a gift of grace, an undeserved favor” (Zodhiates, p. 1471). It is closely related to *charis*, which means “a gracious favor or benefit bestowed” (Lawrence Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, 1985, “Grace”). Just as salvation is a free unmerited gift, so is *charisma*. These spiritual gifts were given to individuals by Jesus Christ after His death, but were not given because of anything the recipient had done to earn them. When referring to a gift for service to the body of Christ, a spiritual gift may be defined as a God-given ability, skill or talent used for serving others.

To summarize, spiritual gifts are God-given abilities or endowments that enable individual members of the body to make a significant contribution to the welfare, growth and development of the Body of Christ, just as our individual organs make significant contributions to the welfare, growth and development of our physical bodies. Spiritual gifts do not appear to be the same thing as natural talents, though they can be based on or enhancements of natural talents, aptitudes and abilities.

Spiritual gifts are given to members of the Church at some point following their baptism through the Holy Spirit, which also empowers their growth. However, it should be noted that the bestowing of spiritual gifts is apparently not limited to the New Testament period. In Exodus 31:1-6, God filled Bezalel with His Holy Spirit and gifted him “in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship” for the purpose of constructing the tabernacle in the wilderness. In the New Testament, God has given all the members of the body His gifts for the work of building the spiritual tabernacle or temple of God. Several passages indicate that gifts are given to each member according to God’s purpose and through His grace (1 Corinthians 12:7, 11, 18; 1 Peter 4:10).

### **What is the difference between talents, skills and spiritual gifts?**

Individuals can be talented in certain areas but this does not necessarily equate with spiritual gifts. The Bible speaks of spiritual gifts in the context of those who are part of the Church, the body of Christ. In other words, natural talents are with a person at birth and spiritual gifts are

given following baptism. Natural abilities, aptitudes and talents may be transformed and enhanced by the Holy Spirit to glorify God and edify others in the Church. Both natural talents and spiritual gifts are God-given and both can vary in degree and kind.

The following expresses some of these differences in table form:

NATURAL TALENTS	LEARNED SKILLS	SPIRITUAL GIFTS
<p>Given by God through parents</p> <p>Given at birth</p> <p>To benefit people in general</p> <p>Can be enhanced and developed by the individual</p>	<p>Learned by us</p> <p>Learned throughout life</p> <p>To benefit people in general</p> <p>Can be enhanced and developed by the individual</p>	<p>Given via God’s Spirit independent of parents</p> <p>Given following baptism at a time of God’s choosing</p> <p>To benefit the Church</p> <p>Natural and learned abilities can be enhanced by God’s Spirit</p>

**What is the difference between spiritual gifts and the fruit of the spirit?**

Both spiritual gifts and the fruit of the Spirit are necessary for us to be productive and effective members of the Church, the Body of Christ. Every Christian is expected to display all the fruit of the Holy Spirit, but every Christian is not expected to display every gift of the spirit.

To differentiate, we might say that the fruit of the Spirit is shown in what we *are* while spiritual gifts are shown in what we *do*. The fruit of the spirit are inward characteristics of a converted person’s heart and indicate what we should be. Spiritual gifts are task-oriented functions or roles that God has called and equipped individuals to perform. Spiritual gifts indicate what we do. **The fruit of the Spirit is essentially reflected in our attitudes. Spiritual gifts are aptitudes.**

The fruit of the Spirit are a natural byproduct of intimate close and obedient relationship with Christ. Spiritual gifts are given and developed when we become and grow as disciples of Christ. Obedience and submission to Christ will, over time, transform our selfish and sinful nature into a yielded nature that will evidence authentic fruit such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

*Both the fruit of the Spirit and spiritual gifts are necessary for us to effectively function as members of the body.* Spiritual gifts and the fruit of the Spirit both need to be developed. God is not as concerned with *what we do* as He is with *how we do it*. For example, if we use our spiritual gifts to the fullest but do not have love, we do not please God (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

The following expresses some of these differences in table form:

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT	SPIRITUAL GIFTS
<p>What we <i>are</i></p> <p>Attitudes (love, joy, peace, etc.)</p> <p>Byproduct of healthy relationship with God</p> <p>Necessary for effective service as a member of the body and for spiritual growth and development.</p>	<p>What we <i>do</i></p> <p>Aptitudes (service, helps, leadership, etc.)</p> <p>Supernatural endowment of God through the Holy Spirit</p> <p>Necessary for most effective service as a member of the body</p>

**What is the difference between spiritual gifts and spiritual disciplines?**

Each of us should be developing habits that keep us spiritually strong and healthy. These disciplines are activities that should be found in some measure in every one of Christ’s disciples.

Spiritual disciplines strengthen *the individual* while spiritual gifts strengthen *others*. These disciplines allow us to live in this world and yet not be conformed to it (Romans 12:2). Spiritual disciplines allow us to discern the will of God, receive the power and love of God and in turn reflect the fruit of His Spirit in our lives. They are significant habits for individual personal growth. Spiritual gifts are important contributions that strengthen and enable growth in others within the body of Christ. Spiritual disciplines allow us to *receive* grace and “grow in grace” (2 Peter 3:18). Spiritual gifts are specific ways we are able to *extend* the grace of God to others.

The following expresses some of these differences in table form:

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES	SPIRITUAL GIFTS
<p>Strengthens personal growth and devotion</p> <p>Develops devotion</p> <p>Examples: Prayer Study Fasting Tithing</p>	<p>Strengthens the entire Church</p> <p>Expresses devotion</p> <p>Examples: Teaching Knowledge Giving Exhortation</p>

**What is the difference between the ordained ministry and the spiritual gift of ministry?**

In Hebrews 6:2, listed among the basic doctrines of the Church, we find the “laying on of hands,” a setting apart for a specific purpose, as in receiving the gift of God’s Holy Spirit (Acts 8:18), anointing the sick (James 5:14), and the ordination of Timothy (1 Timothy 4:14). The “eldership” (or “body of elders,” NIV) confirmed the spiritual gift granted to Timothy by ordination. In fact, Paul himself was involved in Timothy’s ordination (2 Timothy 1:6). Paul instructed Titus to “appoint [“ordain,” KJV] elders in every city” (Titus 1:5).

In Acts 6, we find the record of the first deacons being chosen by the apostles in collaboration with the members of the congregation. Note that the members, based on criteria presented by the apostles, recommended several individuals (verses 3-5). Philip, who was later to become an evangelist (Acts 21:8), was among those chosen. How were these selections confirmed or established? The men selected were set before the apostles, who prayed over them and *laid hands* on them (verse 6). Those with the *office or function* of minister ordained others to that office and function.

The Church of God has consistently followed this biblical practice of ordination to specific service positions or roles within the body, and generally speaking, the ordination to the office or function of ministry has been a recognition of one’s spiritual gift in the areas of pastoring, shepherding, teaching, serving, etc.

Speaking to His 12 apostles (a spiritual gift as well as a ministerial role, Ephesians 4:11), who would form a portion of the foundation of the New Testament church (Ephesians 2:20), Jesus Christ made it clear that vying for the “top position” was unacceptable conduct for spiritual leaders or ministers (Matthew 20:25-28). It is apparent that Christ was discussing the *attitude*

necessary for Christian leadership, contrasting the correct approach to leadership with the attitude of gentile leaders.

A look at verses 26-27 noting the Greek words used makes this abundantly clear. “Yet it shall not be so among you; but whosoever desires to become *great* (*megas*, meaning “great, large, particularly of physical magnitude”—Zodhiates, p. 952) among you, let him be your *servant* (“minister” in the KJV, *diakonos*, meaning “a ‘servant,’ whether as doing servile work, or as an attendant rendering free service”—*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1985, “Deacon”). And whosoever desires to be *first* (*protos*, meaning “foremost, hence first, the first”—Zodhiates, p. 1248) among you, let him be your *slave* (*doulos*, meaning “a slave, one who is in a permanent relation of servitude to another”—Zodhiates, p. 483).

Christ said that the greatest or *chief* among them would be their *servant or slave*. He makes it clear that *the primary element of Christian leadership is service*.

God chose to bestow on men the spiritual gifts that prepared them to perform specific tasks relating to the leadership and organization of the Church or *ecclesia*. In the Church, just as in a physical body, there are systems, organs and functions designed to provide order, coordination, nourishment and growth to the entire body. The body’s head (the brain or mind) is the center of this activity, just as Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, directing various functions of the body through human instruments He has chosen, designated and gifted for that purpose. Their primary function is to *serve* the body in that capacity. (We will examine this in more detail later in this study.)

In a broader context, the Scripture also refers to serving or *ministering* (*diakoneo*, “to serve, wait upon, with emphasis on the work to be done and not on the relationship between lord and servant”—Zodhiates, p. 429). As 1 Peter 4:10-11 tells us: “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ . . .” Here we find that the act (as opposed to the office) of “ministry” or service is expected of all Christians. Service toward others can be accomplished in many different ways and does not require ordination. It is clearly a fundamental part of our Christian obligation.

The distinction between *office or role* and *action or function* is important to make as we examine the Scriptures in this regard. Some offices or roles may require ordination, others may not.

Bruce Bugby addresses this issue in his book *What You Do Best in the Body of Christ*: “There can be a relationship between gifts and ministry positions, but there is not necessarily a one-to-one correspondence. *Ministry titles indicate general roles; spiritual gifts indicate specific functions*. Sometimes individuals in the position of pastor do not have a spiritual gift of shepherding. As they pastor the church, they may be doing so primarily through their spiritual gift of leadership, mercy or administration . . . *Ministry titles indicate organizational positions; spiritual gifts indicate ministry contributions*” (1995, p. 66). When we confuse gifts with titles,



we can create unrealistic expectations of those serving in various positions. Knowing one's gift(s) will help him function more effectively no matter his position.

The following expresses some of these distinctions in table form:

“MINISTRY” SERVICE POSITION	SPIRITUAL GIFTS
General Roles  “Titles” of positions  Examples: Pastor Choir Director Sabbath School Director	Specific Function  Tasks to Perform  Examples: Evangelism Teaching Administration

**To whom are spiritual gifts distributed?**

Both Paul and Peter take it for granted that spiritual gifts are spread widely throughout the membership of the Church. Notice several passages where this assumption is understood and expressed:

“I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong” (Romans 1:11, NIV).

“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness” (Romans 12:6-8).

“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and [it] gives them to each one, just as [it] determines” (1 Corinthians 12:7-11, NIV).

“Do all have gifts of healings? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet, I show you a more excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:30-31).

“Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy” (1 Corinthians 14:1).

“Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church” (1 Corinthians 14:12, NIV).

“As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10).

### **How are spiritual gifts distributed?**

The distribution of gifts is totally under the direction of God the Father through His Son Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, and the power of God’s Holy Spirit. “But one and the same spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as [it] wills” (1 Corinthians 12:11).

Paul also writes: “It was he [Jesus Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11, NIV).

Yet there are certain characteristics that can be noted in regard to the distribution of gifts.

1. *Spiritual gifts are limited by the will of God.* The distribution of gifts is limited by the will of God. People can and do have a part in developing them, but the ultimate source of all gifts is God. He knows what is needed by the body of Christ and what gifts are the best fit for each individual’s role of service. Understanding this should motivate us to use the gifts God has given us to their fullest extent and keep us from complaining that we do not have the gifts God has given to others.
2. *Spiritual gifts are limited as to extent.* Although Scripture indicates that every member of the body has at least one spiritual gift (1 Peter 4:10), no individual has them all. Because no single individual has all the gifts, we need the various types of service each can give to others. Neither should we assume that each local church necessarily has all the spiritual gifts represented in the congregation. God knows what each congregation needs, distributes gifts accordingly, and is involved in building and developing the whole body or *ecclesia*.
3. *Spiritual gifts are limited as to time.* Just as every member does not have all of the gifts, it appears that every generation does not have all the gifts listed in Scripture. The foundational gifts of the apostles and the prophets (Ephesians 2:20) were abundant in the founding era of

the Church. They are obviously not as prevalent in our day. This is not to say that they cannot be or won't be again when the need arises and when God sees fit to give them in greater abundance. The Church still benefits today from the results of the gifts given in the early Church. The Scriptures also indicate that those who were contemporaries of Jesus Christ experienced certain miraculous gifts that were not experienced in the generation that followed Him (Hebrews 2:3-4). The Father endows the Church as He wills, and He knows exactly what each member, each congregation and each generation needs.

4. *Spiritual gifts are limited as to capacity.* The dynamics of aging, illness, injury, overall health and other factors can exert a limiting effect on the exercise of spiritual gifts.

### **Can spiritual gifts be developed?**

Let's discuss this question by examining Matthew 25:14-30 and the parable of the talents. An interesting parallel exists between the contextual meaning of "talents" in this portion of Scripture (money) and our modern use of the term to denote abilities or gifts. The man traveling to a far country is Jesus Christ. On his departure, he divides His goods among his servants "to each according to his own ability" (verse 15).

Christ apparently distributes spiritual gifts in a similar fashion, considering our innate or genetic abilities and disposition in the process. Both the Father and the Son are acutely aware of our individual strengths, weaknesses, attributes and proclivities and have chosen us and placed us in the body as They have seen fit (1 Corinthians 12:18).

Continuing in Jesus' parable, when the master of the servants returns, he demands an accounting. How had the three servants used their gifts or talents? Two of them were rewarded for doubling their talents and one was condemned for "burying" his—doing nothing with it. Discovering our spiritual gifts is one thing—*using them* and *multiplying (developing or using) them* is a crucial aspect of our responsibilities as Christians. The point of this parable is that *God expects us to use the talents and gifts He has given us*—and to neglect them will bring punishment. An obvious corollary of this is that the ordained ministers of the Church should help members develop and use their talents or gifts and not hinder that development.

Although God is the source of spiritual gifts, members may have a part in the development of their gifts. They may be ambitious regarding their gifts and do all that they can to serve the body or they may be neglectful and ignore or "bury" their gift(s). Paul tells the Corinthians to "earnestly desire the best gifts," then goes on to show them "a more excellent way"—that being the utilization of one's gifts on the basis of love or outgoing concern for others, reflecting the love of God toward others as well as exercising and building godly character (1 Corinthians 12:31).

God works through human beings with their desires, limitations, ambitions and ability to discipline themselves. In fact, notice what Hebrews 5:12 says to members of the Body of Christ, to people supposedly well-versed in the Scriptures: "For though by this time *you ought to be*

*teachers*, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.”

How long have members remained at the level of “students”? Is it not time for more to become teachers as well? How well have we used and applied the gift of spiritual revealed knowledge we have received? Have our pastors and teachers fully understood their obligation to create teachers out of students?

### **How can spiritual gifts be identified or discovered?**

Like many issues in this life, there are nearly opposite views held on the subject of spiritual gifts. Some believe there is no such thing, or that they are limited to the ordained ministry (points that are addressed earlier). Some feel that spiritual gifts were only given to the early Church and are irrelevant to the Church today. But if that were the case, why are gifts emphasized in letters to churches in several major cities of the Roman Empire (Romans, Ephesians, 1 Corinthians) written a generation—25 to 30 years—after the Church was founded in A.D. 31?

Also, in Ephesians 4:11-13 Paul states that the purpose for giving spiritual gifts was for the equipping and perfecting of the saints for the work of service to build the Body of Christ. If gifts were necessary to achieve those purposes in the past, why wouldn't they be necessary today?

Others hold the view that one must know his or her spiritual gift(s) before doing anything to serve God and the Church. When the apostles listed the qualifications for choosing their first helpers (Acts 6:1-4; only later would they be called deacons) no spiritual gifts were included. The qualifications were 1) male, 2) of good reputation, 3) Spirit-filled, and 4) wise.

Often it's in the very process of serving that spiritual gifts come to light. The process of discovering or identifying spiritual gifts and even natural talents, aptitudes and skills can be a multi-step, gradual process. Fundamental aptitudes, traits and characteristics have been identified and are measurable by using various assessment tools. There has long been interest in these concepts in the business world, where skill and personality assessment have been recognized as critical success factors in the workplace for decades. Some of these same tools can be used to help us identify our individual temperament, personality traits and special skills.

We may be oblivious as to what our spiritual gifts are. We may not even have the motivation or interest to discover our spiritual gifts. In a sense, we may be “sitting on a gold mine” and not even be aware of it! When we do begin searching for gifts, it is much like a search for valuable gems, mineral deposits, oil and natural gas deposits or any resource not visible from the surface. It is often necessary *to dig to find them*.

Many individuals have not discovered various physical aptitudes such as an innate giftedness in music or art until later in life. Others may live their entire lives not realizing how they could have enriched their own lives as well as those of others had they known what some of their latent aptitudes were. This is why we should encourage children and teens to explore as many avenues

and opportunities as they are able to while they are young. They can then determine in a legitimate manner what interests and aptitudes they may have.

In the same way, if we as members of the Body of Christ tend to be hearers or observers only, how will we ever know our areas of ability or giftedness? If we have questions about how we might most effectively serve, we should expose ourselves to a variety of service opportunities and venues and determine where we can most aptly contribute. We should evaluate our own interests and abilities, ask for the input of those closest to us, and seek the advice and counsel of the ministry. This will require a certain amount of diligence and effort on the part of each member. Though specific spiritual gifts may be given to only a few individuals at any given time, the same attributes on which they are based should be exemplified in every Christian's life in an ever-increasing measure.

Sometimes there is overlap between specific gifts and scriptural commands, as shown in the following table. Perhaps these commands are given as a way to help individuals discover whether they have spiritual gifts in these specific areas.

GIFTS GIVEN TO SOME	COMMANDS GIVEN TO ALL
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Serving (Romans 12:7)</li> <li>2. Exhortation (Romans 12:8)</li> <li>3. Giving (Romans 12:8)</li> <li>4. Teaching (Romans 12:7)</li> <li>5. Showing mercy (Romans 12:8)</li> <li>6. Faith (1 Corinthians 12:9)</li> <li>7. Evangelism (Ephesians 4:11)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Serve one another (Galatians 5:13)</li> <li>2. Exhort one another (Hebrews 10:25)</li> <li>3. Be giving (2 Corinthians 9:7)</li> <li>4. Teaching (Matthew 28:19-20)</li> <li>5. Be kind (Ephesians 4:32)</li> <li>6. Walk by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7)</li> <li>7. Be ready to answer (1 Peter 3:15)</li> </ol>

As we try to identify our spiritual gifts, we must always remember that God will not condemn us for not being able to list them one by one. He is far more interested in whether we are serving Him, His Church and our fellow man, obeying His commandments, growing in grace and knowledge, and showing the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. If we can accomplish these goals without ever confirming our exact spiritual gifts, great! The understanding of spiritual gifts is simply a tool to use in these endeavors.

**What are some of the spiritual gifts and what are their characteristics?**

The following table lists the gifts that Paul mentioned specifically in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12 and Ephesians 4. This does not necessarily appear to be a comprehensive list. He does not mention all of the same gifts in each chapter. Rather he seems to be giving *examples* of various

gifts with primary emphasis upon our attitude and approach toward them and the necessity of identifying and using them to build the spiritual body that is the Church.

Romans 12:6-8	1 Corinthians 12:7-10	1 Corinthians 12:28	Ephesians 4:11
<p>Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us</p> <p>prophecy</p> <p>teaching</p> <p>exhorting</p> <p>ministry</p> <p>leading</p> <p>giving</p> <p>mercy</p>	<p>But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all</p> <p>prophecy</p> <p>discerning of spirits</p> <p>word of wisdom</p> <p>word of knowledge</p> <p>working of miracles</p> <p>gifts of healings</p> <p>different kinds of tongues</p> <p>interpretation of tongues</p> <p>faith</p>	<p>God has appointed these in the church</p> <p>apostles</p> <p>prophets</p> <p>teachers</p> <p>workers of miracles</p> <p>gifts of healings</p> <p>helps</p> <p>administrations</p> <p>varieties of tongues</p> <p>interpreting tongues</p>	<p>And He Himself gave</p> <p>apostles</p> <p>prophets</p> <p>evangelists</p> <p>pastors</p> <p>teachers</p>

God can certainly empower any physical talent or natural aptitude with His Holy Spirit to become a spiritual gift. He can also miraculously bless us with a spiritual gift that has no

necessary connection with our natural talents or aptitudes. In addition, we can earnestly desire to serve in certain ways and through prayer, hard work and the power of God’s Holy Spirit, develop new abilities to serve the Body of Christ. However, it is ultimately by the choice and determination of God that we receive spiritual gifts.

In the following table, the various spiritual gifts listed in Scripture are placed within three general categories in an effort to clarify the nature and type of each gift.

PERFECTING GIFTS	SERVICE GIFTS	SIGN GIFTS
apostleship prophecy evangelism pastor-shepherd teacher wisdom knowledge	administration leadership exhortation faith giving helps service mercy	distinguishing/ discerning of spirits miracles healings speaking in tongues interpretation of tongues

**What are the spiritual gifts listed in Scripture and what do they mean?**

**Apostle/Apostleship** (1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11; Romans 1:5). In a general sense, apostle (*apostolos* in Greek) means “one sent forth” and is derived from a compound of the Greek words *apo*, “from,” and *stello*, “to send” (*Vine’s*, “Apostle, Apostleship”).

This spiritual gift, a messenger sent, is foundational to the early Church, as we read in Ephesians 2:20: The Church is “built on the foundation of the *apostles* and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.”

In the official sense, the word is used in reference to the 12 and to a few others like Paul, Barnabas and James, half-brother of Jesus Christ. In reading the New Testament account, it is clear that Christ chose the 12, trained them and sent them forth (with a replacement for Judas) as a key part of the foundation of the early Church, appointing them to vital leadership roles in the early Church (Matthew 16:18).

Later joined by other apostles, their influence on the Church continues today through their inspired words preserved in the Bible, establishing doctrine that continues to guide the Church today as it has for centuries. They were recipients of revealed spiritual knowledge and were empowered and emboldened by God’s Holy Spirit (Ephesians 3:4-5).

This would be an appropriate point to discuss 1 Corinthians 12:28: “And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.”

The Greek verb translated “appointed” is *tithemi*, meaning “to put, to place” (*Vine’s*, “set”). “Set” (KJV), “place” (Green’s Literal Translation) or “appoint” (NKJV, NIV) would all be accurate translations. But what does the numbering of the first three gifts mean?

Some think they are listed in order of rank and authority. Others think the first three gifts are listed according to the time sequence of their need and the order in which they were granted—i.e., the apostles were gifted first, as their gift was essential to establishing the foundation of the Church. Next, one of the gifts through which God calls many to His Church, inspired preaching and prophecy, was given. Thirdly, the gift of teaching was given to instruct those called to His way of life and His plan of salvation.

Since the Greek words for *first*, *second* and *third* are almost universally translated as sequential words in Scripture rather than words denoting hierarchical rank, the latter view appears to be a more accurate understanding. Why would the ability to prophecy or preach with inspiration necessarily place someone with that gift *over* someone with the gift of teaching? In keeping with the body metaphor, all of these gifts would be of great importance and yet any one of them would be of little value without the others. In keeping with the building metaphor, these “building or foundational blocks” would have to be laid down or established *first* in time sequence, just as would occur in the construction of any building. The foundation is not the *top* of the building, which is added last.

Supporting the view that Paul is describing sequential events is the fact that “first,” “second” and “third” in this verse are *adverbs* in the Greek, meaning they further describe the action of how God “appointed” or “set” these gifts in the Church. If they were describing hierarchical ranks, Paul should have used *adjectives* to describe the nouns “apostles,” “prophets” and “teachers.” These linguistic distinctions are important.

In addition, when we compare the sequence of terms used in Ephesians 4:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 12:28, there are variations as follows:

**Ephesians 4:11-12**

Apostles  
Prophets  
Evangelists  
Pastors  
Teachers

**1 Corinthians 12:28**

Apostles  
Prophets  
Teachers  
Miracles  
Gifts of healing

The differences in these lists are difficult to understand if these are listings of hierarchical ranks. A further difficulty with this view is that “miracles, gifts of healings, helps, administrations, [and] varieties of tongues,” listed immediately after apostles, prophets and teachers in 1



Corinthians 12:28, are very problematic to categorize as hierarchical ranks if this is indeed Paul's intention. We also nowhere see elders or deacons on either of these lists—another problem if this is describing ministerial ranks.

We find further insight into this issue when we examine Romans 12:4: “For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office . . .” (KJV). The Greek word translated here as “office” is *praxis*, meaning “a doing, deed” or “an acting” or “function” (*Vine's*, “Office”). In most translations other than the King James, the word is translated as “function.” Once again, the evident implication is not office or position (as in rank), but *function*—important, critical and vital to the well-being of the Body, but not related to *relative* importance, office, station or position.

**Prophecy** (Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:10). In these passages we find the English word prophecy translated from the Greek noun *propheteia*, meaning “the speaking forth of the mind and counsel of God” (*Vine's*, “Prophecy”). In 1 Corinthians 14:24 the word “prophesy” is used, translated from the Greek verb *propheteuo*, meaning “to be a prophet, to prophesy” (*Vine's*, “Prophesy”). In Ephesians 4:11 we find the word “prophets,” translated from the Greek noun *prophetes*, meaning “one who speaks forth or openly” (*Vine's*, “Prophet”). As we can see by these definitions, “prophecy” is not necessarily limited to the foretelling of the future. It may also refer to inspired speaking, resulting in the strengthening, comforting and encouragement of the brethren—“he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men” (1 Corinthians 14:3).

In the New Testament, this gift was clearly not limited to elders or even to men, for that matter. Acts 21:9 tells us that Philip “had four virgin daughters who prophesied” (*propheteuo*). Prophets (*prophetes*) seem to have been quite common in the Church at Corinth. Paul advised the Corinthians to “let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge [“weigh carefully what is said”—NIV]” (1 Corinthians 14:29).

Inspired speaking appears to be the only manifestation of this gift today, but the future may bring some on the scene with the gift of foretelling future events (Revelation 11:3-6; Amos 3:7). It would appear that in the context of prophesying (predicting future events), one who had this gift would speak with *the absolute authority of God*. Speculation based on prophetic scriptures would not qualify one as having the gift of prophecy.

**Evangelist** (Ephesians 4:11-12). This word comes from the Greek word *euaggelistes*, meaning “a messenger of good” (*Vine's*, “Evangelist”) or “one who declares the good news” (Zodhiates, p. 670). The gift of evangelism could be described as a divine enablement to effectively communicate the gospel to others, encouraging them to respond in faith and understanding and move toward discipleship and the commitment of baptism. It is important to note that the Father grants this gift and encourages it to be used in the context of John 6:44 as He draws people to an understanding of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Philip was one of the first deacons ordained by the apostles in the New Testament Church, and is later referred to as “Philip the evangelist” in Acts 21:8. In Acts 8:26-40, he models the conduct and approach of an evangelist as he teaches and baptizes the Ethiopian eunuch. Following that encounter, “the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more” (verse 39). Dramatic encounters such as this drew attention to Philip and his message as he used this spiritual gift to bring those whom God was calling to a fuller, deeper understanding of the Scriptures.

The evangelist Timothy was encouraged by the apostle Paul to be “watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Timothy 4:5). Within the context of evangelism, is there room to consider what we might refer to as “private evangelism”—involving individuals whose example or “light” is so bright that they attract the attention of others and are able to convict and convince them by their answers to questions regarding the “hope that lies within them”? Could this be the gift of evangelism as well?

This appears to be the point of Christ’s instruction in Matthew 5:16: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” It is echoed in Peter’s instruction: “Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Peter 2:11-12). Clearly Jesus Christ expects this of His followers.

**Teaching** (1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11-12). In these passages the word “teacher” is translated from the Greek noun *didaskalos*, meaning “instructor, master, teacher” (Zodhiates, p. 449). In Ephesians 4:11, the word “teachers” is linked with “pastors,” indicating a close relationship in application of these gifts. In Romans 12:7, the words “teaches” and “teaching” are translated from the Greek verb *didasko* and noun *didaskalia*, which mean “to give instruction” and “that which is taught, doctrine” (*Vine’s*, “Teach” and “Doctrine”). In Acts 18:24-25, we read of Apollos that he was “an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures,” who “spoke and taught (*didasko*) accurately the things of the Lord.”

This spiritual gift is a God-given ability to clearly and accurately communicate the truths of the Bible. People with this gift are able to give clear biblical insight dealing with life situations and communicate truth so that people learn and remember what was conveyed. It is a gift that can and needs to be developed by continued study and discipline. A teacher should be able to reprove, instruct, correct and train in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16).

James warns those who would seek the gift of teaching, “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment” (James 3:1). As in the case of Timothy, as these gifts manifest themselves in the life of the individual, ordination may occur. In other situations, the gift of teaching could be manifested by those with exceptional abilities in teaching children, directing choirs, instructing teens, etc. Hebrews 5:12 admonishes Hebrew members of the Church for their spiritual immaturity, stating that by now they ought to be *teachers (didaskolos)*, not learners needing to be taught elementary truths. This admonishment is a reminder that teaching is a gift that should be promoted and not neglected.

**Pastoring or Shepherding** (Ephesians 4:11). In this passage the word “pastors” is translated from the Greek noun *poimen*, meaning “a shepherd, one who tends herds or flocks” (*Vine’s*, “Pastor”). Once again, this gift is linked with teaching in this verse. The clear use of this metaphor (shepherding) to describe the conduct and attitude of those with this gift is illustrated by Christ’s instruction to Peter in John 21:15-17—“Feed My sheep”!

The instruction to elders in 1 Peter 5:1-3 offers an excellent overview of this gift as well: “The elders who are among you I exhort . . . : Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.”

Jesus Christ elaborated on the shepherds’ role, especially concerning their roles as guardians and protectors, in John 10:1-18. Verses in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus offer multiple references admonishing shepherds to guard the truth and care for their flocks. These pastoral epistles provide ample illustrations of the close relationship between the pastoring and teaching gifts.

This gift could be described as the God-given ability to care for, feed and protect the long-term spiritual needs of individuals in the Body of Christ, enabling them to grow to spiritual maturity. Those with this gift may love being with and ministering to people personally, or they may work behind the scenes, meeting the spiritual and physical needs of the people they serve. They are able to provide care, spiritual nourishment and protection over an extended period of time. Generally speaking, pastors derive great satisfaction and fulfillment from helping and supporting others and in counseling and guiding many individuals.

Can this spiritual gift reach beyond the *function* of pastor to the expression of “pastoral care” of and devotion to others? What about parents with exceptional skills in expressing this kind of love, care and concern for their children—could they possess this gift of “shepherding” apart from the official *title* of pastor or shepherd, one who serves the Church in this fashion in an official capacity? What about others in the congregation such as elders, deacons or deaconesses who exhibit unusually high levels of care and concern for others—could they possess this gift?

**CAUTION:** Individuals with this gift may have a difficult time saying “no” to others, often at the expense of their families and their own physical and spiritual well-being. They may be indecisive because of their strong desire to be sensitive to the needs and feelings of those they serve. Pastors can become too protective of people and create an unhealthy level of “member dependency” within their flock. They may even find themselves trying to control people by making decisions for them out of a desire to protect them from wrong choices or actions.

**Leadership** (Romans 12:8). In this passage we read of one who “leads” as having a spiritual gift. This word is translated from the Greek verb *proistemi*, which means “to stand before” or “to lead, attend to” (*Vine’s*, “Rule”). In the KJV, the word is translated as “ruleth.” In 1

Thessalonians 5:12, the same word *proistemi* is translated as “over” in the NKJV: “recognize those who labor among you, and are *over* you in the Lord.”

In Hebrews 13:17, the word *rule* is taken from the Greek verb *hegeomai*, which means “to lead” (*Vine’s*, “Rule”). In Luke 22:25-26, Christ advises His disciples to “let he who governs (*hegeomai*) [be] as he who serves” (*diakoneo*, meaning “to minister” or “to render any kind of service”—*Vine’s*, “Serve”). The obvious point is that to lead as Christ intends is to do so with the intention of serving others.

To illustrate, let us return to the sheep/shepherd metaphor. The shepherd may *lead* the sheep, he may walk beside them or he may drive them from behind. However, when one thinks of “standing before,” we can envision one standing before you as an example, leading the way by example, persuading and encouraging others to reach their potential, not standing “over” people in the sense of forced control. A leader may at times need to exercise such control in fulfilling his duties and responsibilities, but the overall goal as stated by Jesus Christ is to serve those one leads.

This divine enabling of one to convey vision and to motivate and direct people to harmoniously accomplish the purposes of God can be likened to the conductor of an orchestra, one who is able to involve each member meaningfully in service while making beautiful music together for the benefit of others. They are goal-setters who provide direction for God’s people and motivate others to perform, serve, contribute and grow to the best of their abilities. They present the big picture for others to see, take responsibility and establish goals. Most importantly, they model the values and the life that God wants His people to live—*the life and values of a servant* coupled with loving leadership and right use of authority. They do not need a *position* to exercise their gift of leadership. Those with the gift of leadership understand the importance of mentoring and instructing others in leadership skills for the overall growth of the Body.

*CAUTION:* Leaders may become so caught up in the big picture that they become insensitive toward those who are carrying the daily burden of making the vision of their leadership a reality.

**Exhortation** (Romans 12:8). The gift of exhortation is translated from the Greek noun *paraklesis*, meaning “the act of exhortation, encouragement, comfort” (Zodhiates, p. 1106). It literally means “a calling to one’s side” or “to one’s aid” (*Vine’s*, “Exhort, Exhortation”). In its verb form, it implies looking to the future in contrast to dealing with the past. The same word is translated “comfort” in Romans 15:4.

Barnabas seems to have had this gift. We find in Acts 4:36 that his original name was Joses, but the apostles named him Barnabas, which means “son of encouragement.” Acts 11:22-24 highlights this ability as he “encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord . . . And a great many people were added to the Lord.” In Acts 18:24, we similarly find Priscilla and Aquila taking Apollos aside and “explain[ing] to him the way of God more accurately.” Acts 15:30-32 highlights Judas’ and Silas’ ability to encourage as they “said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers” (NIV).

This gift supplies the ability to encourage, comfort or challenge others toward right action in such a way that they respond and act. It enables people to motivate, affirm, support and reassure others. Individuals who have the gift of encouragement are able to communicate specific truths as well as motivate others toward the practical application of God's Word in their lives.

They encourage people to *apply* Scripture, not just learn about it. They are able to tell others the truth about themselves, with great encouragement and understanding *without offense*. They can look toward what people can become and encourage them to envision these possibilities, giving practical guidance for others' spiritual growth. Whereas teachers deliver facts, explain "what" and pursue truth, exhorters *encourage response, explain "how" and encourage and promote application and response*.

*CAUTION:* Individuals with this gift must balance encouragement and admonition as they exhort others. They must take the time to really understand where people are so that they understand what they really need. They must also be careful not to be too simplistic or overly optimistic or flattering, thus enabling others to avoid course correction when it is really needed.

**Word of Wisdom** (1 Corinthians 12:8). In 1 Corinthians 12:8, Paul refers to the gift of “the word of *wisdom*.” In the same verse, a closely related gift is mentioned—“the word of *knowledge*.” “Word” is translated from the Greek noun *logos*, meaning “the expression of thought” (*Vine’s*, “Word”) or “intelligence, word as the expression of that intelligence, discourse, saying, thing” (Zodhiates, p. 924).

The Greek noun translated “wisdom” is *sophia*, meaning “skill in the affairs of life, practical wisdom, wise management as shown in forming the best plans and selecting the best means, including the idea of sound judgment and good sense” and “in a higher sense, wisdom, deep knowledge, natural and moral insight, learning, science, implying cultivation of mind and enlightened understanding” (Zodhiates, p. 1300). God is the source of true wisdom, and according to James 1:5, if we lack wisdom, we can ask God to give it to us.

Paul refers to the “hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory” (1 Corinthians 2:7). This is undoubtedly a major aspect of the gift of “the word of wisdom.” A practical definition of wisdom would be the power of judging rightly and following the soundest course of action, based on knowledge, experience and understanding. Solomon was granted his request for wisdom. In fact the Hebrew word translated “wisdom” in 1 Kings 4:29 is *chokmah*, which means wisdom or what we today might call common sense. Solomon’s wisdom became legendary and could undoubtedly be considered a spiritual gift. Wisdom is knowledge rightly applied in every circumstance.

In addition to common sense, those who possess this gift most often would be practical people who have much insight, experience and an excellent sense of fairness. A gift like that used to benefit the Church can be a powerful tool. In addition, the ability to rightly divide the Word of truth and discerning how to make direct application of Scripture to everyday life and situations, offering clear spiritual insights into today’s world, is the kind of spiritual “word of wisdom” the bearer of this gift can provide.

*CAUTION:* A review of the life of Solomon should be adequate in providing a word of caution to the wise. Remaining “little in your own eyes” may be difficult for someone with this gift.

**Word of Knowledge** (1 Corinthians 12:8). In 1 Corinthians 12:8, Paul refers to the gift of “the word of *knowledge*.” We again find the word “logos” preceding the listing of this gift. The word “knowledge” is translated from the Greek noun *gnosis*, meaning “the power of knowing, intelligence, comprehension,” “what one knows” or “what is known, the object of knowledge, general knowledge, doctrine, science” (Zodhiates, p. 378).

If we consider the broad implications of this gift, it is quite possible that *gnosis* or knowledge could encompass all forms of knowledge—practical, spiritual, biblical, scientific, philosophical, historical, etc., and the ability to retain it. Special focus would undoubtedly be given to spiritual and biblical knowledge by one who was the recipient of this gift. For example, when Peter was confused and disoriented by the vision of the descending sheet containing a variety of animals, situations arose that clearly guided him to grasp and understand the knowledge that God had imparted to him—that he was to call no man common or unclean.

In a sense, all those whom God has called are the recipients of revealed knowledge. However, this gift enables a person to acquire, retain and utilize knowledge for the benefit of others and the Church. People who have this gift are often inquisitive, reflective, insightful and observant. However, as Paul warns, if we have “all knowledge” but don’t have love, we are nothing (1 Corinthians 13:2).

*CAUTION:* Those with this gift should be aware of the human tendency toward pride and arrogance when one becomes overly impressed with himself and what he knows.

**Tongues, interpretation of tongues** (1 Corinthians 12:10). In 1 Corinthians 12:10, in his continuing discussion on spiritual gifts, Paul notes two additional gifts: “to another, different kinds of tongues, to another, the interpretation of tongues.” The word “tongues” is translated from the Greek noun *glossa*, which literally means tongue but metaphorically means speech or language (Zodhiates, p. 375). The word “interpretation” is translated from the Greek noun *hermeneia*, meaning “interpretation, explanation” (Zodhiates, p. 655)—or, as we see from scriptural usage of this gift, *translation*.

From the biblical examples, the gift of tongues appears to be the ability to speak an accepted language that the gifted person has not previously studied or learned for the purpose of teaching God’s truth or evangelizing those of another language who can understand it. In the Bible we find this gift being exercised in Jerusalem in Acts 2 when the Church was founded on the day of Pentecost with people from many lands and languages in attendance; in Corinth which, being a port city, likewise had people from many areas and languages; in Cornelius’s house in Caesarea, another port city (Acts 10); and in Ephesus, yet another major port city (Acts 19). A common thread in all of these situations is that the people in attendance likely came from a variety of places, cultures and languages, and the gift of speaking and translating “tongues” allowed those in attendance to understand what was being expressed.

As we read 1 Corinthians 14, we find that the Corinthians were *very zealous* regarding spiritual gifts (verse 12). However, Paul cautioned them that these gifts must be used for the *edification of the Church*. They seemed to be quite involved in *tongues*—a spiritual gift enabling the recipient to speak in other legitimate languages. This gift was apparently accompanied at times by the gift of interpretation or translation. When someone spontaneously spoke in a language obviously foreign or unknown to them, their words were of no benefit to the listeners unless someone, through the gift of interpretation, was able to interpret or translate what the speaker said for the edification of the Church. It was important to Paul and to the edifying of the members that speakers promoted understanding, order and edification among the hearers.

Note how Paul contrasts the gifts of tongues and prophesying. In 1 Corinthians 14:22, he states that “tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.” He makes this point in the context (verse 21) of quoting from Isaiah 28:11-12, where Isaiah refers to the language of the Assyrian invaders that the people would soon hear, yet even that divine act of retribution, with God “speaking” to them through it, would not cause them to hear and obey Him. This emphasizes Paul’s point that

speaking in tongues provides a witness for the “hard of hearing”—the unbelievers. “Prophecy,” on the other hand, provides inspired preaching for the believer (1 Corinthians 14:19).

In fact, so many in Corinth appeared to have the gift of tongues that it was becoming problematic. “Therefore, if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind?” (1 Corinthians 14:23). It appears that with multiple speakers addressing the congregation in a variety of languages or tongues, with no interpretation available, mayhem apparently ensued. Paul told the congregation that if no interpreter was present, the would-be speaker must remain silent (verse 28).

From Paul’s account, it would appear that the situation in Corinth was quite different from that day of Pentecost in Jerusalem when the apostles spoke and *everyone* heard and understood in their own native tongue or language. That remarkable miracle gave credence and power to the apostle Peter and the fledgling Church of that era. It’s interesting to note that the Corinthians were engaged in the gift of tongues—and its abuse—some 26 years after this event.

From Paul’s description of tongues and interpretation, it appears that the gift of tongues is not present in the Church today, but that does not mean that God could not grant the gift in the future for the furtherance of His work and for the benefit of unbelievers as evidence of His power.

**Gifts of Healings** (1 Corinthians 12:9, 28, 30). In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul mentions three times “gifts of healings”—“healing” being translated from the Greek word *iama*, meaning “healing or cure, the result of the process of healing” (Zodhiates, p. 752). The kind of divine healing mentioned here could be defined as immediate and complete physical or mental restoration that circumvents or bypasses natural laws.

Dramatic healings were not only witnessed but also experienced by hundreds if not thousands in the first-century Church. From the miracles of Jesus Christ himself to the dramatic acts of healing by the apostles (Acts 5:14-16), this spiritual gift was made manifest in various individuals and served to fully establish the Church and authenticate the message and mission of the apostles. However, as the first century drew to a close, it became evident that the prevalence of that gift had diminished.

What we witness today in terms of anointing the sick and praying for their healing is far different quantitatively in most cases from the miraculous and instantaneous recovery received at the hands of those endowed with the gifts of healing, and yet the same Jesus Christ empowers both endeavors. Certainly the gift of healing is God’s to grant as He sees fit.

**Discerning of Spirits** (1 Corinthians 12:10). In 1 Corinthians 12:10, Paul speaks of the gift of “discerning of spirits”—“discerning” from the Greek noun *diakrisis*, meaning “distinguishing, a clear discrimination, discerning, judging” (*Vine’s*, “Discern, Discerner, Discernment”) and “spirits” from the Greek noun *pneuma*, meaning wind, breath or spirit (Zodhiates, p. 1180). The majority of references to *diakrisis* in the New Testament have an evil or demonic connotation.



This spiritual gift empowers an individual to discern the spirits, to determine the source, nature and disposition of the spirit and deal with it.

On numerous occasions Christ confronted the spirits, discerned their intentions and motives, and commanded them to leave—a striking example of how this gift would operate if granted to a recipient. If this gift were given, the fruit would be dramatic, obvious and miraculous. Another aspect of this gift may relate to discernment of the mental or ethical disposition of others, as in the example of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5).

**Miracles** (1 Corinthians 12:28). Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12:28, mentions “teachers” and “after that miracles” to note this spiritual gift. “Miracles” is from the Greek noun *dunamis*, meaning power or inherent ability “used of works of a supernatural origin and character, such as could not be produced by natural agents and means” (*Vine’s*, “Miracle”). The same gift is mentioned as “working of miracles” in 1 Corinthians 12:10.

Since this gift is listed separately from healings, these acts would apparently be different from healing miracles and could involve supernatural events of other kinds. What miracles this gift might involve is unknown, although it is obviously evident in the work of the two witnesses (Revelation 11:5-6).

**Helps** (1 Corinthians 12:28). This gift appears as simply “helps” in 1 Corinthians 12:28, where it is translated from the Greek noun *antilepsis* and literally means “the receiving of remuneration,” but came to mean to render assistance or help (Zodhiates, p. 193).

In Romans 16:1-2, we find Paul’s commendation of Phoebe. Note what he says of her: “I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a *helper* of many and myself also.” It appears this is the kind of gift Paul refers to when he mentions “helps” as a spiritual gift.

The supernatural ability enables one to unselfishly meet the needs of others. They see what needs to be done in assisting others and they desire to do it. People with this gift are typically unselfish and capable of rejoicing in others’ gifts and usually do so behind the scenes. They enjoy helping others and see the tangible and practical things that need to be done on a daily basis to meet the needs of the Church. They have a “can-do” attitude and are reliable, loyal and dependable servants. People with this gift are very important to the effective functioning of the body.

**CAUTION:** Helpers must learn to say “no” and establish their personal and spiritual priorities. They also require encouragement and support to effectively administer their gift.

**Administration** (1 Corinthians 12:28). In 1 Corinthians 12:28 we find the Greek noun *kubernesis* translated as “governments” in the KJV and “administrations” in the NKJV. This word means “steering, pilotage” such as steering or piloting a ship, and metaphorically refers to

government or governing (*Vine*'s, "Government"). Acts 6:1-7 records the need to find individuals to administer the needs of the growing Church.

This spiritual gift grants the ability to provide organization for the goals of the body of Christ by initiating and implementing an efficient plan of action. Like a helmsman, those with this gift can help plot the course and bring it to completion. They provide clear guidance in the process of activating and serving the body. They focus on the details of the vision, part by part, rather than the big picture and are generally implementers rather than "vision-sharers." Administrators provide for things to be done "decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40) and are usually thorough, objective, conscientious, goal-oriented and efficient. We should note that good speakers are not necessarily good administrators—the gift of administration is different from the gift of teaching or inspired speaking.

We can get a good idea of what administrators do by reading Acts 27:11-20, 27-29, 38-44. In these verses we find the captain of a ship making critical and life-saving decisions as he attempts to deal with the severe impact of a storm upon his ship, crew, cargo and passengers.

*CAUTION:* Those with the gift of administration must be careful not to view people as simply "task-completers" or "goal-achievers" without being concerned about their growth in the process. They must learn to be responsive to suggestions and proposed alterations to plans they have made so as not to stifle a leader's vision. Administrators must be conscious of the need to be good communicators. They must rely on God first and foremost and not on their own well-organized plans and remember to see God's purposes being fulfilled in the process of meeting a goal.

**Service** (Romans 12:7). We might refer to this gift as the act of serving or ministering. In Romans 12:7, the Greek noun *diakonia*, meaning "service, attendance [as a servant or attendant], ministry" (Zodhiates, p. 429) is listed. Those with the gift of service to others are a pleasure to behold and be around. Their unselfish acts of kindness set them apart in dramatic ways.

Jesus Christ Himself promotes this form of leadership in Luke 22:26-27—with the role and attitude of a servant prevailing. In 1 Corinthians 16:15-16, Paul especially commends the household of Stephanas: "that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the *ministry (diakonia) of the saints—that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with us.*" This is quite a commendation and goal to reach as we seek to edify the Body of Christ.

This gift represents the supernatural ability to identify unmet needs in the Body of Christ and beyond, and to use whatever resources necessary to meet those needs in a practical way. Those who have the gift of service are unselfish individuals who are able to serve joyfully, even without public recognition or thanks. They are able to see needs arising before others, and even without being asked are willing to sacrifice their time and personal schedules to meet those needs.

*CAUTION:* People with this gift need to be careful not to wear themselves out physically or neglect responsibilities at home to serve others. They should be aware of excluding others who also may want to serve and avoid going around “the system” to get things done. They also need to be careful to avoid feeling their worth is based on *doing* rather than *being* and feeling frustrated and even abused should they get over-involved.

**Faith** (1 Corinthians 12:9). In 1 Corinthians 12:7-10, Paul refers to the manifestation of the spirit as the bestowal of various gifts, including the gift of faith. “Faith” here is from the Greek noun *pistis*, meaning “firm persuasion, conviction, belief in the truth, veracity, reality of faithfulness” (Zodhiates, p. 1162). This same Greek word *pistis* is used in Galatians 5:22 of faith as a fruit of God’s Holy Spirit. Is there a difference between the *gift* of faith and the *fruit* of faith? One may only need to read the “Faith chapter” of Hebrews 11 to answer that question. To compare ourselves and our faith with the steadfast examples of the men and women noted here may indicate that the *gift* of faith is a miraculous magnification and amplification of the *fruit* of faith! And yet, as we read in 1 Corinthians 13:2, even if we have faith to move mountains, if we don’t have love, we are nothing.

This gift is a divine enabling to act on God’s promises with extraordinary confidence and unwavering belief in God’s ability to fulfill His and purposes. People with the gift of faith are optimistic, positive individuals who are able to believe God’s promises and inspire others to do the same even when the situation appears impossible. They are willing to carry out His will without question or wavering in the midst of enormous trials and obstacles. People with the gift of faith are willing to go forward in faith when others are unwilling and thus reassure people by their example. They look to God for their needs and trust that He will provide.

*CAUTION:* Those with the gift of faith must use care to avoid judging and condemning those whose faith may not be as strong as theirs. They must remember to listen to the counsel of others, exercise wisdom and remember a desire to plan for the future is not synonymous with a lack of faith. Some who have great faith may forego medical assistance and choose to rely on God to heal them, and in doing so perhaps allow faith to get in the way of wisdom. Those with great faith may find it difficult to understand why God may not work things out the way *they* would expect.

**Mercy** (Romans 12:8). In Romans 12:8 we read of a gift that enables the recipient to show “mercy, with cheerfulness.” The word “mercy” is translated from the Greek verb *eleeo* which means “to feel sympathy with the misery of another,” and especially sympathy manifested in act” (*Vine’s*, “Merciful, Mercy”).

Note the level of compassion, mercy and service that Tabitha (Dorcas) possessed. Following her death, Peter was called and told of her generous acts: “And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them” (Acts 9:36). In Luke 6:36, we are exhorted to extend mercy in the same manner we have received it from our Heavenly Father.

The recipient of this spiritual gift shows great empathy and compassion, without judgment or condemnation, for those who suffer physically, emotionally or spiritually and *cheerfully* assists those in need. People with the gift of mercy kindly address the needs of the lonely or forgotten and willingly bear others' burdens. They can endlessly and patiently tend to those who are ill, suffering or feeling unloved often without recognition or appreciation. They can express love, grace and dignity to those facing hardships or crisis and joyfully take the time to do so.

**CAUTION:** Those with this gift must avoid judging those who find it difficult to display the level of mercy that people gifted in this area can exhibit. They must exercise mercy in balance with judgment. They must also realize that they cannot always rescue people from their pain and must avoid getting so emotionally involved that it risks their own emotional, spiritual or physical health.

**Giving** (Romans 12:8). This gift, noted in Romans 12:8, is described in a way that reveals something beyond the ordinary giving expected of us: "he who gives, with liberality . . ." The Greek verb translated "gives" here is *metadidomi*, which means "to share with someone, to impart" (Zodhiates, p. 967).

Did the widow who gave two her mites have this gift when she gave all she had (Luke 21:1-4)? How about Barnabas who sold land, brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet (Acts 4:36-37)? Jesus Christ spoke of what we might call "the law of give": "Give and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. *For with the same measure that you use, it will be given back to you*" (Luke 6:38).

This supernatural gift allows the giver to give freely, cheerfully and sacrificially of their money, time or possessions for the sake of God's work and the Body of Christ. They tend to be disciplined and resourceful people who trust in God to provide for their needs and may even have a special ability to make money so that it may be used to provide for the work of God. Individuals with the gift of giving see their money and possessions as tools to serve God and so give liberally. Giving is often quiet and confidential as they do not desire fanfare. People with this gift do not ask "How much money do I need to give to God?" but "How much money do I need to live on?"

Note the example of the Macedonians in 2 Corinthians 8:1-6, who gave generously in spite of their poverty. Giving of our tithes and offerings to the work of God is a great honor. Giving of our time in prayer is a great privilege. These are fundamental responsibilities we all have. Those possessing this spiritual gift of giving are taken beyond these foundational acts, enhancing their lives and their ability to serve and to give in remarkable ways.

**CAUTION:** Those with this gift must be careful to see that the needs of their family are being met. They must also avoid judging others who cannot match their generosity.

**Please note:** This paper has discussed the gifts that the Scripture mentions specifically in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. This is not meant to be a complete list of the ways that God is able to spiritually magnify natural aptitudes or grant entirely new gifts (1 Peter 4:10).

Other individuals are mentioned in Scripture who have the wonderful gift of hospitality—of loving others, even strangers, and providing them with food, fellowship and shelter (Hebrews 13:1-2). Some individuals may have a special gift for intercessory prayer such as Epaphrus (Colossians 4:12). Other abilities commonly thought of as creative talents—such as musical, artistic or writing abilities—can be effectively used in building the body of Christ.

### **What should our approach toward spiritual gifts be?**

1. *We are not placed in the Body of Christ randomly or by chance.* The body is fitly framed together by God and each of us has been chosen for a specific purpose (1 Corinthians 12:18).
2. *Remember that the purpose of our gift(s) is to strengthen and build up the body* (1 Corinthians 14:12; Ephesians 4:16). Ultimately, our goal as individual members should be that of perfectly mirroring Christ (Matthew 5:48; Ephesians 4:13). Realistically, however, we all have a long way to go toward that goal. God requires each of us to work together, compensate for each others' shortcomings and add our unique gifts, talents and character qualities to the mix until we collectively and individually reach the "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ," as a bride prepared to wed her husband (Revelation 19:7-8).

None of us are whole or complete at birth or when we are placed within the Church. As we surrender ourselves to each other, gain new perspectives, allow "iron to sharpen iron," and recognize that others have strengths that can help us develop our necessary growth areas, we are gradually perfected toward the fullness of Christ. The Church is the physical and spiritual workshop where this transformation, through the power of God's Holy Spirit, takes place.

3. *Though we are all in the same body, we all have different functions and gifts according to the grace given to us* (Romans 12:5-8). Paul said he wished that all men were like him, but that was not the case—each has his own gift, or combination of gifts, different from those of others.
4. *Spiritual gifts are not the same as talents.* Although our innate talents are gifts from God in that we inherited them from our physical parents with no efforts of our own, spiritual gifts are given by our Heavenly Father for the purpose of serving and edifying the Church. Obviously there are talented or "gifted" people who are atheists and unbelievers who care nothing for God.
5. *We are expected to stir up the gifts that are in us—both the gift of God's Holy Spirit as well as individual spiritual gifts* (2 Timothy 1:6; Romans 12:6-8). We should ask God for understanding of our gift(s) and guidance to use them effectively in building the Body of

Christ. We should recognize and appreciate the privilege of being a part of that Body. We should ask God for understanding of our gifts and guidance in using them effectively in building the Body. We are not to bury our talents, but multiply them (Matthew 25:19-30). There must be evidence that God's Spirit is at work within us, not just with us and around us. We must not neglect the gift that is in us (1 Timothy 4:14), since we will be held accountable for what God has given us (Luke 12:48).

6. *Recognize, appreciate and encourage the use of others' spiritual gifts.* We are to encourage one another to good works. An important reason to come together on a regular basis at Sabbath services is to encourage and exhort one another (Hebrews 10:24; 1 Peter 4:10). We must recognize and appreciate our collective calling as well as our individual calling. When one member of the Body is honored, we are all honored (1 Corinthians 12:26).
7. *Exercise godly humility as we use our gifts.* We are to use our gifts to serve, honor and glorify God and the Church, not ourselves. The strong should bear the infirmities of the weak (Romans 15:1). Those with spiritual gifts are to use them to *serve*, not to aggrandize the self. Spiritual gifts are *God's gifts of grace* that we do not deserve any more than we deserve eternal life. We must appreciate others' gifts and not be envious of them (1 Corinthians 12:26). Wisdom that comes from above is pure and peaceable, not self-seeking (James 3:13-18).
8. *The overriding motivation for use of all gifts and talents whether spiritual or physical should always be love* (1 Corinthians 13:1-13). This approach personifies God's way of give versus man's way of get.
9. **God sets a very high standard.** We are to follow Christ's example of bearing the infirmities of the weak and even the reproach that others have earned (Romans 15:1-3). This is the level of unity God expects members of His Body to achieve as they submit to each other, surrender their individual wills for the good of the whole and exercise their spiritual gifts to complement and serve one another.
10. *While efforts should be made to confirm the best fit for members' gifts, considering their interests and abilities, the fundamental needs of the Body as a whole are most important.* What the Body lacks in natural talent and spiritual gifts should be compensated for by fervent desire, prayer and a genuine desire to serve by all members. As individuals, we can develop new talents through hard work, discipline and the power of God's Holy Spirit living in and working through us. There are times when the need to sacrifice is apparent and the "Here am I, send me!" attitude (Isaiah 6:8) is the one to express. Care must also be taken to avoid the problem in Corinth of members arguing with one another and judging one another over the issue of spiritual gifts.
11. *A primary role of the ministry is to prepare the body for works of service and to build and bring unity to the Body.* Seeking to help each member understand and utilize their strengths, passions, interests and gifts appears to be an important part of this responsibility. The future of all members of the body, individually and collectively, is to reign with Jesus Christ

(Revelation 20:4, 6). Members should be taught and encouraged to actively prepare for their future role, not burying or hiding their God-given talents, abilities or gifts.

12. *As we all work together to learn where God has placed us in His body, we must pray for guidance as we come to understand and appreciate one another.* By recognizing and utilizing our spiritual gifts, we all will be involved in the *work of God*, which is not only preaching the gospel but building His Church and preparing His people as Jesus Christ's Bride.

In closing, let us return to the words of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:11-16 (NIV) as he describes the importance of spiritual gifts and their relationship to the Body of Christ, the Church:

“It was he [Jesus Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

Again, this is the basis for the vision statement of the United Church of God:

“The vision of the United Church of God is ‘A Church led by God's Holy Spirit, joined and knit together by what every member supplies, with all doing their share and growing in love to fulfill God's great purpose for humanity to bring many children to glory’ (Ephesians 4:16; Hebrews 2:10).”

*Submitted by Scott Ashley, Dec. 24, 2012 (updated Dec. 19, 2013)*