

Sound Living

The Holy Spirit

Jerry Nelson

What things come to mind when you think of the Holy Spirit? What does it mean to be “filled with the Spirit” or “baptized with the Spirit”? What about gifts from the Spirit—do I have a spiritual gift and if so, how can I know what it is?

This study of the Holy Spirit answers those questions and more. God “gifted” each of us to make a difference for the kingdom. And, God’s gift of the Holy Spirit means God is with us!

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Chapter One

The Holy Spirit—God With Us

John 14:15-17

What things come to mind when we talk about the Holy Spirit?

- To understand what makes us different or similar to the Pentecostals and Charismatics?
- To get some hand-raising, “hallelujah”-shouting joy into our worship experience?
- To learn about speaking in tongues?
- My friend says the Spirit leads him or that the Spirit told him such and such. I don’t experience that. Is that biblical?
- The disciples were filled with the Spirit and did miracles of healing—are we supposed to do that or is that just for Benny Hinn?
- Some people seem so “alive” in their faith while I feel “comatose.” How do I get what they have or should I even expect it?
- “Everybody” talks about his or her “gifts,” gifts of the Spirit – do I have one, should I, how do I know?

The Holy Spirit is not a recent invention:

John Calvin back in the 1500’s, honored the Holy Spirit by understanding and proclaiming the role of the Holy Spirit in becoming and living as a Christ-follower.

In the 1600’s the Puritans, particularly John Owen, continued to emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit, leaving us profound and extensive writings on the Spirit’s ministry.

In the 1700’s, the Great Awakening, preachers such as

Whitefield and Edwards led the way in understanding and applying the Spirit's work in reviving His church and enabling it to pursue its mission.

In the 1800's, Charles Finney contributed to a new way of thinking about the Spirit's work, "attributing to human initiative much of what had previously been reserved for the Spirit's operation."¹ Finney also introduced the idea that the "baptism of the Spirit" was a second work of grace subsequent to conversion.

In the early 1900's, Charles Parham began to teach that speaking in tongues was the initial evidence of having been "baptized" in the Spirit. And in 1906 in Los Angeles, with that same emphasis on tongues, during a series of meetings, the Pentecostal movement began. The Assemblies of God churches are the most significant example of a denomination that grew from that origin.

Just as during the Reformation (in the 1600's) and during the Great Awakening (in the 1700's) so during much of the 1900's, in reaction to the Pentecostal movement, other Evangelicals taught that the more spectacular gifts, such as tongues, were not a legitimate part of the Christian experience. And during most of the 1900's, Evangelicals and Pentecostals treated each other more like theological enemies than brothers in sibling rivalry.

In the 1950's and 1960's, a renewed emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit swept into some of the "mainline" churches. Because of their similar emphases on speaking in tongues, healing and other more spectacular gifts of the Spirit, and a doctrine of baptism of the Spirit as a second work of grace following conversion, they looked to the untrained eye to be the same as the earlier Pentecostals.

They were clearly not Pentecostals by tradition and so they became known as Charismatics (from “charis” in Greek which means gifts). And so there were Lutheran “charismatics,” Presbyterian “charismatics,” Episcopalian “charismatics,” and even Catholic “charismatics.”

Because of the often, liberal doctrines of some of the “mainline” churches, many “Charismatics” couldn’t find a permanent home in those churches so new churches and even whole denominations sprang up—Calvary Chapels, Vineyards and other groups. These groups were evangelical in their basic doctrines but “Pentecostal/Charismatic” in their worship/ministry experiences.

In continuing reaction to the Pentecostals and then the Charismatics, some Evangelicals began to de-emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit—a theological “throwing the baby out with the bath water.” Some felt they couldn’t pray to the Holy Spirit. Others were afraid to lift their hands in worship lest someone think they were Pentecostal or Charismatic. Praying for healing was relegated to the Oral Roberts and Benny Hinns of America.

But slowly over the past thirty years, for many reasons, including the growing influence of the youth culture, the emphasis and popularity of the music of the charismatics, the growth and influence of evangelical seminaries, not to miss the more important reason of the grace of God, the Pentecostals, Charismatics and Evangelicals have moved toward each other. Simplistically stated, the Evangelicals brought truth (a strong emphasis on Bible exposition) and the Pentecostal/Charismatics brought spirit (a strong emphasis on experience).

We are privileged to live in an era when the excesses of experience have been tempered by more solid Biblical

exegesis and the limitations of the purely academic has been revitalized by a growing experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. If you have been part of Pentecostal/Charismatic traditions, you have much to learn from the Evangelicals. If you have been part of the Evangelical traditions, you have much to learn from the Pentecostal/Charismatics. We need each other. Or, maybe more importantly we need to stop thinking in terms of either Pentecostal/Charismatic or Evangelical but rather think of ourselves as Christ-followers who “keep in step with the Spirit” as the Apostle Paul said it.²

If you have ever thought it would be easier being a Christ-follower if Jesus were still here, you’re not the first one.

I think most of us who are serious about our Christianity have had the experience of thinking to ourselves, “If only I could be with Jesus like the disciples got to be with Him.”

- “If He were actually here and I could be with Him, hear from Him and talk to Him, it would be so good.”
- I know I can pray to Him and read His word but it’s not the same.
- “I mean two thousand years is a long time to wait for someone to come back.”
- “The disciples got to hear Him and then ask questions – it was an on-going dialogue—what an advantage!”
- “When things didn’t go the way they should, the disciples got to go back to Jesus to talk to Him about it.”
- “When they were afraid (like when they almost capsized their boat on the lake) they called out to Him and He was there.”
- “When they engaged in ministry, they knew Jesus was right there to guide them and to encourage them.”

- “If only I could be with Jesus like the disciples got to be with Him—it would sure be easier to be a Christian.”

If you have ever thought it would be easier being a Christ-follower if Jesus were still here, you’re not the first one.

When Jesus was toward the end of His work here on earth, He began talking about going back to heaven to be with His Father. His disciples were immediately distressed at the idea. Like some of us, they couldn’t imagine living the Christian life without Jesus present. What Jesus told them then and what they experienced 50 days later totally transformed their perspective and their lives. During the disciples’ distress over Jesus’ imminent return to heaven, Jesus said to them:

“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”(John 14:16-17)

***The disciples were worried about losing
Jesus and Jesus promises them
the Holy Spirit.***

And moments later in the same discussion, Jesus said,
“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.”(John 16:13-15)

In those five verses we have the primary purpose of the coming of the Holy Spirit. But before I remind you what that is, let me tell you how the story of the first disciples ends. The disciples were worried about losing Jesus and Jesus promises them the Holy Spirit. I suspicion they didn't think it was a good trade. In Acts 1:4-5 we read,

"On one occasion (during the 50 days between his resurrection and his return to heaven), while he was eating with them, (Jesus) gave them this command: 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' "

And, after Jesus' ascension to heaven,

"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them."(Acts 2:1-4)

Peter eventually stood up to preach to a crowd that had gathered and said,

"These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.' "(Acts 2:15-17)

Never again in the New Testament will you hear the disciples lament the absence of Jesus. Why not? Because with the coming of the Holy Spirit, the disciples experienced again the presence of Jesus. As I said, they never again wished Jesus were with them. They never again wished they could talk to Him or hear from Him. They never again

expressed disappointment that Jesus wasn't there to teach, encourage, protect or guide them. Jesus was again "with" them in the person of the Spirit.

Now you might say, "Wait a minute, who is with the disciples and with us—is it Jesus or is it the Holy Spirit?" And I would correctly answer, "Yes." Maybe a comparison would help explain how it is both Jesus and the Spirit who were with the disciples after Pentecost and are with us today. One of the things that drove Jesus' contemporaries "crazy" and left His disciples confused was when Jesus kept saying that He and the Father are one. Today we have little difficulty thinking of Jesus, the Son of God, as the "exact representation" of the Father but that was not always so. When Jesus was here, He said, "to see Him was to see the Father."

"Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.' Jesus answered: 'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.'" (John 14:8-11)

The Disciples grew to understand and experience that to have Jesus, the Son, with them was to have the Father. They weren't missing anything. That Jesus is God and the exact representation of the Father is a "big deal" in the New Testament—that to have one is to have the other. Likewise, after the coming of the Spirit, the Disciples realized and experienced that to have the Spirit was to have the Son—they weren't missing anything. By knowing and responding to the Spirit, they were not leaving Jesus to

attach themselves to the Spirit. It is not as if they were leaving one person to go to another; they hadn't switched allegiance. And it was not that they now talked to the Spirit in hopes that He would convey the message to Jesus. No, to have the Spirit was to have Jesus—***He was with them.***

Earlier I said that in just five verses in John 14 and 16, we see stated the primary purpose of the coming of the Holy Spirit. Consistent with what I have already addressed, I want you now to see what that purpose is. The Spirit comes to be Jesus "in" us and to bring glory to Jesus. Theologian J.I. Packer put it this way: "The truth of the matter is this. The distinctive, constant, basic ministry of the Holy Spirit under the new covenant is...to mediate Christ's presence to believers—to give them...a knowledge of Jesus' presence with them as Savior, Lord and God."³

I've already discussed how the Spirit comes to be Jesus "in" us but I want you to see more Biblical evidence of this. Look how the Holy Spirit is referred to as the Spirit of Jesus:

- *"When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to."* (Acts 16:8)
- *"God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts."* (Galatians 4:6)
- *"I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance."* (Philippians 1:19)
- *"trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing..."* (1 Peter 1:11)

To Luke, Paul and Peter, to have the Spirit was to have Jesus.

It shouldn't surprise us that the Holy Spirit is so closely identified with Jesus. The same Spirit who indwells us is the Spirit who was with Jesus throughout His earthly ministry from womb to tomb and beyond.

- *"At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit..."(Luke 10:21)*
- *"Then John gave this testimony: 'I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, "The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit." I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.' "(John 1:32-34)*
- *"You know what has happened...how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power..." (Acts 10:37-38)*

So closely connected are God the Son and God the Spirit, that to have the Spirit is to have the Son.

And I have already shown you that when the Spirit came to the disciples at Pentecost, they never again complained about missing Jesus because to have the Spirit was to have Jesus. In fact so interchangeable is the presence of the Spirit and the presence of Jesus that Paul would write:

*"You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if **the Spirit of God lives in you**. And if anyone does not have **the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ**. But if **Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin**, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through **his Spirit, who lives in you**."(Romans 8:9-11—Emphasis added)*

This is not to minimize the distinction between the person of the Son and the person of the Spirit but to show how the work of the Spirit is to give us the presence of the Son. I believe the New Testament teaches that the primary purpose of the Spirit's coming is to be Jesus in us—to mediate the very presence of Jesus. A study of the Spirit is not about getting inside information to release supernatural power in our lives. It is not about discovering the gifts of the Spirit and learning how to utilize them. It is not even just learning how to overcome temptation and becoming more like Christ by the influence of the Spirit.⁴

The ministry of the Spirit is that we might know, love, trust, and honor Jesus. This study is about a relationship with the Jesus who is present with us in the person of His Spirit. But the Holy Spirit's purpose is fulfilled in a very specific

To have the Spirit is to have the Son!

way. Notice the second part of the way I describe the purpose of the Spirit in our lives: The Spirit comes to be Jesus "in" us **and to bring glory to Jesus**. The John 16 passage declares this unequivocally:

"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you." (John 16:13-15 – Emphasis Added)

The Spirit's work is to bring glory to Jesus. To bring glory to Jesus is to reveal who He is. Jesus says the Spirit does that by *"taking from what is mine (what is true about Jesus) and making it known to you."*

Look again at the comparison of God the Son's relationship to God the Father. Right after Jesus got through talking to His disciples about the coming Spirit He prayed, *"Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, **that your Son may glorify you...**I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. **Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.**"* (John 17:1, 6-8 Emphasis Added.) Jesus glorified the Father by making Him known. In similar fashion, the Spirit will take all of who Jesus is, all Jesus teaches, and all Jesus has done and apply it to us.

When Jesus says that the Spirit will take *"what is mine and (make) it known to you,"* J.I. Packer says, Jesus "must have meant everything that is real and true about me as God incarnate, as the Father's agent in creation...as the world's rightful lord....And all that is real and true about me as your divine lover, your mediator, your (guarantee) in the new covenant, your prophet, priest and king, your Savior from the guilt and power of sin...; and all that is true of me as your shepherd, husband and friend, your life and your hope, the author and finisher of your faith, the lord of your own personal history, and the one who will one day bring you to be with me and share my glory, who am both your path and your prize."⁵ We are describing a relationship with a Person—the Person of Jesus in the Person of the Spirit.

Writing 20 years ago, Richard Lovelace said this relationship "involves moving about in all areas of our life in dependent fellowship with a person: 'So I say, Live by the Spirit.' When this practice of the presence of God is

maintained over a period of time, our experience of the Holy Spirit becomes less subjective and more clearly identifiable...A normal relationship with the Holy Spirit should (include) a profound awareness that we are always face to face with God; that as we move through life the presence of his Spirit is the most real and (influential) factor in our everyday lives; that underneath the momentary static of events, conflicts, problems, and even excursions into sin, he is always there..."⁶

The Holy Spirit is Jesus-God with us. It is a relationship so close that the only way Jesus can describe it is as "in" us. As Robertson McQuilkin put it, "Incredible as it may seem, God has planned my life around Himself—uninterrupted companionship with the greatest Love who ever lived! No getting an appointment a month in advance. No taking a number and waiting my turn. He doesn't just tolerate me. Outrageous mystery—God actually desires my company."⁷ The Holy Spirit comes to be Jesus "in" us and to bring glory to Jesus. That's the Holy Spirit I want to know better.

250 years ago, long before the current emphasis and even controversies over the Holy Spirit, Joseph Hart wrote,

*Come Holy Spirit come!
Let thy bright beams arise;
Dispel the sorrow from our minds,
The darkness from our eyes.*

*Convince us of our sin,
Then lead to Jesus' blood,
And to our wondering view reveal
The secret love of God.*

Revive our drooping faith,

*Our doubts and fears remove,
And kindle in our breasts the flame
Of never-dying love.*

*Show us that loving Man
That rules the courts of bliss,
The Lord of hosts, the Mighty God,
Th' Eternal Prince of Peace.*

*'Tis Thine to cleanse the heart,
To sanctify the soul,
To pour fresh life in every part,
And new-create the whole.*

*Dwell, therefore, in our hearts,
Our minds from bondage free;
Then shall we know, and praise and love,
The Father, Son and Thee.*

Joseph Hart 1759
The Lutheran Hymnal

End Notes

¹ Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, p. 120

² Ibid

³ J.I. Packer, *Keep in Step With the Spirit*, p. 50

⁴ Ibid, p. 26-47

⁵ Ibid, p. 52-53

⁶ Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, p. 131

⁷ Robertson McQuilkin, *Life in the Spirit*, p. 79

Chapter Two

Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Acts 1 and 2

In our continuing study of the Holy Spirit, we turn to the ideas of "baptism in the Spirit" or being "filled with the Spirit." These phrases and others cause great division among Christians and are easily misunderstood; phrases found in Scripture such as in the first two chapters of the book of Acts:

"baptized with water"

"baptized with the Holy Spirit"

"when the Holy Spirit comes on you"

"All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit"

"God says, 'I will pour out my spirit on all people'..."

And to those in the church, we have added some phrases of our own to describe the work of the Holy Spirit:

- a revival
- an outpouring of the Spirit

What do these mean?

For this study we are going to look primarily at two of the phrases: Baptism of the Holy Spirit and Filling of the Spirit. Looking at Acts 1:5, we read Jesus promised His disciples they would receive the Holy Spirit.

"For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

In Acts 1:8, He says that when they do, they will be witnesses to the rest of the world about who Jesus is:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all

Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Then in Acts 1:14, it says they met together to pray. Though it doesn't explicitly say it, I believe they met together to pray for the coming of the Spirit Jesus had promised would come. And in Acts 2, we have the record of the Holy Spirit coming.

Baptized in the Holy Spirit

What then does it mean when Jesus says, *"you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit"*?

It is probably obvious to most that the word "baptism" used in this way is a word picture to help us understand in what way the Holy Spirit affects a person. When we hear the word "baptism," it ought to make us think of water and of the ritual known as water baptism. Water baptism will help us understand how the word is used in reference to the Holy Spirit and us. In the same verse (1:5) where Jesus talks about "baptism of the Holy Spirit," He also talks about "John's Baptism with Water." Jesus, Himself, makes the parallel. What is it?

If we were to take the time to look back at any of the Gospel accounts of John The Baptist, we would see that John went around preaching repentance and when people would repent of their sins they would be **initiated** into John's band of disciples by water baptism. That baptism was a ritual that indicated that the person who had confessed his sins was cleansed of them (just like water cleans dirt) and was initiated into a whole different way of life. Through the ritual of water baptism people gave evidence that they were entering a new way of life, just as we ask people to go through rituals to belong to organizations (fraternities, clubs, etc.). Now when we think of the word "Baptism" we not only think of John's Baptism with water from the Gospels, but more likely we think of

the water baptism that is commanded by Jesus in Matt 28:19-20, and was practiced by the Apostles and is still practiced in our own churches.

I'm not able to take the time here to talk about the full significance of water baptism as Paul does in Romans 6 but I can say that at root "water baptism" is symbolic of an **initiation** into a group. In the Bible, Christian water baptism in every case follows faith and repentance and is symbolic of the person's new identity—I now belong to Christ. Water baptism is a ritual of initiation—I now belong to the church. I am taking my stand as a Christian. I am willing to identify as a part of the people of God. This is why we say it is inconceivable that people would say they are trusting Christ as saving-Lord and not be willing to be baptized? Jesus is the one who laid down "water baptism" as **the** ritual that outwardly indicates to others what has happened internally—we belong to Christ.

***Water baptism is a ritual of initiation—
I now belong to the church.***

Now we may understand how the word "baptism" when used with "water" indicates initiation—an induction into something—but how do we understand the word "baptism" when not used with water? We understand it in the same way as initiation is an induction into something. We are familiar with that usage, too. When someone has had only one day of practice on the new football team and then is thrown into the "big" game, we might hear someone say, "Wow, that guy sure got baptized." or "He got baptized by fire," meaning he was abruptly initiated into the activity: from no participation to full participation. And when we say, "he sure got baptized," we don't mean he got wet; we mean he was initiated into something. We aren't talking

about water but about **initiation** into something.

If water baptism is a symbol of initiation into God's family, the baptism of the Spirit is the actual induction into God's family. Water baptism only symbolizes our initiation into the church—the people of God—while the baptism with the Spirit is the authentic way whereby we became God's people. So when Jesus, in Acts 1:5 says, *"you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit,"* He is saying that when the Holy Spirit comes, these disciples will be the first to become part of the new people of God. Look at John 14:16-17:

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you."

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would come and be in them.

In I Corinthians 12:13 we read what the Holy Spirit would do when He came:

"For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."

To be "baptized with the Holy Spirit" is to be **initiated** into the body of Christ, to become part of the people of God.

The Baptism with the Holy Spirit is that act of Jesus whereby He gives us the Holy Spirit, thus making us one of His people—inducting us into His family. Every person from Acts 2:38 on, who trusts in Jesus as Saving-Lord is given the Holy Spirit—they are Baptized with the Spirit. It is part and parcel of becoming a Christian. It is not something we feel; it is something that is done for us by Jesus.

Someone might quickly say, "Baptism with the Spirit may well be an act of Jesus whereby He places us into His family but when I look at Acts 2 I see all kinds of things

that were sensed. What do you mean we don't feel it? Those disciples sure sensed something!" I submit to you that what happened in Acts 2 was two different things—one being the result of the other. In Acts 2, the disciples were "baptized with the Spirit" just as Jesus promised in Acts 1:5, **but** they were also "filled with the Spirit" (Acts 2:4) which was also part of the promise given in Acts 1:8, *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

Filled with the Spirit

That brings us to the second phrase, "filled with the Spirit." If "Baptism with the Spirit" is that act of Jesus whereby He initiates us into the people of God (and water baptism is the outward symbol of that) then "being filled with the Spirit" is that act of the Spirit whereby He governs our thoughts, words and actions. When you hear the word "filled" don't think of a space that is filled with a substance like a fluid; **instead**, think of a person who is increasingly influenced by another person. To be "filled with the Spirit" is to be influenced by the Holy Spirit—to have our lives governed by His values, His goals, His love, and His perspective.

In Acts 2, as a result of the promise of Acts 1:5 and 8, we see two things happening to the disciples:

1. They are baptized with the Holy Spirit
2. They are filled with the Holy Spirit.

It is very important to us to know how this filling (this powerful influence on us by the Holy Spirit) takes place. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit takes place at the time we become a Christian. But the Filling with the Spirit takes

place in two ways. I do not believe that we are filled with the Spirit by simply believing and then start “spiritual breathing.”

God Governs Our Lives

To examine the first way, look at Ephesians 5:18 and Colossians 3:16-17:

“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” (Ephesians)

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (Colossians)

Just a casual perusal of these two passages would indicate

To be filled with the Spirit in this way is the experience of growing in spiritual understanding by the Bible and application of it to our lives by faith and obedience.

they are parallel—they both speak of the same issue—growing to maturity in Jesus Christ and becoming more and more governed by the Holy Spirit as it says in Ephesians 4:13, *“Attaining to the full measure of the fullness of Christ.”* In fact, if you look closely at Eph. 5:18-20 you will see that it is nearly identical to Col. 3:16-17.

“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the

Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."(Ephesians)

What is noteworthy is that while Eph. 5:18 says, *"Be Filled with the Spirit,"* Col. 3:16 says, *"Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly."* I contend that to be filled with the Spirit in this way is the experience of growing in spiritual understanding by the Bible and application of it to our lives by faith and obedience. I see Col. 2:6-7 speaking to the same issue:

"So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."

The usual way we are "filled with the Spirit" or increasingly governed by the Spirit in our words and actions is by the sometimes slow experience of:

- studying the Word,
- praying,
- fellowshiping with other Christians,
- participating in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper,
- worshipping,
- and trusting the Spirit of God to use these means to grow us up to think His thoughts, do what He would do, and say what He would say—governed by Him— "filled."

As I mentioned earlier, as we look at the experience of the people of God in the Old and New Testaments, and as we look at the majority of the teaching of the New Testament, we are led to believe that this is the usual means the Holy Spirit of God uses to "fill" us—to increasingly govern our lives. I do not want to minimize this usual means for a minute—in fact I want to emphasize it. If we want to know

a more mature Christian experience instead of often feeling defeated and weak and weary, then the usual means God uses to grow us is this lifetime of maturing.

Outpouring of the Spirit

But there is another way of being "filled with the Spirit." I mentioned the first way of being "filled" as the "usual" means God uses. But there is an "unusual" way as well.

There have been times in history starting with Acts chapter 2 where God has chosen to pour out His Spirit in unusual measure—meaning that the Spirit has moved in people's lives for special reasons:

- boldness
- ability
- conviction

In Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit filled the Apostles it says they witnessed to the truth about Jesus with special boldness. In Acts 2:37, when the Holy Spirit moved in this unusual way, it says the unbelieving Jews heard, were convicted, repented and believed and were baptized—in fact 3000 of them that first day.

Acts 2:4 says the whole group was filled:

"All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them."

Acts 4:8 says one person was filled:

"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: 'Rulers and elders of the people!'"

Acts 4:31 says that again the whole group was filled:

"After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was

shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly."

And in Acts 13:9, only one person was filled:

"Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said..."

In each of these cases it appears that God sovereignly moved to "fill" these people to accomplish what He had in mind at that very time.

The outpouring of His Spirit (as Peter reciting Joel called it in Acts 2:17) came with such power that the disciples spoke with boldness and unbelievers turned in great numbers to Christ. Again I say I believe Acts 2 is the first New Testament revival. And that unusual reviving and outpouring of God's Spirit has happened numerous times down through history in countries all around the world. It is that kind of revival, that kind of outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that kind of filling of the Spirit that I pray God would do in our lives.

Again, I do not want to underestimate the power or necessity of the "usual" though supernatural working of the Spirit in our hearts whereby He grows us, "fills" us, and matures us over time. But I pray God would visit us with a special, and unusual filling of His Spirit—an extraordinary outpouring of His Spirit. Remember the three related but separate issues:

- "Baptism with the Holy Spirit" is that act of Jesus whereby He gives us the Spirit—initiating us, placing us into the new people of God—we become Christians.
- It happens at conversion.
- The "filling with the Holy Spirit" speaks of the Holy Spirit's governing, controlling, influence on our lives. This can come in two ways:
 1. The usual way—growth toward maturity through the

means of grace.

2. The unusual way—a sovereign act of God whereby He pours out His Spirit in such measure that we more fully and suddenly are governed by the Spirit.

While never neglecting the usual, we also pray for the unusual.

Come Holy Spirit, Come!

(This message relied heavily on John R.W. Stott's *Baptism and Fullness: The Work of the Holy Spirit Today*)

Chapter Three

In Step With The Spirit (Sanctification)

Galatians 5:16-22

Next I want to address the subject of holiness and the Holy Spirit. I might have just as effectively begun the chapter by saying, "Let's focus on root canals." "Holiness" sounds painful if not irrelevant. Some, maybe many, of us operate day to day in or between two spiritual conditions: Uneasiness and apathy. Some of the time we live with a low-grade uneasiness about God—feeling that we aren't quite measuring up and sometimes feeling that maybe we aren't even Christians.

When we are in this **Uneasiness Mode** of thinking or feeling about God, we attempt to correct the uneasiness by **doing** more. We believe in God just enough to fear that if we don't measure up or at least "get saved" we will be in trouble after death. So we pray a prayer asking Jesus to forgive us and take us to heaven when we die.

As long as life is going relatively well, we try to stay on God's good side. We're managing! Who needs it?

And then we try to live good enough lives so He won't back out on the deal when death comes. And we believe enough in God that when life isn't going the way we want it to, we get more consistent about doing the right things so that God will "weigh-in" on our side and make things turn out better for us here and now.

Other times and maybe much of the time we live in **the Apathetic Mode**—not even thinking about our relationship with God, indifferent to what He might think, working hard on our own to make life what we want it to be. And we do just enough of what we consider our religious obligations to keep from slipping into the uneasiness mode. As long as life is going relatively well, we try to maintain it by staying on God's good side. So where's the relevance of holiness and the Holy Spirit? We're managing! Who needs it?

Read carefully this statement from Hebrews 12:14:

"Without holiness no one will see the Lord."

What do you think God means by that? Read as the Lord Jesus and the Apostle Paul make similar statements:

- *"I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of... the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."* (Matthew 5:20)
- *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."* (Matthew 7:21)
- *"No immoral, impure or greedy person...has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ..."* (Ephesians 5:5)

And then from Galatians 5:19: *"I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this (sexual immorality...hatred, discord, jealousy...selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness...and the like) will not inherit the kingdom of God."*

I suspect that by mentioning these verses, I have created some spiritual dis-equilibrium (for those verses certainly put some responsibility on us) so again I ask, is holiness relevant? Now having asked that, I want to bring holiness into sharper focus. The Apostle Peter quotes God from the Old Testament:

"Be holy, because I am holy." (1 Peter 1:16) God was not telling us to be God—He did not say "be holy **as** I am holy." That would be impossible. Only God can be God. But He did say "be holy **because** I am holy." We are to be holy because we are made in the image of God. We were created to reflect the character of God. We are most fully human when we think and act as we were created to think and act. So holiness is both an ethical obligation and an exciting possibility.

When I say, "an exciting possibility," I mean we were created to live in relationship with God and each other. Jesus said it this way in John 17:3, *"Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."* "Eternal life" is not just about the length of life but about the quality of that life—real life, true life, life as God designed us to live it in communion with Him and each other.

Some people think they "know" God because they believe He exists or because they are very religious. John Wesley wrote, "Right opinion (or knowledge) is, at best, a very slender part of religion. Though (a right heart) cannot exist without right (knowledge), yet right knowledge may exist without (a right heart). There may be right (knowledge) of God without either love or right (attitude) toward him. Satan is proof of this."¹ The exciting possibility of holiness is that we might actually get to know God. The Westminster Catechism affirms this: "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever." A.W. Tozer said it this way: "Religion, so far as it is genuine, is in essence the response of created personalities to the creating personality—God."²

If we have the God-enabled sense to see past today, to think beyond a mere 80 or 90 years, we realize that life is about God. And a relationship with that God is not only

relevant, it is at the very heart of life. We are called to holiness because therein is true life as God created it to be. Look at several passages that confirm this truth:

- John 10:10 says, *"I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly."*
- And John 15:9-11 reads, *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."*
Jesus is not saying obey God so you stay on His good side—He is saying enjoy the relationship.
- Psalm 16:11 says, *"You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand."*

Holiness is not just about measuring up to some standard of right and wrong; it is about a relationship. Oh we will increasingly live by God's holy standards, but that is not the goal—the goal is relationships unfettered by the sins that separate and destroy. It is about living as we were designed by God to live in relationship with Him and each other. Most of us are emotional recluses—never getting close to each other and much less to God! Is holiness relevant? *"Without holiness no one will see the Lord."*

You might say, "Jesus made me holy. He forgave all my sin and I accepted His righteousness as my own when I became a Christian and therefore in God's eyes I am holy." That is absolutely correct as far as it goes. But to leave it there and to think of practical day to day holiness as optional is not only dangerous to your soul, it is also sad—sad for us to miss so much of what God has to offer in this life.

Growing in Holiness

So how do we grow in holiness? How do we become more like what God created us to be? Here is the way the Bible describes it:

- Galatians 4:19 – *"Until Christ is formed in you"* (leading some to call it "spiritual formation")
- Ephesians 4:13 – *"Become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ"* (leading some to refer to it as "spiritual growth")
- 2 Corinthians 3:18 – *"And we...are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."*
- Romans 8:29 – *"For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son..."* (leading some to call it "Christ-likeness")
- And 1 Thessalonians 4:3 – *"It is God's will that you should be sanctified."* (leading to the older term, "sanctification.")

And what is that action of "spiritual formation" or "sanctification" or growth in holiness? The Westminster Catechism answers the question this way: Sanctification is that "work of God's free grace whereby we are renewed in the whole (person) after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness."³ Theologian John Owen writing several hundred years ago defined it as, "an immediate work of the Spirit of God on...believers, purifying and cleansing their natures from the pollution of sin, renewing in them the image of God, and thereby enabling them, (by)...grace, to yield obedience unto God...by virtue of the life and death of Jesus Christ..."⁴

Holiness and the Holy Spirit

Look at Galatians 5:16-26:

"So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

"The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other."

Look first at verse 17; it describes the setting of what the Apostle is teaching. Paul writes, *"For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature."*

Paul refers to a "sinful nature" confirming other passages in the Bible that teach we are sinners from conception. A sinful propensity or inclination, a predisposition to sin is part of our spiritual DNA by virtue of being part of a fallen human race. Adam's sinfulness and consequently God's condemnation transferred to all of us.

"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all

men, because all sinned... For...the many died by the trespass of the one man...The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation... For...by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man... Consequently...the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men..."(Romans 5:12-18)

You may not like that truth but the Bible declares it—we are born sinners. Not only are we born as sinners, but also as Dallas Willard in his book, *Renovation of the Heart*, reminds us, we are also born into a world that takes our evil nature and further shapes us in sin. If sanctification is about reshaping us, re-forming us, and transforming us, it is because we are first of all misshapen and malformed by sin. Selfishness, greed, envy, revenge, lust, jealousy, and the like are all around us, influencing us, shaping us. They are in the commercials we see, the programs and movies we watch, and the people we live around. And our sinful nature agrees with the sinful influences around us. And the result is a sinful self-centeredness that manifests itself in all kinds of relationship-destroying behavior.

We are born sinners.

But when we are “born again,” when we become Christians, a powerful new person and influence is introduced—the Spirit of God takes up residence with us. Jesus said in John 14:16-17, *"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth...for he lives with you and will be in you."*

So close, so intimate is the Spirit’s relationship with us that Jesus and the New Testament writers speak of Him as “in” us. He is a personal, ever-present, powerful influence. Romans 8:9 says, *"You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in*

you.”

The old sin nature with its evil inclinations is not gone but by the Spirit, a new more powerful inclination comes and begins to work in us to conquer the old.

“Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”(Romans 6:3-4)

The death-grip those old sinful inclinations had on us has been broken through our relationship with Jesus' death and resurrection.

But even after we become Christ-followers (Christians) those old sinful influences (from within and without) are still there. Or again as Paul says in verse 17, *“For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.”*

My old bent toward selfishness didn't just disappear when I became a Christian. And the influences around me urging me toward self-protection and self-promotion didn't stop being influences.

Instead, the Spirit's entrance into my life set up a bitter battle—a battle between my old sinful inclinations and what sin shaped me into versus new desires and what the Spirit of God desires to reshape me into. And if you have any self-awareness as a Christian, you know something of that battle. It is not just new Christians who struggle with a conflict of desires—wanting to live in a way that is pleasing to Jesus but also wanting to live in the old ways that seem

pleasing to us. Even Christians of many years know the struggle between the old selfish desires and the new way of the Spirit can be intense at times. The Apostle Paul, long into his spiritual formation, described how intense that struggle could sometimes be.

"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do...I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing... When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law...I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin." (Romans 7:15-24)

Jerome, an early church leader, tried to escape temptation by entering a monastery in the desert but found it was no cure.

"O how often I imagined that I was in the midst of the pleasures of Rome while I was stationed in the desert... I, who because of the fear of hell had condemned myself to such a hell and who had not but scorpions and wild animals for company, often thought that I was dancing in a chorus with girls. My face was pale from fasting, but I burned with passionate desires within my freezing body..."⁵

Paul writes that the conflict is so intense, *"that you do not do what you want."* (Galatians 5:17) When I want to do right, my old sinful disposition blocks me and when I want to do wrong, the Spirit within me blocks me. On my own I don't achieve either. Even sin brings no ultimate pleasure (or as Clarence Jordan put it in his Cotton Patch Bible, "That is why you can't run wild, doing as you please," and I can't seem to do the good I sometimes want to do.

So what is the answer to this conflict that, on our own, results in a stalemate? Paul responds in Galatians 5:16 and 25: *"So I say, live by the Spirit...Keep in step with the Spirit."* What does he mean?

Filled with the Spirit

Recent evangelicalism has made so much of the "filling of the Spirit" that it has been put into a class of its own as an event or a series of events that we must seek in order to live successful Christianity. But it is instructive to me that, with one possible exception, the metaphor of being "filled" or "full" of the Spirit is used only in the narrative passages of Luke/Acts. I am not suggesting that being filled with the Spirit is not a biblical phrase—it clearly is. But what I am saying is that being "filled" is not a special category all of its own. The New Testament uses many metaphors and analogies to describe the way of holiness.

The following phrases are expressive of one idea:

- John 21:22 (Jesus said) – *"follow me"*
- Galatians 5:25 – *"live by the Spirit"*
- Galatians 5:25 – *"keep in step with the Spirit"*
- Galatians 5:18 and Romans 8 – *"led by the Spirit"*
- Romans 8:6 – *"controlled by the Spirit"*
- Romans 8:6 – *"live in accordance with the Spirit"*
- Romans 7:6 – *"serve in the new way of the Spirit"*
- Ephesians 5:18 – *"be filled with the Spirit"*
- 1 John 1:7 – *"walk in the light as he is in the light"*
- 1 John 2:6 – *"Walk as Jesus did"*

In all these figures of speech we have the same idea declared by Paul in Galatians 5:16, *"Live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature."* Choose to live life under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The

dominant influence in our lives, the influence that trumps all other influences, is the Holy Spirit. When there are conflicting values, conflicting desires, our new desires, enabled by the Spirit, can win. When sinful desires influence me, the more powerful influence of the Spirit enables me to do the right thing instead of the wrong.

Live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Even as I say this I realize that in my own experience that is not always the outcome. Many times I have struggled with the right and wrong and even though I am a Christian, indwelt by the Spirit, I have chosen the wrong. How did that happen if the Spirit is the stronger influence? It happens in the same way it was happening to the Galatians when Paul was writing to them. The Galatian Christians thought that once they were saved by grace through faith they had to live the Christian life by their own efforts of doing the right things.

We fall into the same thinking: "I'm saved by grace but now I have to live up to my new status as a child of God." And so we set out to do what a Christian ought to do—we read our Bibles and we pray and we go to church and all the other things good Christians are supposed to do. But it is not long before our good intentions are overwhelmed by our old desires. But then we get convicted for not living like a Christian should live and so we double our efforts at doing it right. We join a Bible study group, we get into a Scripture memorization program, we pick up a "read-through the Bible in a year" brochure, we get into an accountability group—all in an effort to keep doing the right things.

But after several cycles of partial success ending in mostly failure, we get discouraged and largely give up and live in that state of uneasiness toward God that I wrote of earlier. Some even get cynical, thinking to themselves that holiness may be talked about but no one really does it. And they take secret delight in some “do-goody two-shoes” finally having his feet of clay exposed, thinking, “See, they couldn’t do it either!” And they fall into that twilight zone between apathy and uneasiness.

Earlier in his letter, Paul wrote, *“Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?”* (Galatians 3:3) And in Galatians 5 Paul reminds them, *“If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.”* (Galatians 5:18) To the Galatians and the Romans, Paul makes it very clear that while the law (God’s rules for life) is good, those rules in and of themselves have no ability to help you follow them. The law and any list of good things to do can show us what to do but they can’t help us do it. The ability to obey the law, to do the will of God, to live as Christ lived, to relate to God and each other as God lovingly desires for us—that ability is from the Spirit. The Spirit with us, in us, influencing us, enabling us is why we are able to choose and do what is right.

“Living by the Spirit” or being “led by the Spirit” or being “filled with the Spirit” is a day-to-day, moment-by-moment, relationship with Him. It is an awareness that on my own I can’t live up to the possibilities of holiness—I consciously depend on the Spirit within me to enable me. I won’t be re-formed into the likeness of Jesus by simply trying to do the right things. I will be re-shaped into Jesus’ likeness by the Spirit. The Spirit will do the reshaping and He will use my trusting obedience to accomplish it. In Romans 6, Paul tells us how it is possible for us to do right.

“Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into

Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”(Romans 6:3-4)

“So in practice we should be constantly reminding ourselves of who we are. We need to learn to talk to ourselves, and ask ourselves questions: ‘Don’t you know? Don’t you know the meaning of your conversion and baptism? Don’t you know that you have been united to Christ in his death and resurrection? Don’t you know that you have been enslaved to God and have committed yourself to his obedience? Don’t you know these things? Don’t you know who you are? We must go on pressing ourselves with these questions, until we reply to ourselves: ‘Yes, I DO know who I am, a new person in Christ, and by the grace of God I shall live accordingly.’”⁶

Why doesn’t that work every time? If I recognize the choice before me and I want to do the right and I ask the Spirit to enable me and believe He will, why don’t I always do the right thing? I suppose there are at least a couple of possibilities. Maybe we want to do the right thing, but fail to also recognize how strong our desires are to do the wrong; we don’t take seriously how powerful the old sin nature really is. And so even though we ask the Spirit to enable us, truthfully we think we can handle this ourselves and step out on our own. Or we **say** we want to do the right thing but inside we are actually yielding to the wrong thing. What I know from Scripture and experience is that this conflict Paul speaks of is a fierce battle and even the best Christians fight it. I love Dallas Willard’s comment, “The greatest saints are not those who need less grace but those who consume the most grace, who indeed are most in need of grace—those who are saturated by grace in

every dimension of their being. Grace to them is like breath."⁷

We don't just do right things but we live in a conscious dependence on the Spirit within us—we call out to Jesus to help us and we trust Him to do so and we act in faith. And it is only as we choose the Spirit's way time and time again over a long time, that in one area of life and then another we begin to build a habit of doing right. Maybe it is in our speech first, then in our actions, then even in our thoughts and attitudes. Spiritual maturity is not built in a day but over a lifetime.

J.I. Packer writes, "Holiness teaching that skips over disciplined persistence in the well-doing that forms holy habits is thus weak; habit-forming is the Spirit's ordinary way of leading us on in holiness. The fruit of the Spirit is, from one standpoint, a series of habits of action and reaction: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control are all of them habitual dispositions, that is, accustomed ways of thinking, feeling and behaving. Habits are all important in holy life..."⁸

Holiness is not about praying a prayer to be filled with the Spirit; it is not about disciplining ourselves more rigorously to do the right things. Holiness is about a relationship with God; it is about relating to the Spirit of God who resides in us. Holiness is moment-by-moment active, conscious dependence on the Spirit to enable us to do what is right. It is also a lifetime of growing more and more to get it right in conquering those old sinful desires by choosing, with the Spirit's help, to do it right.

Will we fail a lot? Of course! Are we satisfied with failure, willing to stay there? Of course not! And with each failing, we ask the Lord's forgiveness and next time we invite the

Spirit to enable us as we choose to obey. It's not magic, folks, and it's not rocket-science but it is supernatural. "Without holiness, no one will see the Lord."

"Keep in step with the Spirit!"

End Notes

¹ A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, p. 8-9

² Ibid, p. 13

³ Answer 35 in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*

⁴ John Owen, *Works*, p. 3:386

⁵ Luther's Works, LW 27:68-69

⁶ John Stott, *Romans*, p. 187

⁷ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, p. 94

⁸ J.I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, p. 109

Chapter Four

The Gifts of the Spirit

1 Corinthians 12

Are you good for anything? For the person with so-called “low self-esteem,” that is a terrible question. They already think they are unnecessary in the world and the question only brings the perception of worthlessness back to mind. But most people know they have a contribution to make somewhere. Most employees know they are making some contribution at work. Most parents have some sense of their importance as fathers or mothers. Most of us know we matter somewhere.

But what if I asked, “Are you good for anything in the Kingdom; are you good for anything in the work of God in the world?” I’m afraid that the number of people with “low self-esteem” would rise dramatically compared to those who responded that way to my first question. Too many Christians have no sense of their importance to the Kingdom, no sense of their importance to other Christians. Part of the reason for this is that Evangelicalism has placed an emphasis on the personal and **individual** nature of becoming a Christian. It is true that we don’t become Christians simply by being part of a group, either a family or a church. We become a Christian one at a time by faith in the cross-work of Jesus. But that emphasis on the individual nature of becoming a Christian has unfortunately led many to think that living the Christian life is not only personal but especially individual.

And so some of us are “lone ranger” Christians. Or to use Richard Lovelace’s metaphor, we are like deep-sea divers; we can look around and see each other but we each have a hose connected to an air supply and we don’t need each

other. We see ourselves as self-contained systems cut off from those around us. We think Christianity is just God and me. We don't need others to help us in our relationship with God and we don't even think of our part in helping others in their relationship with God and God's work in the world.

For others of us, it isn't that we haven't thought of helping others or making a contribution to God's kingdom work; the problem is we can't imagine we have anything to offer. We compare ourselves to others who seem to be so gifted and we conclude we have nothing that anybody needs.

There's a third possibility as well; there are some of us who have an over-inflated sense of our importance in the kingdom. We think we are God's gift to the church and we are the first to hint at or outright tell others how much we give, or how good we are at teaching or whatever. God, through the Apostle Paul, has a word for all of us— instruction for the self-sufficient and selfish, correction for the proud and encouragement for the self-labeled "loser."

Look at 1 Corinthians 12:

"What I want to talk about now is the various ways God's Spirit gets worked into our lives. This is complex and often misunderstood, but I want you to be informed and knowledgeable. Remember how you were when you didn't know God, led from one phony god to another, never knowing what you were doing, just doing it because everybody else did it? It's different in this life. God wants us to use our intelligence, to seek to understand as well as we can. For instance, by using your heads, you know perfectly well that the Spirit of God would never prompt anyone to say, 'Jesus be damned!' Nor would anyone be inclined to say, 'Jesus is Master!' without the insight of the Holy Spirit. "God's various gifts are handed out everywhere; but they

all originate in God's Spirit. God's various ministries are carried out everywhere but they all originate in God's Spirit. God's various expressions of power are in action everywhere; but God himself is behind it all. Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people! The variety is wonderful:

*wise counsel
clear understanding
simple trust
healing the sick
miraculous acts
distinguishing between spirits
tongues
interpretation of tongues.*

All these gifts have a common origin, but are handed out one by one by the one Spirit of God. He decides who gets what, and when.

"You can easily enough see how this kind of thing works by looking no further than your own body. Your body has many parts – limbs, organs, cells – but no matter how many parts you can name, you're still one body. It's exactly the same with Christ. By means of his one Spirit, we all said goodbye to our partial and piecemeal lives. We each used to independently call our own shots but then we entered into a large and integrated life in which he has the final say in everything. (This is what we proclaimed in word and action when we were baptized.) Each of us is now a part of his resurrection body, refreshed and sustained at one fountain – his Spirit – where we all come to drink. The old labels we once used to identify ourselves – labels like Jew

or Greek, slave or free – are no longer useful. We need something larger, more comprehensive.

"I want you to think about how all this makes you more significant, not less. A body isn't just a single part blown up into something huge. It's all the different-but-similar parts arranged and functioning together. If Foot said, 'I'm not elegant like Hand, embellished with rings; I guess I don't belong to this body,' would that make it so? If Ear said, 'I'm not beautiful like Eye, limpid and expressive; I don't deserve a place on the head,' would you want to remove it from the body? If the body was all eye, how could it hear? If all ear, how could it smell? As it is, we see that God has carefully placed each part of the body right where he wanted it.

"But I also want you to think about how this keeps your

***A body is all the different-but-similar parts
arranged and functioning together***

significance from getting blown up into self-importance. For no matter how significant you are, it is only because of what you are a part of. An enormous eye or a gigantic hand wouldn't be a body, but a monster. What we have is one body with many parts, each its proper size and in its proper place. No part is important on its own. Can you imagine Eye telling Hand, 'Get lost; I don't need you'? Or, Head telling Foot, 'You're fired; your job has been phased out'? As a matter of fact, in practice it works the other way – the 'lower' the part, the more basic, and therefore necessary. You can live without an eye, for instance, but not without a stomach. When it's a part of your own body you are concerned with, it makes no difference whether the part is visible or clothed, higher or lower. You give it dignity and honor just as it is, without comparisons. If anything, you have more concern for the lower parts than the higher.

If you had to choose, wouldn't you prefer good digestion to full-bodied hair?

"The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don't, the parts we see and the parts we don't. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance.

"You are Christ's body – that's who you are! You must never forget this. Only as you accept your part of that body does your 'part' mean anything. You're familiar with some of the parts that God has formed in his church, which is his 'body':

*apostles
prophets
teachers
miracle workers
healers
helpers
organizers
those who pray in tongues*

But it's obvious by now, isn't it, that Christ's church is a complete Body and not a gigantic, one-dimensional Part? It's not all Apostles, not all Prophet, not all Miracle Worker, not all Healers, not all Prayer in Tongues, not all Interpreter of Tongues. And yet some of you keep competing for so-called 'important' parts. But now I want to lay out for you a better way."

(Taken from *The Message* by Eugene Peterson)

Spiritual Gifts

In verse 1 Paul says his subject is spiritual gifts.

"Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant." (1 Corinthians 12:1)

Pollster George Barna writes that at least 80% of churchgoers have heard of "spiritual gifts." My hope is that the percentage is higher at Southern Gables Church. I began by asking, "Are you good for anything in the kingdom of God, God's work in the world?" That is exactly what the Apostle Paul is going to answer.

First of all I want you to see an outline of Paul's instruction.

I. Verses 1-6 – Introduction

II. Verse 7 – Thesis Statement

III. Verses 8-11 – Every Christian is given spiritual gifts

IV. Verses 12-26 – Spiritual gifts are given for common good

In the first 6 verses, Paul gives us an introduction to the subject. In these verses, Paul not only tells us what the subject is, but he simply states that every gift, all spiritually effective service to others, is God's Spirit working in and through us.

"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men." (1 Corinthians 12:4-6)

Notice he uses several words to describe the same thing and the Holy Spirit is the source of all spiritually effective service.

Having given that introduction, he states his main thesis—the thesis around which the rest of the chapter is built:

"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." (1 Corinthians 12:7)

That word "manifestation" simply refers to how the Spirit shows or reveals Himself. Peterson, in the paraphrase of the passage we read earlier, said it this way, "Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits." Stated differently I could say, the Spirit of God shows Himself, or works in and through each of us for the good of all of us. This "manifestation of the Spirit" in each of us for the good of all of us is Paul's definition of spiritual gifts. In 1 Corinthians 12:1 he says, "*Now about **spiritual gifts...***" And in 1 Corinthians 12:7 he states, "*Now to each one **the manifestation of the Spirit** is given for the common good.*"

In this, his thesis statement, Paul makes two primary points:

1. Every Christian is given a manifestation of the Spirit or stated differently, a spiritual gift.
2. Those manifestations or gifts are for the common good.

The Holy Spirit gives every Christian spiritual gifts so they will be spiritually effective in the lives of others.

In verses 8-11 Paul emphasizes the first of those two points: that **every Christian is given spiritual gifts.**

***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 he gives them **TO EACH ONE**, just as he determines." (1 Corinthians 12: 8-11 – Emphasis Added)*

Then, in verses 12-26, Paul emphasizes the second of his two points: **spiritual gifts are given for the common good**. God has given every Christian spiritual gifts because no Christian is complete in and of himself and we need the help of others so that together we can become more like Jesus. According to the Bible, God's grace is conveyed not only along vertical lines from God to us but God's grace is more often conveyed along horizontal lines through each other. God's Spirit works in and through you to effect change in me. Christians who don't understand that and who live in isolation from each other will not grow strong but will continue to be anemic in their Christian faith and ineffective in their service.

The Holy Spirit gives every Christian spiritual gifts so they will be spiritually effective in the lives of others.

And how does Paul make this point? He uses the analogy of the human body.

"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body." (1 Corinthians 12:12) There may be many parts of our physical body but it is one body. And then Paul makes the comparison:

*"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. **So it is with Christ.** For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."* (1 Corinthians 12:12b-13) Using metaphors and analogies, Paul makes his point that just as our physical body is one with many parts, so the church is one body with many parts—all of us—because we were all brought into that

“body” by the same Holy Spirit.

Now continuing to use the physical body as an analogy, Paul makes several more points about how the church, the people of God, should relate to each other.

Every Part Needed

The first thing he says is that **every** believer is a necessary part with **no inferior or unnecessary parts**.

"If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body."

(1 Corinthians 12:15-16)

How many of you have placed such importance on certain people or abilities in the church that you have effectively ruled out your own contribution to the work of God? Because you can't sing or teach a large group you assume you have nothing significant to contribute. What does God say? Nonsense! Well, He doesn't exactly say, "nonsense" but He suggests it is nonsense by the weird and dysfunctional physical body it would be if parts were missing:

"If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?"(1 Corinthians 12:17)

Likewise it is a weird and dysfunctional church that lives and attempts to minister with only some of the members contributing their spiritual gifts.

Speaking of the physical body (though clearly with the people of the church in mind) Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:18, *"In fact **God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.**"* And the

implicit is made explicit in verse 28 when Paul says, "***And in the church*** God has appointed" the gifts.

Many Christians live year after year with no sense of their importance to other believers. The Bible says that God placed you in your church for a specific purpose. Every Christian is appointed by God as a functioning part of the church. God's word teaches that you are crucial to the proper functioning of the church and to the work of God in this world. Do you believe that? In verse 21, using the same analogy of the physical body, Paul makes another point: Just as there are no inferior or unnecessary parts of the body so there are no superior parts of the body. Look at 1 Corinthians 12:21: "*The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!'*"

If the rest of us don't have your contribution, whether it is a public contribution or not, we are all impoverished. Now in verses 24-25, mixing the analogy of the physical body with the truth about the church, Paul says, "But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other."

No inferior, no superior and no deep-sea diver Christians—just God's people living in open relationship with each other and available to the Spirit to serve one another. These verses clearly declare that God intends to make a difference in others' lives through you. Your church can grow **as an institution** with only your attendance, some of your money and some of your time. But your church cannot grow **as a spiritual force** in the lives of its members and this community and world without your spiritual gifts.

I wish to correct a possible misunderstanding. Some may still think of talk about spiritual gifts as a “churchy” way of “guilting” people into serving in the organization’s programs. Too many of us still see church as an organization in which we use people to get things done. But the church as God designed it, is a group of people to whom He has given spiritual gifts not first of all to get things done but to get people done—to help each other become more like Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 4, speaking also of spiritual gifts, God through Paul makes it explicit that the purpose of gifts is until we all “*become mature in our faith.*” When God’s people are using spiritual gifts, they aren’t just getting things done, they are effective in producing spiritual change in people.

For example, when you use the gift of mercy, the people you help see the goodness of God in you and are attracted to Him and may learn to trust Him—that is a spiritual change in them because you exercised that gift. Or when you use the gift of teaching, the people you teach grow in their understanding and application of the Bible to their lives—there is a spiritual change in them because you exercised that gift.

I think we have finally come to the place where we can look at a working definition of spiritual gifts.

“A spiritual gift is a special work of the Holy Spirit whereby He grants a Christian grace for effective service.” Another way of saying that is this: A spiritual gift is the Spirit of God working in us in order to work through us to produce spiritual change in another. Let me try to illustrate this:

The Spirit of God prompts my friend D to call a woman to whom she hadn’t spoken in several weeks. D feels compelled to call, not even knowing what the need of that woman might be. After exchanging pleasantries, D tells the woman why she called—just because Jesus had laid her

name on D's heart. The woman immediately begins to cry softly, relating an immediate urgent need in her family. They cry together, D shares some words of Scripture that speak to perseverance in difficulty and they pray together. The woman tells me later how D's call, words and prayer were just what she needed to make it through that day. What was happening in that relationship? The Spirit of God was working in D in order to work through D to produce spiritual change in the other woman. The Spirit prompts, He provides and He produces—D was available, willing and obedient.

A spiritual gift is a special work of the Holy Spirit whereby He grants a Christian grace for effective service.

Mike wrestles with a problem for days before it comes to mind to call Bob. He and Bob meet for lunch and Mike lays out the situation at work that is putting his Christianity to the test. If he does the right thing, it will cost him his job and if he just keeps quiet somebody else will get hurt. Bob shares a similar experience from his own life and then takes him to the books of Proverbs, Hebrews, and Romans and encourages Mike to trust God with the results of doing the right thing. Mike tells me later that Bob's empathy, wisdom and prayer were just the insight and encouragement that Mike needed to take the risk of doing the right thing.

What was happening in that relationship? The Spirit of God was working in Bob in order to work through Bob to produce spiritual change in Mike. The Spirit prompts, He provides and He produces—Bob was available, willing and obedient.

Dan stood up on Sunday morning in his class and taught from the Scriptures. He had no idea that the passage of

Scripture he taught that day spoke directly to the present life-situation of one of the class members. All through the teaching and discussion that class member wrestled with God about whether and how to apply the Word to his situation. Dan's ability to clearly explain the text, his willingness to speak to how it applied, his sensitivity to how hard living the truth can sometimes be, all moved the class member to take action. Dan never heard how his teaching impacted that man's life that day. What was happening in that relationship?

In the grocery store, Fran saw a woman from church she didn't know well. Fran was in a hurry but felt compelled to stop and visit for a minute. Only later did we learn that the woman had decided there was no place for her at Southern Gables and was ready to quit trying to find a church home. But that act of friendship by Fran encouraged the woman to attend the Sunday School class Fran is in and it opened up a whole new spiritual community for the woman. What was happening in that relationship?

The Spirit prompts, He provides and He produces—Bob was available, willing and obedient.

Several inconvenient times a week, John treks over to the county jail to be with and lead a Bible study with a group of inmates. He listens to the sad stories of some of them and attempts to meet the needs of their impoverished families on the outside even as he tells them of Jesus' love. What's happening in those relationships?

There are at least two problems with the way some of us understand spiritual gifts—we may tend to overstate them or understate them. Some of us overstate spiritual gifts so that we think of them only or mainly as those spectacular

demonstrations of power in miracles or eloquence. Benny Hinn and Chuck Swindoll have spiritual gifts but not me. Others understate spiritual gifts so that they think of them as any effort they make to do something good. But spiritual gifts are a special, supernatural work of the Spirit in us in order to work through us to help others grow spiritually.

The Gifts of the Spirit

So what are the gifts of the Spirit? Several times spiritual gifts are listed: 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4. All the gifts named in those passages I have listed in Appendix A. Our temptation is to look at the list and ask, what gift or gifts do I have? But I want you to notice several important things about these lists.

- Some of the definitions of the gifts overlap so that you can't distinguish between them clearly.
- Some of the definitions are very broad covering whole ranges of ideas.
- None of the lists is the same.

For those and other reasons, I, and others, don't think the lists of gifts are meant to be complete, even when combined.

There may be a nearly infinite number of ways that the Spirit of God ministers to us to minister through us. I'm convinced that the lists in the Bible are meant to illustrate the variety of ways the Spirit will work. I don't think it is important that a Christian necessarily be able to put a label or a name to their gifts. In fact I am convinced that using the biblical names for gifts has caused a great deal of confusion and has limited our understanding rather than increased it. I don't fault the Holy Spirit for that; I fault those who would try to pigeonhole people into one of the gifts listed.

I think there is very little value in being able to name your gift and great value in serving others in dependence on the Spirit. But even if I don't label it, how do I know what my gifts are? I'm convinced we don't sit around with a list of the gifts and take an inventory trying to see what we are good at and then assume that is our gift. Nor do we look at the list and imagine which one we would most like, supposing the gift will be ours if we ask for it.

If not that, how do I know and use my gifts for effective service? I included in this series Appendix B entitled, "Discovering Your Spiritual Gift(s)." In terms of application of this study, thinking through the ideas listed there is the most important thing you can do. Do you want to know what you are "good for" in the Kingdom?

1. Begin by praying – ask God to give you sensitivity to the needs of people and sensitivity to God's direction and "gifts" in your life. Are you willing to be used by the Spirit in the lives of others?
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 describe their struggles, their hurts, their sorrows, aspirations and dreams. 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 desire to respond to?
4. Ask, "What strengths do I already 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, temperament and talents, as a vehicle for the spiritual

gift He has given you.

5. Start meeting needs. Look around you, see a need and start responding to that need. Over time you begin to get a sense of whether that ministry to people is effective in their lives.
6. Listen carefully to the advice and feedback of others who know you well. What do others say are the ways you are most effective? If only you think you are effective, you probably aren't. Spiritual effectiveness is confirmed by others.
7. Look for evidence of results. The greatest evidence of what your spiritual gifts are is in the fruit that it bears in others' lives. The purpose of spiritual gifts is not to have them and claim them but to use them to help others spiritually. When others are loved, cared for, prayed for, encouraged, healed, taught, equipped, or helped spiritually in some other ways by your actions, that is the greatest evidence of your spiritual gift.

God "gifted" you to make a difference for the kingdom. He gave you special grace to be effective in service to others. Please don't be concerned about naming it or claiming it; just act. Act on what the Spirit said; He gifted YOU!

Start serving in prayerful active dependence on Him—and let Him work through you to make a difference for the kingdom.

Are you good for anything? Oh, yes you are!

*"Now **to each one** the manifestation of the Spirit is (or the gifts of the Spirit are) given for the common good."*

(1 Corinthians 12:7)

Appendix A

The Gifts of the Spirit (A Definition and Explanation)

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 the Holy Spirit grants and the way 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 in becoming 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 his note on "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.

GIVING

The ability to use with liberality and cheerfulness 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.

LEADERSHIP

The ability to help others work together to accomplish appropriate goals for the glory of God. (See 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, other 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)

TEACHING

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

TONGUES

The ability to speak to God in a language never learned and/or to receive and communicate a message from God to His people through 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.

Dr. Jerry Nelson

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End Notes

Carson, D.A., *Showing the Spirit*

Sanders, J. Oswald, *The Holy Spirit and His Gifts*

Wagner, C. Peter, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow*

Appendix B

Discovering Your Spiritual Gifts

A spiritual gift is a special work of the Holy Spirit whereby He grants to you grace for effective spiritual service.

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 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 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 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 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. What are your spiritual gifts? Are you willing to discover them?

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