

INSTITUTE FOR TRAINING IN MINISTRY

HOW TO DISCOVER YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

A 12 lesson study of spiritual gifts
in the New Testament,
will help learners evaluate their personal gifts
and encourage the use of their gifts in ministry.

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INTRODUCING iTIM

Jesus gave one final command to his disciples, to “*make disciples*”. The Institute for Training in Ministry (iTIM) will help your church to “*equip the saints*” and so help build up the body of Christ. (Eph. 4:12).

To get started, log on to traininginministry.com and view the video, then purchase the Operations Manual. These two steps will help assure success in using iTIM.

Learning Approach

TIM incorporates a *Head, Heart, and Hands* approach to learning. *Head* represents the content to be learned in every iTIM course. *Heart* represents the application of this content to the learner’s personal life. And *Hands* represents using this content to minister to others.

Group Meeting Approach

The weekly group meeting features a *discussion* of the lesson, with integrative and application type questions asked in the leader’s guide.

Time Involvement

Learners need to *commit* to one hour of preparation in advance of each group session. Group leaders must commit to an additional hour weekly to prepare to lead the group session.

Curriculum Tracks

iTIM consists of 5 *ministry tracks*: Discipleship, Church Ministry, Church Leadership, Bible Teaching, and Pastoral Ministry. See the Operations Manual for more details.

Ministry Involvement

The goal of iTIM is that learners become involved in actual ministry, based on the iTIM course they have completed. The result will be that the body of Christ will be built up and your church will grow!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introducing iTIM	2
1 You Are the Body of Christ	4
2 Discover Your Gifts!	10
3 Speaking Gifts: Apostle, Prophet	17
4 Speaking Gifts: Evangelism, Shepherding	23
5 Speaking Gifts: Teaching, Exhortation	28
6 Speaking Gifts: Knowledge, Wisdom	34
7 Serving Gifts: Helps, Hospitality, Giving	40
8 Serving Gifts: Government, Leadership	46
9 Serving Gifts: Mercy, Faith, Discernment	52
10 Sign Gifts: Miracles, Healing	59
11 Sign Gifts: Tongues, Interpretation	68
12 How Can I Know?	76
How to use Your Spiritual Gifts	81

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BIBLE TRANSLATION: Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible: English Standard Version, Copyright 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois.

YOU ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST

Searching for lost treasure is a challenging occupation. However, those who persevere with single-minded persistence can find themselves fabulously wealthy.

The Church of Jesus Christ is wealthy beyond her greatest dreams. The believer in Christ has been lavished with the riches of God's grace (Ephesians 1:7-8). Paul continues in prayer that their eyes will be opened to the riches of the glorious inheritance found in Christ's salvation (Ephesians 1:18-19).

Ray Stedman writes in the foreword of Kenneth Gangel's book *Unwrap Your Spiritual Gifts*:

The whole subject of spiritual gifts is the lost treasure of the 19th and 20th century Christianity. The Church has been impoverished beyond belief by the prevailing ignorance of the existence of these spiritual riches. But now the long-buried truth is coming to light again. Widespread excitement has possessed the churches, and the tide of interest in the subject is running at full flow.

We're going to go look for that lost treasure. It is the plan of this course to introduce you to careful and profitable "mining" techniques. To find the pure gold of God's riches in the area of spiritual gifts, we will begin digging in the mother lode of the Scriptures—God's Word.

The Continuing Ministry of Jesus Christ

Spiritual life is the direct continuing ministry of Jesus Christ in the believer. The Holy Spirit is the source of this "Christ-life". Spiritual gifts are directly related to spiritual life.

Let's begin by asking ourselves, "What was the ministry of Jesus Christ," and "How does that relate to the Christian's present ministry?" Respond to these two questions, based on the following passages in the book of Mark.

Mark 1:8 _____

Mark 1:14-15

Mark 1:17

Mark 1:32-34

Mark 1:35

Mark 10:45

How does the ministry of Jesus compare with what believers are to do today? (Matthew 28:19-20)

The above passages indicate what the ministry of Christ was when He was on earth. It is also the ministry of the Body of Christ today. In other words, the ministry of Jesus Christ is a continuing ministry. It never stopped! It never will stop until the very end of the age.

Now, here's the critical question: If God's ministry to the world is through Jesus Christ, and if God's ministry is to continue, who in the world is going to do it?

The Body of Christ—the Church

There is only one means for the work of God to be accomplished today. It is through the Church, the Body of Christ. Jesus said, *"I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* (Matthew 16:18)

What is the Biblical description of the Church? The Church is not a physical building, but a group of believers; not a denomination, sect, or association, but a spiritual Body. The Church is not an organization, but a *"koinonia"*—the Greek word for communion, or fellowship that includes all believers.

Chapter 2

DISCOVER YOUR GIFTS

A pastor was reviewing the membership rolls with one of the church boards. As they went down the list, the pastor wrote the initials FBPO by several names. After a while one of the board members, too curious to hold back any longer, asked, "Pastor, what do those letters mean?" The pastor replied, "They mean, 'for burial purposes only.' You see, these are the inactive members!"

All Christians would be taken into heaven's eternity immediately after conversion if God had no purpose for them on earth. There is a saying that has great Biblical backing, "We are saved to serve". There is no room for "deadwood" in the body of Christ.

This lesson will help you understand spiritual gifts, how to discover your gift(s), and what hindrances might stifle your gift discovery and use.

What Are Spiritual Gifts?

The Biblical word in the Greek language is *charisma* (plural=*charismata*) and means "gift of grace."

Thayer, the famous Greek lexicographer, wrote in his *A Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* the following definition of spiritual gifts "extraordinary powers distinguishing . . . Christians and enabling them to serve the church of Christ, the reception of which is due to the power of divine grace operating in their souls by the Holy Spirit".

Leslie Flynn in his helpful book "19 Gifts of the Spirit" gives this definition of a spiritual gift: "a special qualification (ability) granted by the Spirit to every believer to empower him to serve within the framework of the Body of Christ."

Probably the best short, simple definition of spiritual gift is the Spirit-given ability for Christian service.

Spiritual Gift or Natural Talent?

Natural abilities (talents) are given to every person and are part of God's gift to all created beings. But spiritual gifts (abilities) are given only to those empowered by the Holy Spirit through rebirth. Therefore, we can say that everyone has talents, but only Christians have spiritual gifts.

Spiritual gifts function in the spiritual world, while natural talents function primarily in the natural realm. A person may have the spiritual gift of helps, and a natural talent for singing. Another person may be a talented singer who has the gift of exhortation. This latter person can have an especially powerful ministry through music, because his or her singing talent is enhanced by the spiritual gift of exhortation.

Natural talents, when dedicated for the use of God, and when anointed by the Holy Spirit, can be greatly used.

Ray Stedman urges in his article *"Equipped for Community"* in His magazine:

"use (*your natural talents*) as channels or vehicles for spiritual gifts, and you will find that they dovetail beautifully. You might expect that they would do this since they both come from the same God."

Who Has Gifts?

Some Christians feel that they don't have great abilities and feel useless in God's service. Many Christians secretly feel that they have no gift at all for spiritual ministry. Read 1 Corinthians 12:7 and 1 Peter 4:10. What does this passage say to a Christian who believes he has no spiritual gift?

If every Christian has at least one spiritual gift, what does this imply about gift use and development? Before answering, check 1 Peter 4:10-11.

You are a gifted child of God! Since God gifts you with

Chapter 3

SPEAKING GIFTS: APOSTLE, PROPHET

Imagine the Carpenter's shop holding a conference. As the Hammer was presiding, several suggested that he leave because he was too noisy and rough. Hammer replied, "If I have to leave this shop, then Screw must go too. To accomplish anything with him, you have to turn him around again and again."

Screw then spoke up. "If you wish, I will leave, but Plane must go too. All his work is superficial; he has no depth".

To this Plane responded, "I think Rule will have to withdraw as well. He is always measuring people by his standards and thinks he is always right."

At this point, Rule complained about Sandpaper, "You should leave too because you are so rough and always rub people the wrong way."

As the discussion continued, in walked the Carpenter of Nazareth. Ready for a new day of work, He put on his apron and began to work on the new pulpit He was making from which the gospel would be preached. Throughout the day He used the hammer, screws, plane, rule, sandpaper and many other tools. At the end of the day's work, the pulpit was beautiful in its finished state. As the Carpenter's shop observed the finished product, Saw rose and remarked, "Brothers, I can see that we are all workers together with the Lord."—Leslie Flynn, 19 Gifts of the Spirit

This story reinforces the teaching of 1 Corinthians 12:14-26. Every part of the Body of Christ is important and essential to the health of the church and the ministry of Jesus Christ. There is no room for pride, exclusiveness, or insensitivity. Nor is there a place for feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, or self-pity.

What Types of Gifts Are There?

The apostle Paul lists the gifts of the Spirit in three different chapters in three different epistles. Read Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28-30; and Ephesians 4:11. How many

different gifts did you find? _____

Is this list exhaustive? Is it partial? Some believe that this is the complete list and that there are no other gifts. Others believe that there are many more and that these were only some examples. Still others believe that while every possible spiritual gift may not be specifically mentioned, they all could be listed as a part of the gifts mentioned by Paul. In this view, the Biblical gift list becomes an umbrella that covers a group of related gifts.

For this study, we will examine 20 different gifts mentioned in the biblical record. To assist your study they are divided into three categories

- 1. Speaking gifts—those gifts primarily involved with verbal communication to others.
- 2. Serving gifts—those gifts that are primarily involved with acts of help and service to others.
- 3. Sign gifts—those gifts that are primarily used by God to verify the authenticity of the messenger and the message.

The Gift of Apostle

The word “apostle” was used in two ways in the New Testament:

RESTRICTED USE. The original 12 apostles were unique according to the New Testament. What were some qualifications that made them unequaled?

Mark 3:14 _____

Acts 1:21-22 _____

Ephesians 2:19-20 _____

2 Corinthians 12:12 _____

The twelve apostles were unique for those reasons. This

Chapter 4

SPEAKING GIFTS: EVANGELISM, SHEPHERDING

It's been said that when Nicolo Paganini willed his elegant violin to the city of Genoa, Italy, he demanded that it never be used. It was a gift designated for preservation, but not destined for service. How sad that an instrument so powerfully used for beautiful music would never again fulfill the function for which it was created.

When the resurrected Christ gifted his chosen people, He commanded that they be used. They were functional gifts, not designed for preservation in human museums, but for devoted service. How sad that some Christians have put their spiritual gifts on the shelf. How weakened the church is by unused gifts that have such great potential.

We now turn to two other speaking gifts. Each is needed in the church body. Each has a special function to help perfect the Body of Christ to do its ministry.

The Gift of Evangelism

Evangelism means different things to different people. To some, evangelists are high-powered showmen or businessmen on television and radio who market a religious product. To others, they are enthusiastic religious fanatics who try to push their religion on people. To still others, it may be simply those who live their faith by doing kind deeds and helping others.

What is evangelism? Who are evangelists? What is the gift of evangelism? The word "evangelism" itself does not occur in the Bible. In fact, it did not appear in the English language until the 17th century. The word "evangelist" only appears three times in the New Testament, in Acts 21:8; Ephesians 4:11 and 2 Timothy 4:5. Both words are derived from the Greek word *euangelizomai*, "to announce the good news." Though all Christians are to witness of their faith in Christ, the gift of evangelism is a special ability to communicate the Gospel message in relevant terms to unbelievers. For our

purposes, the gift of evangelism is “the ability and responsibility to effectively communicate the good news of salvation in Jesus in such a way that people respond and are disciplined.”

The gift of evangelism involves four important aspects mentioned in the definition

EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE. The gift of evangelism, while it certainly includes works and lifestyle, emphasizes a verbal witness so listeners understand the salvation message.

GOOD NEWS. What is proclaimed has historical content--including the historical reality of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The word “gospel” means good news. What is the good news? It is the message that there is hope for man’s guilt and alienation from God. There is peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ. There is salvation from the penalty of sin, the power of sin, and ultimately from the presence of sin.

PEOPLE RESPOND. Many people may be able to communicate the words of the good news and still not be effective. The key to the spiritual gift of evangelism is that the Holy Spirit has made the Christian effective. People are converted.

DISCIPLESHIP. The process of evangelism isn’t finished unless there is discipleship. What did Jesus command His disciples to do, Matthew 28:19-20?

Discovering Your Gift

Mark a number according to how much this characteristic is evident in your life: 0 = never true in my life; 1 = sometimes true in my life; 2 = regularly true in my life; 3 = almost always true in my life.

1. I have a consistent concern for people who don’t know Christ and would like to share the gospel with them. _____
2. I enjoy sharing my faith when opportunities arise. _____
3. I am at ease in sharing with others how Christ is my Savior and Lord. _____

Chapter 5

SPEAKING GIFTS: TEACHING, EXHORTATION

I once had the opportunity to visit a man dying of emphysema. The disease, which affects the lungs, kept him from getting enough oxygen. With every breath he was precariously on the edge of life. It wasn't until I arrived at the hospital that I realized my chest cold would be life threatening to the patient. Recognizing my potential danger to the seriously ill man, I cancelled the appointment until I was well. Though I wanted to help, I could have inadvertently killed him!

Great damage has been done by well-meaning but spiritually unhealthy Christians. With spasms of dedicated zeal, they have reached out into the world to help, while burdened with unsolved problems in their own lives. Unconsciously displaying hypocrisies, heresies, and inconsistencies, they have mocked Christianity in the eyes of those they hope to reach. The gifts of teaching and exhortation are designed by God to bring health, balance and vigor to the growing believer.

The Gift of Teaching

Just as the shepherding gift reminds us of the earthly shepherding ministry of Jesus Christ, so an appreciation of the gift of teaching should lead us to think about Jesus as the master teacher. One who exercises the gift of teaching in the church follows the pattern of Christ feeding His Church. The gift of teaching is mentioned in three of the four major passages dealing with spiritual gifts, that is, in Romans 12:7; 1 Corinthians 12:28-29; and Ephesians 4:11.

The concept of the *didaskalos* is a common but important one in the New Testament. Most people would agree that the chief function of the gift of teaching is to explain God's truth and how to apply it to life in an understandable way. Teaching focuses on the written revelation of the Bible and how it is relevant to this generation and context.

Remember our discussion about the difference between talents and gifts? How does that apply to our study of the gift of teaching? Both the talent of teaching and the gift of teaching have to do with the communication of truth in an organized way. How do they differ?

- A talent is present from birth and may be developed. A gift is present from spiritual birth and may also be developed.
- A talent operates through grace given by God to all human beings. A gift operates through the special grace given believers in the Body of Christ.
- A talent may be applied to any subject it teaches. Those with the gift of teaching communicate Biblical truths.
- Teaching talent yields understanding of the subject. The spiritual gift prepares for involvement and obedience.

The supernatural gift of teaching then, has the spark of God to enable the effectiveness of the teacher. Usually someone with the talent of teaching has developed this ability through formal education. But a person with the gift of teaching, though he may benefit from training and preparation, does not require formal education to communicate spiritual truth.

In the light of this discussion, think about and answer the following questions

Just about all Christians can do some teaching. What are some things people can teach who might not have the spiritual gift of teaching, Hebrews 5:11—6:1?

How might this help you discover your gift for teaching?

In what ways was Ezra a model teacher, Ezra 7:10?

Chapter 6

SPEAKING GIFTS: KNOWLEDGE, WISDOM

A small factory had to stop operations when an essential piece of machinery broke down. When none of the factory personnel could get it to function, an outside expert was called in for repairs. After looking the situation over for a few moments, the expert took a hammer and gently tapped the machine in a certain location. Immediately it began to run again. When the expert submitted a bill for \$100, the plant supervisor went into a rage and demanded an itemized bill. When submitted, it read "For hitting the machine, \$1; for knowing where to hit, \$99."

Knowing where, when, and how "to hit" is essential in today's church. Of course, we are not speaking of hitting machinery or people. But making crucial decisions in council meetings, the courage to give the appropriate word of caution or advice, the needed perspective for personal counseling or ministry changes - all these are very important for today's church. The gifts of knowledge and wisdom fit these essential needs.

The Gift of Knowledge

Today our culture is experiencing a "knowledge explosion," but this is not the same as the spiritual gift of knowledge. The gift of knowledge (1 Corinthians 12:8) is defined as: "the supernatural ability and responsibility to investigate and systematize the facts and truths related to God's revealed truth". Through it, the Christian is enabled to acquire deep insight into divine truth. This gift helps us understand God's thoughts more deeply than would ever be possible using human reason alone.

Paul speaks of the "word", or "utterance" of knowledge because knowledge helps others only when it is communicated. Most Bible students would agree that this gift is closely related to the gift of teaching. With the gift of teaching, the emphasis is on the communication of truth,

while with the gift of knowledge, the emphasis is on the knowledge or insight itself.

Most scholars would agree that in the early Church the gift of knowledge was a revelatory gift. That is, it was used by God to reveal new truth to unfold His plan to the Church and to the world. As the canon of Scripture was completed, the gift of knowledge became primarily an interpretive gift, so that there is clear understanding of God's revealed truth.

Let's examine some passages in the Bible and see what we can discover about knowledge and how the gift functions in the believer's life and the church body.

What is the source of true spiritual knowledge, Proverbs 2:6?

What is a danger regarding knowledge, 1 Corinthians 8:1-2?

What comparison between knowledge and love is given in 1 Corinthians 13:8?

How did Paul use his gift of knowledge, 2 Corinthians 11:6?

Is this usage of knowledge intended to be a pattern for the Church, 2 Corinthians 2:14?

What would you say is the difference between the gift of knowledge and formal education, where one receives much knowledge?

Chapter 7

SERVING GIFTS: HELPS, HOSPITALITY, GIVING

We live in a society that is increasingly dependent upon verbal skills. It is a society that thrives on communication. Yet, every family, every person and every society always needs those who have abilities in service. Assistance, support, help—these are all essentials to a thriving group—especially the church.

The Gift of Helps

The gift of helps mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:28 gains its name from the Greek word *antilempis*, which carries the idea of supporting, assisting, or lending a hand. According to Kittel, the famous Greek expert, it refers to the “activity of love in the dealings of the community” (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*).

Another word for the gift of helps is found in Romans 12:7. This word, *diakonia* is where we get our commonly used word, “minister”. Though the word has come to mean the “pastor” of a church, the concept is true for everyone in the church body. Everyone is to minister. Everyone is to help.

Putting the two words together, we come to the following definition for the gift of helps: “The ability and responsibility to give needed assistance and support where a need appears”.

If a person has a serving gift, how should he use it, 1 Peter 4:10-11?

Read Acts 9:36-39 and tell why you do, or don't believe that Dorcas had the gift of helps.

Read Acts 6:1-7 and describe the benefits and results of the operation of the gift of helps.

It is possible to misuse the gift of helps. How might that happen in the church?

Discovering Your Gift

Mark a number according to how much this characteristic is evident in your life:

0 = never true; 1 = sometimes true; 2 = regularly true; 3 = almost always true.

1. When listening to a speaker, I am strongly impressed and want to respond to exhortations to serve other Christians. _____
2. In an organization, I prefer to be a follower with practical things to do to help make things happen and go smoothly. _____
3. When there is a task to do, I prefer to do it myself, rather than asking someone else. _____
4. I find joy and satisfaction in taking on a helping role in some worthy project. _____
5. I prefer to be helping out in the background, rather than up front. _____
6. I am content to do menial jobs, or jobs others might consider unimportant. _____
7. Practical things like typing, cleaning, fixing, ushering, and other support tasks are meaningful and important for me to do. _____
8. I know key leaders can only do their job if someone takes over the supportive responsibilities. This is my place. _____
9. When called on to serve, I am comfortable and motivated to help in situations of specific material

Chapter 8

SERVING GIFTS: GOVERNMENT, LEADERSHIP

In his book, *Unwrap Your Spiritual Gifts* Kenneth Gangel relates an episode from the television series "Family Affair". Uncle Bill had planned a night out, and a baby sitter was to arrive within minutes of Uncle Bill's departure to take care of Jody and Buffy until the next morning. The sitter failed to show up, which set the stage for an evening of high adventure for the two small children.

After a hilarious dinner of just what one might expect, Jody took over to tuck in his little sister for the night. As he turned out the light and prepared to leave the room, Buffy asked, "Who will tuck you in?" Displaying his new-found authority, Jody replied, "Nobody needs to. I'm in charge. Remember?" To which Buffy sighed and said, "I guess that's the trouble with people in charge. They have nobody to tuck them in!"

The people who have the gifts of government and leadership have "nobody to tuck them in." Yet, they are supernaturally enabled by God to fulfill an important function for the rest of the body, enabling the church to move forward with direction, unity and purpose.

Some believe the gifts of government (some call it administration) and leadership are different aspects of the same gift. Others see them as two distinct gifts. For a long time I struggled with this issue, but now have arrived at the conviction that they are two distinct, but related gifts that equip others for ministry.

People often ask the difference between administration, management, government, and leadership. Many use these words in different ways. Business people tend to use the word management. Educators tend to use the word administration. For the sake of this study and for clarification, we will equate administration, management, and government.

Leadership will be placed in a different category. Leadership seems to be more identifiable by what a person is, while government seems to be more identifiable by what a person does. In other words, people can be leaders without being administrators, while others can be administrators without being leaders.

Let's now look at each of these two gifts, with their distinctiveness.

The Gift of Government

The Greek word for government is *kuberneseis*. The word means "helmsman," or "governor." The helmsman is the one who is qualified to steer the ship. This is the person who is gifted to give direction and set up the system to reach its desired goal. All its uses in Scripture refer to administration in some form of secular enterprise, except when the Apostle Paul applies it to the church context and gives it a spiritual meaning.

It is inconceivable that an organization can be formed and attempts to accomplish its purpose without the administration of the resources of that organization. Though every church may have different titles and roles, every church body has administrators to organize, direct and channel the resources and people of that church organization.

Read Acts 6:1-6. How does administration fit into this picture?

What should be the attitude of those who are in a position of government in the church, Mark 10:42-44?

From Titus 1:5, what do you think was one of the things he was to "straighten out" among the churches on Crete?

The gift of government would be defined then as "the

Chapter 9

SERVING GIFTS: MERCY, FAITH, DISCERNMENT

Part of the work of Mother Theresa and the nuns associated with her in India is to pick up the dying from the streets of Calcutta and bring them to a building where they can die knowing someone cares for them. Many die; but some survive and are cared for. “We want them to know,” Mother Theresa says, “that there are people who really love them, who really want them, at least for the hours that they have to live; to know human and divine love. There is always a danger, if we forget for whom we are doing it. Our works are only an expression of our love for Christ. To us what matters is an individual . . . Every person is Christ for me.”
—Kenneth Gangel, *Unwrap Your Spiritual Gifts*

The Gift of Showing Mercy

The popular song of the late 60’s said, “What the world needs now is love, sweet love. It’s the only thing there is just too little of.” No one would argue with that. The Bible says that in the latter days society will be filled with love grown cold, with violence and brutality (2 Timothy 3:1-4). Those with the gift of mercy have an unusual ability to show love to others. That’s why a person gifted with showing mercy sparkles like a diamond against the background of society’s indifference.

The Greek word *eleos* means “mercy” or “pity,” especially in relation to the poor and afflicted. The word *eleemosune*, Greek for alms in the New Testament, is also built on this word for mercy. What attitude is to characterize the use of this gift, Romans 12:8?

Why is the emphasis of the gift on action, not just attitude, Luke 10:25-35?

The spiritual gift of showing mercy is defined as “the ability and responsibility to feel compassion for the hurting and to cheerfully take action to alleviate the hurt.” The spiritual gift of mercy includes at least three characteristics

A FEELING OF PITY. This is not just the temporary stirring of the emotions of a person, but the deep-down, continuous compassion that is supernatural in origin. It is more than kindness springing up for another. It is divine agape love. It is an extension of the compassion and graciousness of the Savior.

A DESIRE FOR ACTION. Beyond feeling pity, the mercy-giver will not rest until something is done to alleviate the hurt. Compassion is no vague abstraction, but a concrete deed done in mercy to help the situation. Jesus’ compassion was always followed by action—whether in healing, feeding, or on the cross. In this connection, what does James 2:15-16 say about compassion?

AN ATTITUDE OF CHEERFULNESS. The attitude with which we help a person conveys as much or more than the action itself. As we saw earlier, Romans 12:8 specifies that this gift must be used with cheerfulness. A joyful, cheerful, positive attitude in mercy ministry is evidence that God is the source of the care and mercy.

Discovering Your Gift

Mark a number according to how much this characteristic is evident in your life:

0 = never true; 1 = sometimes true; 2 = regularly true; 3 = almost always true.

1. I feel deeply and hurt for others who are sick, imprisoned, poverty-stricken, or broken in some other way. _____
2. When faced with counseling another person, I tend to deeply identify with his situation. _____
3. If I could choose the Bible passages to study, I would

Chapter 10

SIGN GIFTS: MIRACLES, HEALINGS

Water turned to wine; children and adults raised from the dead; eating poison and not being harmed, walking across raging flooded streams, cancerous tumors disappearing, once blind eyes able to see . . . From Indonesia, Nigeria, Brazil, the United States and many other parts of the world—reports come of signs, wonders, and miracles. Are these true, counterfeit, or fake? Are they of God, Satan, or pretenders?

It is impossible to consider Christianity without considering miracles. God is a God of miracles. Beginning with Moses and throughout the Bible, we see that God performed miracles through His people and for His glory. The sign gifts are those gifts that reflect the obvious supernatural intervention of God in the natural order of life. The sign gifts have a three-fold purpose

1. To display the power of God so that observers are confronted with the reality of God's awesome might. Example: Psalm 77:13-15. How was God's might demonstrated in the miraculous events spoken of here? Compare Exodus chapter 7 and following.

2. To demonstrate the authority of the messenger and of the message he carries. Example: Acts 13:6-12. How was the miracle in this case used to demonstrate the authority of the messenger?

3. To cause men to listen to God's message. Example Mark 2:3-12. How did this miracle cause people to listen to God's message?

Sign gifts then, are especially used of God as He chooses to minister to the body of Christ and to alert unbelievers to the reality of God and of His message to men.

There is confusion today, however, on the availability and frequency of these gifts. There are two extremes this study wishes to avoid. One extreme is to categorically deny the present-day existence of sign gifts. The very definition of miracles assumes a supernatural intervention into the ordinary course of nature. Surely God is able to do this at any time.

The other extreme this study seeks to avoid is the frequently heard teaching that any person, at any time, can and should be able to do miracles and signs in the name of Jesus. This was never true in Biblical times, nor is it true today. Did all great men of God do miracles? (See John 10:41) _____

Who were the ones to perform signs, wonders and miracles and how did the rest of the believers feel about them? (Acts 5:12-13)

What were the special marks of a first century apostle, 2 Corinthians 12:12?

Sign gifts can still be used today if God so chooses. However, sign gifts have a specific purpose and are used by a sovereign God through His chosen vessels. In some places and times they may be highly visible. On other occasions they may be totally absent.

The Gift of Miracles

The definition of the gift of miracles is: The ability and responsibility to authenticate God's word through supernatural acts. There are three primary Greek words for

Chapter 11

SIGN GIFTS:

TONGUES, INTERPRETATIONS

It is generally agreed that one of the most controversial and significant developments of 20th century Christianity was the growth of the “tongues movement.” Four stages are recognized in the development of what is called the “charismatic movement.”

Stage one was the outbreak of tongues speaking in Los Angeles in 1906 with the subsequent establishment of small Pentecostal denominations. These grew and spread slowly in the early part of the 20th century.

Stage two was the acceptance of speaking in tongues in the mainline denominations that began in 1960. Many people believe this openness was due to the lack of spiritual vitality in the mainline churches.

Stage three was the sudden and massive infusion of the “Pentecostal experience” in the Roman Catholic Church in the mid and late 1960’s. This change opened many Catholics to the need for a personal relationship with Christ, the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the need to return to New Testament Christianity.

Stage four is the more recent widespread recognition that God continues to work in miraculous ways. These miracles are not confined to the traditional framework of Pentecostal denominations that stress a second experience of the Holy Spirit, commonly called the “baptism of the Holy Spirit.” Currently there is widespread recognition across many denominational lines that God has given all of the gifts to the Church and they can be exercised in an appropriate and biblical way without falling into the misuse discussed by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians chapters 12—14.

What Is the Gift of Tongues

The technical word for the gift of tongues is the English word “*glossolalia*,” which comes from the Greek word *glossa*,

meaning “language.” The gift of tongues is not mentioned often in the Scriptures, but it is mentioned in the book of Acts, chapters 2, 10, and 19, and in 1 Corinthians chapters 12—14. There is disagreement as to whether the tongues were actually known languages or ecstatic utterances that communicated spiritual truth.

Check the following passages and be prepared to discuss your answers in the group meeting.

Read Acts 2:1-4 and describe what happened.

What indication is there in Acts 2:5-8 that this gift was of known languages?

How does this relate to Paul’s use of his gift of tongues, spoken of in 1 Corinthians 14:18-19?

Based on this study of Scripture, we would define the gift of tongues as “the ability and responsibility to speak in a language which has not been learned.”

What Is the Purpose of Tongues?

Look again at Acts 2:1-11. What seems to have been the purpose of the apostles speaking in tongues at this time?

What was the purpose of tongues in Acts 10:44-46?

In Acts 19:1-7?

Chapter 12

HOW CAN I KNOW?

In his booklet, *How to be Filled with the Spirit*, Bill Bright tells the story of a famous oil field known as Yates' Pool.

During the depression this field was a sheep ranch owned by a man named Yates. Mr. Yates wasn't able to make enough on his ranching operation to pay the principal and interest on the mortgage, so he was in danger of losing his ranch. With little money for clothes or food, his family (like many others) had to live on government subsidy.

Day after day, as he grazed his sheep over those rolling West Texas hills, he was no doubt greatly troubled about how he would pay his bills. Then a seismographic crew from an oil company came into the area and told him that there might be oil on his land. They asked permission to drill a wildcat well and he signed a lease contract.

At 1,115 feet they struck a huge oil reserve. The first well came in at 80,000 barrels a day. Many subsequent wells were more than twice as large. In fact, 30 years after the discovery, a government test of one of the wells showed that it still had the potential flow of 125,000 barrels of oil a day. And Mr. Yates owned it all. The day he purchased the land he had received the oil and mineral rights. Yet, he'd been living on relief. A multimillionaire living in poverty! The problem? He didn't know the oil was there, even though he owned it.

Many Christians, sadly, have a similar problem. They live in spiritual poverty, unaware of the potential that God has given to them to do His great, divine ministry! They are unaware of the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given them for use in God's eternal work.

This lesson seeks to further answer the significant question of which gifts for ministry you may have.

How to Discover Your Gifts

While we discussed steps in gift discovery (chapter 2), and zeroed in on these gifts in chapters 3—11, you may still not be sure about your own giftedness. So here are some practical steps for you to follow.

1. Make sure you are a Christian. When you were born physically, you received certain physical traits. When you are born spiritually, you receive spiritual traits, including your spiritual gifts. Jesus said, “you must be born again,” John 3:7. If you are not sure you have been born spiritually, speak to your study leader about this and settle this essential life issue.

2. Offer your life as a sacrifice for God’s use. The discovery of God’s will for one’s life and the discovery of one’s gifts go hand in hand. Both these issues are related to the attitude of yielding to the Lordship of Christ as described in Romans 12:1-2. When our life is available for God’s use amazing things begin to happen.

3. Concentrate on ministry to others. Spiritual gifts surface in the context of ministry and availability to others. Ask God for opportunities to minister to others. As you seek to meet needs and minister, your spiritual motivations will come to the surface and your gift will be obvious in time.

What ministries are you involved in? What opportunities could you respond to? What are ways you could be involved in ministering to others regularly?

4. Note your inclinations and your irritations. God never asks us to do any ministry without equipping us for it. The gifts are God’s equipment for ministry. What are the inclinations, the interests, the abilities, the joys you find in ministry? What really fulfills you in ministry? What do you long to see happen? What burdens you? Jot down your thoughts.