

THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT
Life in the Spirit
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We've been in these Sunday nights a series, "Life in the Spirit." We have looked at the theme who the Spirit is and what the Spirit does, the Work of the Spirit. We've shared together concerning the Baptism in the Spirit and last week we looked at the theme, The Spirit and Speaking in Tongues.

Tonight our theme deals with the Gifts of the Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit are really given to fulfill the mission of the church. What is that mission? We have it rather clearly spelled out in our church by-laws. For anyone who has gone through the new members' class this will sound like a broken record. The church is in the world to fulfill the mission of the head of the church.

If we want to discover what the church is about we must know what Jesus is about. Jesus in his flesh came with these four purposes. To glorify God, to evangelize and to save the lost, to make disciples and to meet human need. Where the head of the church goes, the body that belongs to the head must follow.

Therefore the gifts are given that the purposes that God has in Jesus' ministry may also be the purposes he has for the church. The gifts therefore do not exist that we might somehow stand back and simply gape at them in astonishment. Especially some of the gifts that have very supernatural connotations to them. But the gifts are designed to fulfill a mission.

You see every time we gather in the sanctuary a lighted center of a cross in our pulpit. That's the logo of our church. That logo represents some geographical details of our community. We live in the world of Southern California, which is the beach, the water, the sand, the green belt, the palm tree, the mountains and the sun shining on sunny southern California. This emblem of our church stands for the fact that God wants to gather this world which we live in the cross and in Christ. The gifts which he gives to the body of Christ are designed to accomplish this mission.

All the gifts themselves are resident in Christ. We can go through the gospels for example and we can find all the gifts that we will describe this evening as active in Christ's ministry. The only exception being that we are never told that Christ spoke in other tongues. Although we know in the Garden of Gethsemane he was groaning and he was encompassed about with pressing sorrows. That's the kind of atmosphere that Paul talks about in Romans 8 when we pray and are struggling in prayer we groan with inarticulate signs or groanings which cannot be uttered. We know however that the Lord clearly said that when the Spirit came he would give us this gift.

But all the gifts, with the possible exception of other tongues, were evidenced in the Lord's ministry. Speaking of other tongues and the Lord, who knows what language he prayed in. Since he with his eternal relationship with the Father was certainly not limited to the Aramaic tongue.

The key to understanding spiritual gifts therefore is to see them as a perpetuation of Jesus' ministry. Acts 1:1 is a key to opening this second volume of this history of Christian origins. Luke says in a former work or former treatise, "O Theophilus I told you of all the things that Jesus began to do and to teach." What's so striking about that introduction to Acts is that it is

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following his first volume in which he traces the ministry of Jesus from his conception through his assumption into heaven. He says as he begins the second volume which is the history of the church that the first volume only contains that which Jesus began to do and to teach. Luke as the theologian of the Spirit has this understanding of the Christian mission being that Jesus is working today. All that is described in the book of Acts is the continuing life and ministry of Jesus, which the Spirit is making possible. It isn't so much the church ministering it is Jesus ministering through his church. The gifts resident in him are now being expressed through his body.

Ephesians 4:8 helps us understand and put these gifts in the context of Christ's gifts to his church. Ephesians 4:8 says that "When he ascended on high he led captives in his train [a curtly kingly procession of which there are attendants who are following after him] and gave gifts to men." That is a quotation out of Psalm 68:18 with one exception. Paul in Ephesians 4 changes completely a word. He totally renders different the meaning of the quotation. Psalm 68:18 is speaking of the kingly reign of Jesus says "When you ascended on high you led captives in your train and you received gifts from men."

That's logical. A person who conquers sets upon a throne and there are people who bring him gifts. That's what Psalm 68 says. But in quoting that scripture in the New Testament, Paul by the Spirit gives a deeper revelation of the work of Jesus and says when Jesus ascended on high and had behind him a train of captives [we are that train who have been captured by his love] he turned around and didn't simply receive gifts, he gave gifts. Then Paul goes on to tell us that the gifts of the Spirit with which the church functions are really the gifts of Jesus to his body.

And God gives good gifts. He begins by giving us the gift of eternal life. Romans 6:23. Then he continues in Acts 2:38 by giving us the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then once we're passed those initial gifts of entry into the Christian life we have a whole gift catalogue that is open to us. The gifts that the Spirit brings because of Christ's benefits.

Perhaps if you have ever heard a description of the gifts of the Spirit you have had that description limited to nine gifts described from 1 Corinthians 12. That was my thinking for many, many years as I looked at the scripture – there are nine gifts of the Spirit. But I think a more serious study of the scripture has to take into account that there are three major passages, which are gift passages in the New Testament. We will therefore look at all the gifts of the Spirit which are listed in the New Testament for the glorification of God, the reaching of the lost, the discipling of the found and the serving of human need.

These primary passages are first Romans 12:6-8. Seven gifts listed there. They are often called motivational gifts.

Then we'll look at 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 sometimes called the Spirituals. Often they're called charismatic gifts. In 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 they're not referred to as gifts but as *pneumatica* from the Greek *pneuma*. They're in contrast to the carnalities of the Corinthians. The Corinthians had a lot of carnalities so Paul is saying in opposition to the carnalities let me talk to you about the Spiritualities. So 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 gives us these nine gifts which are Spiritualities.

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Then continuing in 1 Corinthians 12 there's verses 27-31 where we have ministry gifts. That couples up with Ephesians 4:11-13 where also we have a description of ministry gifts.

So we have motivational gifts. That is those gifts, which explain the motivation of the people in the body to minister to one another.

We go past that to the Spiritualities, often called (perhaps mistakenly) the *charismata*. They are that. They are grace gifts of God.

Then we have the ministry gifts – gifts that go with an office in the church. Such as the office of apostle of teacher or whatever.

What I'd like to do is simply gift the gift catalogue of all these gifts without repeating anyone. If we find a gift that is given in Romans 12 and it's repeated in 1 Corinthians 12 rather than giving it a second time we will treat it as we have already explored it in Romans 12. As we go through this list I'd like for you to be checking by the side of your notes those gifts which you feel the Holy Spirit has put in your life. They you might also put a check for all those gifts that you have seen in operation in the body of Christ. Sometimes when we're in the body of Christ we mistakenly assume that we haven't seen any demonstrations of the Spirit's work when all around us we have been seeing every day the work of the Holy Spirit and simply not had Spiritual eyes to be open to it and to see that the Lord is indeed at work. So we judge things by surface kinds of observations rather than by looking more deeply at whether or not our experience as a body of Christ is conforming to that which the Spirit gave for the church to be in the New Testament.

The first gift is the gift of prophecy. Immediately when we think of the word "prophecy" we think of someone standing up in a service and uttering something like "I the Lord thy God say unto thee..." Sometimes unless we hear a person do that we'll go away from the service assuming that there has been no prophetic word that has been spoken by the Lord.

What is a prophet? 1 Samuel 9:9 has an excellent definition to call the fact that in the former days before men of God were called prophets they were called seers, ones who saw. What did the prophets see? The prophets always saw the world and people through God's eyes. Primarily that seeing was two-fold in nature. It was intuitive, that is it looked into the heart of a person and read that person's needs and perhaps sins in the light of God's word and addressed God's word to that particular need. And the prophets beyond being intuitive were prophetic and would indicate the course of action that was to come. Sometimes we think of prophets in talking about prophecy, sort of spoke in a vacuum. But always their prophecy arose out of a true seeing of current conditions and saying if these conditions continue this is where they're going to lead you and this is what God is going to bring in focus in order to either judge you or bless you depending upon whether or not you address and correct the situation that he's wrestling with now.

Prophecy therefore involves both forth telling – declaring the word of God now to our hearts. And it also may involve foretelling. That is, telling of the future. One who prophecies literally speaks for God. Someone has called the gift of prophecy when functioning in a church setting as the gift of inspired utterance. The pinpoint application of God's word to our heart. I think maybe one way of understanding this is the difference between a prophet and a teacher for example. I trust that one of the gifts of the Spirit that flow through me is the gift of teaching. If I

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am teaching I tend to be somewhat numbers oriented. You'll always find me having an outline with three points or five points or like tonight a list of 24 things. Teachers tend to think synoptically and to want to bring everything under an idea. To be thorough and consistent and apply the totality of the word of God to a particular situation.

What's the difference between that and a prophet? The prophet will ignore the five rules or three points and say, The problem in your home is infidelity. Prophets have your name, address and zip code. We feel this when we're around anointed preaching. When the prophecy like Nathan to David is one to one we know when God's searchlight is beamed right into our house and right into our heart. We go away from a service or from such an encounter saying, God spoke to me through his word. Prophetic utterance.

1 Corinthians 14:3 indicates that prophecy does these things for believers – it builds up, it encourages, it consoles. That's the function. When we gather together and hear inspired speaking, Holy Spirit inspired speaking we leave built up in the faith, encouraged in the faith and we leave consoled as well. If we're down the word of God picks us up.

To unbelievers 1 Corinthians 14:24-25 says that prophecy convicts and it brings a person to the point of conversion of making a decision. The gift of prophecy is to be earnestly sought by all in the church. We say with Moses when he found out that two more were prophesying in the camp who didn't have credentials he said, Would that all of God's people were prophets. Would that we all would come to God and know his word so intimately and his Spirit so intimately that when the occasion required we could with equal force speak out God's word, whether in a one to one situation or whether in a group context. Highly to be desired.

The second gift of the Spirit is the gift of service, the gift of relationship practicality. Serving involves practical ministry to needs. Jesus well epitomized this gift of serving when in the course of his being a prophet and having much to tell the disciples on the eve of his passion he steps into a situation where they are arguing over pre-eminence and he takes a towel and washes their feet and demonstrates through his practical service the ministry of love.

Notice no where will the scriptures say that the gift of prophecy is greater than the gift of serving or serving is greater than prophecy. Both are vital components. The body of Christ needs people who speak the word of God and it needs people who serve with the Spirit and the heart of Jesus and whose ministry is seen primarily as serving.

Then a third gift in the church is the gift of teaching. Teachers are systematic and strive for accuracy. Luke 1:3. Luke, a masterful teacher. You can pick this up in his writings. The gift of the Spirit rests upon him. It says, He had followed all things accurately and served to set down in order the things concerning Jesus.

Apollos, Acts 18:24 who is said to have had the gift to have been a teacher. He's said to be a learned man, he has a thorough knowledge of scriptures, instructed in the ways of the Lord. He spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately. A great quality of a teacher is like Apollos who was also teachable. Because of this gift of teaching, resident in Apollos, he built up believers and confounded unbelievers. We need to be taught and have set before us God's full counsel on the matter. The body of Jesus Christ suffers when the teaching is not accurate or when it doesn't set before the people of God the whole counsel of God. That way we fall into

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heresies or emphasis is misplaced and we don't then reflect the wholeness that God wants for his people.

Then there is another speaking gift, the fourth gift, which is the gift of exhortation. Or literally encouragement. It's the Greek word for "one called alongside to help." The gift of prophecy and the gift of teaching and the gift of encouragement all inter-relate. We've all been exposed to verbal ministries, which have blessed our hearts in different ways. I've heard persons who ministered under great inspiration of the Spirit who were not inductive students of the scripture nor could they be called teachers. But when they declared the word of God, I knew it was heaven sent to my heart. I've known speakers who were great story tellers and who were not real students of the word or base their ministry upon "thus sayeth the Lord" but when they finished ministering to me it left me with a great sense of being built up. Their heart was so in tune with God and with people and they were such great story tellers out of the context of their own experience with God that they left people being built up.

I think the difference between the prophet, the teacher, and the exhorter or the encourager is that they depend upon different ways to get their message. The prophet depends upon his interaction with the Spirit of God and with the word. The teacher depends upon a thorough mastery of the subject to address it. The exhorter depends more upon a need to arise that he could address so that he could help to encourage and to inspire people.

Barnabus was such a person. His story is told for us in Acts 11 with the founding of the church at Antioch. Barnabus went and saw what God was doing among the Gentiles that it says when he got there he was glad. He ministered to the assembled believers. But he knew that the congregation that was assembled at Antioch could not long thrive on an exhortative ministry. That it would need the ministry of a teacher alongside the ministry of an exhorter. So he went to Tarsus and got Saul and brought him down. Then the scripture says they taught the believers and the word "teaching" comes into interplay once Paul arrives on the scene. Barnabus was the kind of person who could literally put his arms around an individual or around a congregation and so minister to it they'd be inspired. The church needs people who have the ministry of encouragement both to the church as a corporate body and to us as individuals. We need people to put their arm around us and encourage and inspire us.

Then a fifth gift of the Spirit, motivational gift in Romans 12 is the gift of giving.

In each one of the gifts that we mention there are dimensions of that gift that are universal to all believers. To say that some have the gift of giving does not mean that others don't give. Or to say that some have the gift of teaching doesn't mean that we should just sit down and not teach even our children if that falls in our responsibility. There is universality in each one of the gifts but there are gifts that have special application and refinement as we use them. There are some in the body that have this unique gift of seeing needs. If you have the gift of giving you need resources to give – whether it's time or finance or skills. Then the giver gives those willingly. He doesn't ever give begrudgingly but God has given that person a special delight in sharing for the benefit of the body.

Then the sixth gift is the gift of leadership, the ability given by the Spirit to help set a course of direction and unify people for the accomplishment of the work of the Lord. To help the body of Christ strive toward common ideals and to build the community of the people of God into that

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which would delight the Spirit of the Lord. To help that body of people move and fulfill the objectives that the Lord has for it. There are all kinds of different leaders. Servant leadership maybe best describes the kind of leadership the Spirit places in the body.

Then Paul in Romans 12 notes the gift of mercy. For there are indeed critical needs where teaching or words of any kind cannot help. So we need gifts of mercy. When a person is terminally ill it isn't the prophet or the teacher or even sometimes the exhorter that has the impact. It's that person that has that way of showing mercy. Mercy inspired out of Christ. There are all kinds of people and groups in our society where there are individuals that need the gift of mercy, not only the terminally ill but abused people, victims of AIDS. The church is great at thundering pronouncement of judgement. We realize the wages of sin is death. But we also need to reach out with love and with compassion because people are won to Christ through love. We recognize that the judgment of God is upon sin, that God does love the sinner. The merciful person somehow is able to reach out and administer the healing of Jesus Christ. And the redemption of Christ and the forgiveness of Christ. Orphans need those who have ministry of mercy and widows.

We often look at the gifts of the Spirit and say wouldn't it be great if we all exercised miracles and healings? But if every time the need was addressed by miracles and healings there would be no need for the gift of mercy because you don't need mercy unless someone is hurting. And if a hurting need was always met by a miracle or by a healing then the scripture would not ever leave us room for the gift of mercy.

That's why people who always have a formula for why you're sick or why you're poor, lack of faith or lack of righteousness – sin in your life – ultimately become so brittle in their heart that mercy is crowded out and judgment replaces mercy. Mercy is meant to be a gift in the body. We're all meant to practice mercy but some have a special compassion. Some are able to go into a room where somebody's been throwing up and minister to them without passing out. I'm not in that category.

Or change bandages. See blood and not pass out. A Mother Teresa who can pick up the dying in Calcutta. People who can go to extreme measures we'd say of willingness to identify with the suffering.

Those are seven of the gifts listed in Romans 12. Then we come to 1 Corinthians 12. We find some additional gifts that are given.

The gift of wisdom. The utterance of wisdom as it is called. Wisdom is a trait of character and discipline and thought life. But it's also a special gift of the Spirit. When one speaks an utterance of wisdom. It's exhibited by Jesus in John 8:7 where they confront him with the woman taken in adultery. They ask him to judge her. He with a word of wisdom turns the whole situation on its head and says "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." A word of wisdom. That word of wisdom is also seen operating in the church in Acts 15:13-21 where the church is debating the whole matter of the inclusion of non-Jews into the body. James the leader of the assembly speaks a word of wisdom. It's especially important whenever we come to a critical decision junction in our life. Whether it's a decision of the body or whether it's a personal decision that we be open to this particular gift of wisdom. Wisdom by the way would not be needed if all the time we had operating the gift of faith. If everybody were using faith

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we'd simply get whatever we ask and we would never need wisdom for faith would always work. But the presence of wisdom is the balance to faith. And faith is the balance to the wisdom.

Then there's the gift of knowledge. Here we're not talking about book knowledge or scholarly knowledge. We're talking about an utterance of knowledge. That is a person who either knows God's word in a deep way or knows something. Like Nathaniel who knows that David's had an affair with Bathsheba that no one knows about. But the man of God knows because to him is that gift. Jesus has the gift of knowledge when he says to Nathaniel in John 1:48 "I saw you while you were still sitting under the fig tree." He knew what Nathaniel was doing. Peter says to Ananias and Sapphira when they come and bring their offering pretending like it's all they have "You've not lied to me but to the Holy Spirit." When a person has a gift of knowledge in the scripture it's always validated. In other words events prove out. But the word of knowledge, which is spoken is real. In the scripture when the word of knowledge is used it immediately is recognized.

Then there's the gift of faith. We're all called upon to have faith but there's a special operation of the gift of faith which is a supernatural endowment by the Holy Spirit that enables a person to believe for an extra demonstration of the power of God. This special demonstration may be one that calls forth the potential in a person or a group. There are some who have the gift of faith that will cause faith to arise in a whole group of people to accomplish something or in an individual. Or it may be to grasp the vision of what God wants to bring to pass and confidently live and work to see it brought to pass. We often identify the gift of faith as functioning only with those who see immediate results. But there are two dimensions to faith. There's the faith that sees immediate results then there's the gift of faith that perseveres when there is no immediate sign but continues faithful and trusting that what God has spoken He'll bring to pass.

My uncle serving on the borders of China and Tibet for eight years without a single convert in his first years of ministry is an example of a person who functioned with the gift of faith to believe that God had called him there and he would accomplish his purposes.

Adonijah Judson was one who had the gift of faith. He went as a missionary apostle to Burma in the early 1800s. It was seven years after he left America before he had his first convert. When he died he left behind 7000 converts and had established 63 churches and the body of Christ in Burma today is direct flowering of that man's faith who persevered.

Some faith is a faith which helps others continue in trial. Hebrews 11:39.

Then there is an eleventh gift, the gift of healings or gifts of healings. Both gifts and healings are in the plural. There are different kinds of ways that healing is administered. Physical healing. Through the laying on of hands or through speaking an authoritative word or through anointing with oil. Therefore there are varieties of gifts and varieties of healings – physical healings, emotional healings, spiritual healings, gradual healings, instant healings. Different ways that healings come. There are a lot of frauds that have a so-called miracle ministry. There are a lot of people whose faith functions particularly in one area. Some have a gift for praying for people who have cancer and others for people who have paralysis and others who are possessed of evil spirits and others to be delivered from alcohol. There are a variety of needs for healing and varying gifts of healing to be administered.

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Then there are miracles, the gift of miracles. These are distinguished from healings in that miracles include a demonstration of God's power in unusual measure. They especially relate to miracles in the realm of nature. Such as the feeding of the 5000 or miracles that involve the resurrection of the dead. The gift of miracles vindicates the name of God. Elijah and the prophets of Baal – that miracle vindicated God's name. Or those who function the gift of miracles may see the miracles as delivering God's people from the hands of an enemy. Moses. Or maybe the miracle is to provide for those who are in need. Elijah and the widow at Zerephath. So to vindicate God's name, to deliver God's people from an enemy and to provide for those who are in need seems to be the purpose and motivation for miracles.

Then there is the discerning of Spirits. This is used by people in the body to distinguish whether or not a person who brings a Spiritual message is from God. Acts 20:26-28 Paul warns the pastors at Ephesus to distinguish between those who come as wolves in sheep's clothing and those who bear a true message from God. Discernment is needed as to what person and what message is from God.

Then there needs to be discernment between outward appearances and inward realities. Simon Magus in Acts 8 outwardly appears to be an earnest seeker. But discernment says no, he's a fraud and wants the gift of the Spirit for his own advancement. Then the discernment of Spirits is needed to distinguish the Spirit of God from the Spirit of man from an evil Spirit. There are some people who lump everything as an evil Spirit. I walked into a church foyer one time and all I saw were tapes on demons. Every work of the flesh was categorized as a demonic manifestation. Discernment of Spirits, the Spirit of God from the human spirit from an evil spirit.

Then the fourteenth the gift of tongues which in 1 Corinthians 12 differs from personal tongues but is tongues when they occur in a public setting. Controls are given. The person who speaks out must pray that they interpret. There must be no more than two or three in a service. And they must speak at an appropriate time. The Spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets. I think in an appropriate tone of voice as well. Tongues are an address or praise to God.

Therefore, fifteenth, a gift of the Spirit is an interpretation of tongues. We could spend a lot of time on interpretation. But since tongues are happening in the Spiritual field, I'm not sure that what the scriptures require is always what is given is a translation. Sometimes what happens in the Spirit is very visual. When I am giving a prophetic word I have a very visual experience of seeing God unfold some picture before me. You interpret a painting different than you interpret a written text. That's why sometimes in an interpretation, the interpretation is longer or shorter than the utterance in tongues.

The more normalized way of understanding interpretation of tongues is since the person who speaks in tongues is speaking to God the interpretation should normally reflect that pattern of speaking to God. When we pray sometimes we sense immediately as we pray God answering back. That may be why sometimes in an utterance in tongues there is followed not a prayer or a word of praise but an exhortation.

The sixteenth gift if the gift of being an apostle. Now we jump to the later part of 1 Corinthians 12. An apostle in a technical sense in the New Testament is one who is an eyewitness of the

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Lord and who has been commissioned by the Lord to lay the foundation of the church therefore Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12:12 the things which mark an apostle signs, wonders and miracles were done among you with great perseverance. An apostle had surrounding him a supernatural ministry. We might even extend the idea of apostle to one today who goes into an area where the church of Jesus Christ does not exist. And through whose labor and ministry the church of Jesus Christ is brought into being. That one is a sent one.

Then there are people who have the gift of helps. Helps is that special ability that God gives to some members of the body to invest the talents that they have in the life and ministry of others in the body. Thus enabling that person to increase their effectiveness and their own Spiritual gifts. Ortlund calls people who have the gift of helps, "the glorious company of the stretcher bearers." Remember from Mark 2 the four who bring the paralytic on the stretcher. For that man to get to Jesus it required somebody who had the ministry of helps. They had to help him to Jesus.

The eighteenth gift is the gift of administration or government as it's called in the King James. The Greek word means someone who steers the course and makes sure that everybody is bending toward accomplishing that course.

There's the gift of leadership and there's the gift of administration. Aren't these two the same? No, they're not. I've known some excellent leaders who were poor administrators. I've known some excellent administrators who were poor leaders. Some people with the gift of administration involves efficiency, it involves setting out a task and how to map it so that you accomplish the task. You pull in all the loose ends and take care of all the detail and you make sure that the ship is running on course. The job of a helmsman. Not all administrators are leaders. People able to get up and articulate a vision and unify the people of God to accomplish it. The leader needs the administrator and the administrator needs the leader. We ought not to saddle people with things that aren't their calling.

Ephesians 4 adds some additional gifts. The gift of evangelist. Which is the special gift of sharing the gospel in such a way that men and women become Jesus' disciples. All of us are called to be witnesses. But there are some in the body of Christ who are given the special equipment of being an evangelist. When they get up to testify or witness people are always coming to the Lord. That doesn't excuse the rest of us from being witnesses but it does recognize that there are those who especially have that gift.

Then the twentieth gift is the gift of being a pastor who assumes the responsibility for the Spiritual welfare of God's people. The word pastor literally means shepherd. One who looks out for a flock.

Then if you look in some other references you perhaps could find four additional gifts. There is the gift of celibacy. 1 Corinthians 7:7. Celibacy interestingly enough is called a charisma. A spiritual gift. Celibacy is the spiritual gift of being able to remain single and not suffer undue sexual temptation. Thus in your singleness having more time to give to the Lord, his work, and his people. Those of you who are single, if God has not given you the gift of celibacy by all means seek a partner in life. If that isn't what God has for you then you need to be spending that time of singleness in extra service to the Lord, rather than the singles lifestyle in Orange County which says spend it on self. Spend your life on the Lord that's why God gave you this gift of not needing to be married.

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Then perhaps another gift is one that occurs in 1 Corinthians 13:3 where Paul talks about voluntary poverty. He mentions “If I give all I possess to the poor.” Here is a person who has given by the Spirit that unique ability to empty themselves of all their assets for the care of others.

Then the gift of martyrdom, 1 Corinthians 13:3. “If I surrender [or give] my body to the flames...” by the way, martyrdom, if it is a spiritual gift, is a gift that’s given only once.

Then the 24th gift that could be a spiritual gift is hospitality. 1 Peter 4:9-10 says “Offer hospitality to one another.” That phrase is immediately followed by an admonition to use your spiritual gifts. I submit to you that if the admonition to use your spiritual gifts is immediately preceded by a teaching on hospitality then the apostle Peter is considering hospitality or the special reaching out to others as a gift of the Spirit.

Think through this list of 24. I suspect that you have come up one or two or perhaps more that really describe you. The Lord has all of them. Nobody in the body has them all. But the whole body needs every single gift.

Let me quickly summarize the use of the gifts and say ten things about them.

First, they are for Christians. You can’t receive the gifts or function in these gifts which are meant to glorify God, to build up the body, to save the lost, to serve human need. You don’t function in these gifts unless you receive the gift of salvation.

Secondly, the gifts are given for the benefit of the body and Christ’s work in the world. They’re not given so that we can be stars. We especially star miracles and healing as being more outstanding than the others. But the gifts are not given that we might be better stars. But that we might be better servants. Their function is to build up the body and to do Christ’s work in the world.

Third, they can never be divorced from love. They should not be divorced from love. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 14:1 to follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts. 1 Corinthians 13 is a reminder in the middle of a section dealing with spiritual gifts, that we are to walk in the way of love.

A fourth thing is gifts should not be confused with spirituality. Some people measure their spirituality on the basis of their gifts. Gifts often have little to do with spirituality. They have to do with getting the work of the Lord done. There are going to be people, Jesus says in Matthew 7, who stand before him in that day and talk about the wonderful work they did for Christ and the healings and the exorcisms. And he’s going to say, I never knew you. There have been people I’ve known in my life who have had real gifts of the Spirit in operation but who have been apostate in their life and in their character. Once given, they are irrevocable. They always function. The gifts are not to be confused with spirituality so we don’t go wandering after people simply because they have gifts.

Fifth, the gifts are often matched with natural inclinations and abilities. Therefore look for people who have a tender heart to often be the ones functioning in the gift of mercy. Look for

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people who are highly organized who often function in the gift of teaching. Look for people who are naturally happy and glad to function in the gift of exhortation. I don't know what natural proclivity goes with miracles and healings. I expect there isn't one expect a desire to see God's compassion reach out to people.

The gifts are natural inclinations but they often build from a base of natural inclinations.

Six, the gifts tend to be developmental in nature. That's why we're told to perfect the gifts in 1 Corinthians 14. Jesus tells us in Mark 24 to him who has, more will be given. We need to continue to use the gifts to see them developed. All the gifts are that way.

Seventh, they are not proprietary. They are not *my* gifts and I'll use them whenever *I* want to. They are for the body. All the gifts have parallel virtues to them. We're all to express certain virtues in common.

Eighth, the gift each uses will be confirmed by the body of Christ. There's no true ongoing function of a gift unless it has the ratification of others in the body. That's why we need to encourage and confirm one another.

Ninth, how do we individually exercise a gift? Individual exercise of a gift emerges from a combination of desire, prayer and need. What are the desires that God has placed in my heart? What comes to me while I'm praying? What needs is the Holy Spirit calling me to address? It's when we consider the matrix of those things – desire, prayer, and need – that God begins to individually appoint us in his body where we fill our particular mission. Unique calling.

Then the last thing about the gifts, and this is the thing that's surprising – is only a very few of them occur in a church service. That's a shocker. In fact if you look carefully at the gifts of the Spirit as they occur in the book of Acts the gifts mostly occur in the marketplace. If you look at the whole gift catalogue of all 24 gifts you'll find that the majority of them are occurring in our everyday service to Christ or in the functioning of the body outside of the worship service or in our ministry to the world. Therefore we are to assume when we come to a service that the Holy Spirit is just limited to working in that service. Then when the church is dispersed the rest of the week the Spirit isn't working and waits to work again until we assemble. The Spirit is working throughout his body. Every day of the week, seeking to bring his body and his people into wholeness. We need, the church needs the gifts of the Spirit.

I'm pleased to look over this list and see the great majority of these gifts operating in the body. They need to be operating more and the gifts that are not functioning as they ought we need to humble ourselves before the Lord and ask him to bring into existence so that the body may be equipped with everything to do God's will and to do his work.

Praise your name, Lord. Thank you. Blessed Holy Spirit we come to you again this evening as people who are in need of you. In need of your power. How blessed we are because of you. How unique is your church in which the gifts function. There have been so many institutions that have come into existence the last 2000 years that have passed away. Yet your church, Lord Jesus, stands. It is a tribute to the fact that that you truly gave the Spirit that the church stands and is more triumphant today than at any time in its history. Your heart reaches out to the community in which we live. We through prayer again embrace the

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mission you have for us as your people. Lord, it's going to take every one of us to find your specific will operating in us and the gifts that you want in us so that it's a wealthy church that ministers to this community. Not wealthy monetarily but wealthy in the things of God. Gifts that flow to the benefit and healing of people who hurt and need. We ask you, Lord, to continue to raise up among us the gift of mercy and the gift of teaching and the gift of prophecy and the gifts of healings and miracles and faith and service and helps and leadership and administration and tongues and interpretation of tongues and wisdom and knowledge. All the gifts that please your heart to bring into existence Lord we offer ourselves up as a body that the Spirit might work in us. Not for our individual glory but for your glory, for the salvation of the lost, for the edification of those you've found. Bless your church with all the gifts of the Spirit. In Christ's name. Amen.