

**THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT**  
**(A Definition and Explanation)**  
**Dr. Jerry Nelson [www.Soundliving.org](http://www.Soundliving.org)**  
**“A spiritual gift is a special work of the Holy Spirit**  
**whereby he grants to you grace for effective spiritual service.”**

What follows are the words used by the New Testament in describing some spiritual gifts. The words used are sometimes very general in nature and often overlap in definition. There is no indication that the Scriptures list all of the gifts of the Spirit. Noting the following gifts will, however, be helpful to you in seeing the range of gifts that the Holy Spirit grants and the way that they are used by believers to build each other up in the faith.

**ABILITY TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN SPIRITS** - The ability to discern the difference between the work of the Holy Spirit and the work of demons by immediate insight granted by the Spirit or by insight into the Scriptures.

**ADMINISTRATION** (The word is used primarily of steering a ship) - The ability to understand clearly the immediate and long-range goals of a group (small or large) and to devise means to help people accomplish those goals (probably largely synonymous with “leadership” listed below).

**APOSTLE** - There is serious question as to whether this gift extended past the original 12 disciples and Paul who were selected personally by Jesus. (See Carson, p 90-91)

**EVANGELISM** - The ability to assist unbelievers to become Christ's disciples **and/or** to equip believers in effectively witnessing to their faith.

**EXHORTATION** (Encouragement) - The ability to stir people to action, to so encourage, stimulate, counsel, and comfort people that they are enabled to grow and serve.

**FAITH** - A special work of the Spirit enabling "a believer to trust God to bring about certain things for which he or she cannot claim some divine promise recorded in the Scripture..." (Carson, p 39, especially note "prayers of faith")

**GIFTS OF HEALING** (note the plural) - That special ability to be used as God's intermediary to cure illnesses and restore health apart from the use of natural means. (Wagner, p 261) The plural may suggest that not everyone was getting healed by one person but that certain persons could heal certain diseases and others were needed for other diseases. (See especially "Expectant and Accepting" under "special topics" at [SoundLiving.org](http://SoundLiving.org)).

**GIVING** - The ability to use with liberality, cheerfulness, and without ulterior motive, one's temporal possessions for the good of others and the glory of God.

**HELPS AND SERVING** - An ability to meet the needs of others. These are very general words to describe all kinds of assistance. It may include helping, serving, giving, hospitality, etc.

**HOSPITALITY** - The ability with generosity and willingness to provide an open home and warm welcome to those in need.

**INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES** - The ability to make known in the common language the message spoken in tongues (see "tongues" below).

**LEADERSHIP** - The ability to help others work together to accomplish appropriate goals for the glory of God. (See also "administration," probably largely synonymous)

**MERCY** - The ability to feel genuine sympathy and compassion for people who are suffering and with cheerfulness, not compulsion, help them.

**MIRACULOUS POWERS** (Literally "workings of powers - note the plural) - An inclusive phrase indicating a host of miraculous acts. The ability to perform powerful acts that alter the ordinary course of nature (eg. exorcism, nature miracles, others displays of divine power). (Carson, p 40; Wagner, p 261)

**PASTOR (SHEPHERDING)** - The ability to assume a long-term responsibility for the spiritual welfare of a group of God's people.

**PROPHECY** - The reception and subsequent transmission of spontaneous, divinely originating revelation. (see Carson, p 91-99, and especially p 160-164) (See also "Does God Speak Today" Parts 1&2 from 2 Peter 1:16-21 SoundLiving.org)

**TEACHING** - Instructing others in the meaning and moral implications of the Christian faith as learned in the Scriptures.

**TONGUES** - It is the unintelligible expression of a Spirit-led impression on the heart of the Christian that was unplanned and/or the ability to speak to God in a language never learned. (See "prophecy" and "interpretation of tongues")

**WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE** - In some cases this is the same as prophecy (above) or in some cases a special experience by which a message comes to a person from the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures and is communicated to the congregation to meet a particular need. (in this latter case it is much like teaching).

**REMEMBER:** God may grant other gifts as he chooses.

Carson, D.A. Showing the Spirit  
Sanders, J. Oswald The Holy Spirit and His Gifts  
C. Peter Wagner \_\_\_\_\_

## **DISCOVERING YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFT(S)**

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To discover your spiritual gift(s) take the actions listed below. Further instruction regarding spiritual gifts may be found in I Corinthians 12, Romans 12:3-8, Ephesians 4:7-16, and I Peter 4:7-11.

1. **Pray.** Ask God to give you sensitivity to the needs of people and sensitivity to His direction and "gifts" in your life. "God, I know that you have given to me, as you have given to all Christians, certain spiritual gifts so that I might be effective in serving others. Please show me what those gifts are so that I may honor you."
2. **Become exposed to the needs of people.** No one will discover what grace God has given them to serve others if they remain isolated from the needs of others or ignore those needs when they appear. Listen to people as they describe their struggles, their hurts, their sorrows, their aspirations, their dreams. Talk to teachers of the Word, to disciplers, to those who visit hospitals or prisons, to those who work with youth, to those who take meals to others, to those who help with leading in worship. Ask them why they serve in those ways and what needs they are meeting. Get exposed to the needs of people.
3. **Ask "What human hurts or needs do I have a longing to help with?"** What needs do I see in others that I feel a passion to respond to? Is it to help people understand the Word? Is it to alleviate suffering? Is it to help people organize to accomplish their objectives? Is it to heal the sick? As you see the needs of people around you, what do you feel the need to help with?
4. **Ask "What concrete strengths do I have to help meet those needs?"** God didn't allow your background of experiences for nothing. He sovereignly ordered your life so that you are who you are, and He will most often use your education, experiences, relationships, physical makeup, temperament and talents) as a vehicle for the spiritual gift he has given you. Consider how God has already designed you and sovereignly ordered your life. What strengths do you already have to help meet the needs of people?
5. **Start meeting needs.** Look around you, see a need and start responding to that need. If you think that you have some strengths in communicating, then start with various kinds of teaching or Bible study leading, either in small groups or one-on-one. If you think you have an ability to demonstrate a true caring to someone who is hurting, then visit someone in the hospital, visit a shut-in, or take a meal to a family in need. What will happen is that over time you will begin to get a sense of whether that ministry to people is effective in their lives. You will find that you will grow in your ability and desire to help in these ways.
6. **Listen carefully to the advice and feedback of others who know you well.** What are they saying are your gifts? It will probably not be a gift if only you think you have it. Spiritual gifts are confirmed by others.

7. **Look for the evidence of results.** The greatest evidence of what your spiritual gift is (or gifts are) is the fruit that it bears in the lives of others. The purpose of spiritual gifts is not to have them but is to use them to help others spiritually. When others are loved, cared for, prayed for, encouraged, healed, taught, equipped, or helped spiritually in other ways by your actions, that is the greatest evidence that you have that particular spiritual gift.

God has given you spiritual gifts to make a difference in people's lives. He has given you special grace to be effective in service to others.