

What is my Spiritual Gift?

We are all born with various natural gifts. We all have different talents and abilities. Some of us were born with tremendous athletic prowess. You can run faster, jump higher, and go longer than most others. Others of us were born with highly analytical minds. You're a great thinker. You may or may not have a lot of education, but you think about a problem long enough and you can noodle your way out of it. Maybe you have beautiful singing voice and can hold perfect pitch or you have a tremendous eye for design, color, and detail. Some of you, like my daughter, have a gift with words. Others of you have the natural ability to belch the national anthem.

In the same way, when we are born again, we receive spiritual gifts. When you were baptized into Christ, you were gifted by the Holy Spirit. Remember, **a spiritual gift is a spiritually empowered ability given to every Christian to help the church be the church.** Here's what Peter says about spiritual gifts in 1 Peter 4:10:

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others..."

No matter what your gift is, its purpose is to serve others. We are gifted to bless, build up, and better others. Spiritual gifts are tools to build with, not toys to play with or weapons to fight with.

In addition Peter, the Apostle Paul lists out in three different passages ([1 Cor. 12 – 14](#), [Rom. 12](#), and [Eph. 4](#)) various spiritual gifts. Now, none of these lists are identical. Each one contains some that aren't included in the others. And some sound so similar, it's hard to tell the difference. For instance, how is the gift of leadership different from the gift of governing? How is the gift of helping different from the gift of serving?

This shows us that these lists are not so much a defined and exhaustive set of spiritual gifts as these are examples of the different ways the Holy Spirit works through God's people. We should be cautious about treating these lists of gifts like an accountant with a spreadsheet.

I've included the lists of the gifts mentioned in your bulletin inserts. This is just to give you an idea of how God may work in your life, or in the lives of others this morning. There may be gifts that aren't listed here. Your gift may not be just one of these things, but a combination of several.

What we want to do this morning is help you begin answering the question, "What is my spiritual gift? How do I know how God has gifted me? A gift that is given but never opened, never used, and never enjoyed doesn't do anyone any good. Have you all seen the movie Castaway? In the movie, Tom Hanks plays a FedEx manager named Chuck whose plane crashes and he ends up on an unknown island in the middle of the ocean. His only companions are the scores of FedEx packages that wash up on the beach with him. He opens all of the boxes only to find stuff of very little use except a volleyball, he names Wilson who becomes his best friend in his solitary quest for survival. Only one

package remains unopened. It's a box covered in angel's wings. That box gives him hope, and delivering that box, gives him purpose for the future. Not long after the movie, FedEx came out with a Super Bowl commercial that gave an alternate ending to the movie.

(Show Video)

In the commercial, Chuck delivers the box with the angel wings. A woman answers the door, and when Chuck asks what was in the box, the woman replies: "Just a satellite phone, GPS locator, fishing rod, water purifier, and some seeds. Just silly stuff.

We have to open our gift. God hasn't gifted us with an ugly knit sweater that should be put in the back of the closet somewhere. He's given us these amazing and useful gifts that make all the difference in the church. Without these gifts the church is nothing more than a social club, a charitable organization no different from a hundred others. With spiritual gifts, the church is a life-changing, soul-shaping force for global impact.

1. A spiritual gift gives unusual effectiveness in a responsibility given to all.

As you look through these gifts, notice how many of them involve things we are all called to do anyway. We are all called to serve (Gal. 5:13 "*serve one another humbly in love.*"); we are all called to evangelize (1 Pet. 3:15 "*Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.*"); we are all called to have faith (Mark 11:22 "*And Jesus answered them, 'Have faith in God.'*"); we are all called to show mercy (Lk. 6:36 "*Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.*"); we are all called to give, to teach someone, to lead in something. But God gifts some believers to be especially effective in these things we're all called to do anyway.

This doesn't mean I don't have to give, because I don't have the gift of giving, and you do. It doesn't mean you don't have to teach, because I have the gift of teaching and you don't. It doesn't mean you don't have to tell others about Jesus, because you don't have the gift of evangelism. Why, because we're all called to do these things anyway.

So, why does God gift each believer with something we're all supposed to do anyway? Gifted people show us what something looks like. We learn how to serve by watching a person with a gift of serving do their thing? We learn giving by watching generosity blossom from someone with the gift of giving. Gifts give us an example to follow.

One day in the middle of hottest part of summer a church's primary AC unit went out. It was going to cost in the neighborhood of \$30,000 to replace. The church didn't have the money to fix it. Just as they were beginning to wonder what they were going to do, a couple stands up and addresses the congregation. They ran a successful business. They were really good with money, and they knew how to use that money to effectively and powerfully help the kingdom. "My wife and I will give five thousand dollars to replace the AC. This church has blessed us, has given us lifelong friends, helped raise our

children, and made a difference in this community. We don't want to see something like an AC get in the way of that."

Then another person stands up. "I can give \$300." Then another couple. "We can give \$1,000." Before you know it, the church had enough money to replace the AC plus make a couple of other improvements. It all started with someone with the gift of giving that responded to a need.

A spiritually gifted person can be like a jump starter that gets the rest of the body going. In electronics, a capacitor is a component that stores electrical energy for when it is needed. A spiritual gifted person is like a spiritual capacitor for whatever gift they have. When the body of Christ needs a charge of giving, or of serving, or a supercharge of faith for a particularly challenging moment, God provides these people with these gifts to give the church what she needs when she needs it. And it inspires all of us.

In discovering your gift, ask the question, what is your spark? What is God trying to ignite through you?

2. We discover our spiritual gifts as we actively pursue those responsibilities.

You discover your gift to serve by serving. You discover your gift to lead by leading, and so on. As you obey God in all these different areas, you'll discover your better at some things than others. You'll experience God's provision and power more in one thing than another. It's entirely possible that one day you're helping with something, and it'll hit you like a bolt of lightning. Wow, I love this. I can't believe how good I am at this. I can really feel God blessing other people through me when I do this.

Take Paul and Barnabas, for example. In Acts 13, Jesus calls them out to go on a mission trip to teach others about Jesus. In Acts 13:2-3 we read this:

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

Have you ever wished God would do that for you? He just speaks up in the middle of church and says "Set apart for me David and Chuck for the building and grounds ministry. Set apart for me Laura, for I have given her the gift of service and I have called her to prepare meals for families in need." This would make finding a ministry really easy. There'd be no question about what God wanted us to do. There was no doubt about what God had called and gifted Paul and Barnabas to do, but here's what I want you to see. Turn back a couple of pages to Acts 11:25-26:

Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the

church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

Before their calling and gifting was made known, they were already teaching. Before God called them out in front of the whole church, they were already serving. How do you know where and how God wants you to serve, by serving wherever and however you can.

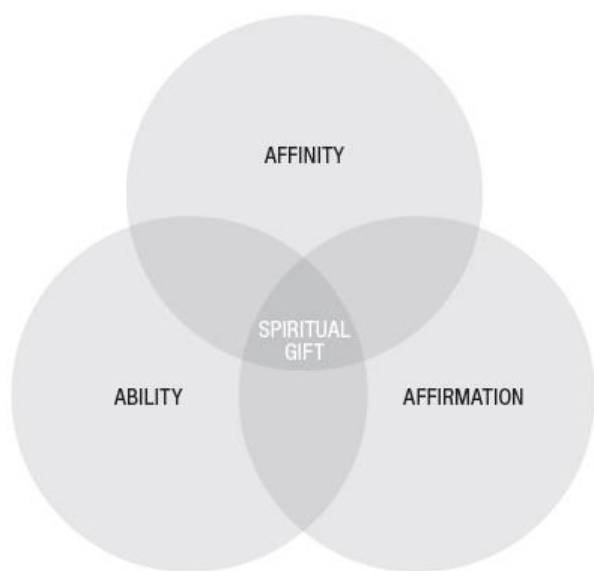
Paul and Barnabas weren't sitting around doing nothing, when God called them. Have you ever tried to steer a bike that standing still? It's really hard. It can be done. It's called a track stand, and pros can do it. I've tried, and I always end up looking like an idiot. It's a whole lot easier for God to steer us to our area of giftedness when we're already pedaling and moving. Pick your illustration— it's easier to guide a horse that's walking, it's easier to steer a ship that's sailing, it's easier to turn the steering wheel when the wheels are rolling. It's a 100 times easier to find your giftedness while you're serving. It's almost impossible if you're doing nothing.

If you serve in an area and fall flat on your face, that's okay. You've just discovered what you're not gifted at. Move on to something else. The answer is not to quit serving; it is to serve in a different way.

3. Our spiritual gift is usually found in the union of what we are good at, what we are passionate about, and what others affirm.

Here's what I mean. Check out the following diagram:

(Show diagram)



The circle labeled “**ability**” refers to what you are naturally good at: you're good at public speaking, you're a talented singer, you're an excellent craftsman, you're an excellent cook. That sort of thing. Spiritual gifts often work in conjunction with our

natural talents. For example, it wouldn't be surprising to find someone who's a great singer that has the gift of encouragement.

"Affinity" is what you're passionate about. This is the stuff you think about, you read about. You daydream about. Your affinity is where you carry your burdens. These are things you think should be the most important priority for the church. The church should be focused on foreign missions. The church should be focused on the poor and needy. The church should be all about reaching the lost. The church should be all about families and children. The church should be all about men's ministry or women's ministry.

These are all passions, and I could start quite an argument in here this morning by pitting one against the other. But that's not what we want or what we need. We need people passionate, sold out, all in, for each of these things. For each one of us there needs to be something you're all about when it comes to faith and church and Jesus. And I want you to be convinced it is the most important thing for the church to be doing. Whatever your affinity is, that gives you a clue where your gift lies. Now we also need to be loving and humble enough to realize that everyone else has different "most important thing" and they are all needed.

"Affirmation" is what other people see in you. When you serve in a certain way, or fill a certain role, others say, "Wow, you're really good at that." "I'm so blessed whenever you do such and such." "I can really see God working in you." It becomes evident through the affirmation of others that God's Spirit working through you when it comes to certain things. When that affirmation happens...ding, ding, ding, ding...that's a sign of your gift.

What you are looking for is where these three circles come together in your life. Where they overlap, that's your sweet spot. You're not limited only to that area, but that should be your focus.

For me, my spiritual gift is in the area of teaching. Preaching and teaching— that's my calling. That's my gift. That's why God put me on this planet. That's why He dragged me kicking and screaming to Ozark Christian College. I'm arguing with him the whole time, "No, I don't want to be a preacher. I want to be a computer programmer." But I made an amazing discovery once I started preaching. God gifted me in this area.

I'm passionate about God's word. I have an affinity for studying scripture. I carry a great burden for people to know the word of God. It breaks my heart when people are biblically illiterate. It bothers me deeply when people mishandle the word. In my mind this is the most important thing, because it underlies all the other things. I know a lot of you think other things are more important. That's okay, you can be wrong (wink, wink).

God also used the affirmation of others to show me my gift. People would say things like, "You make difficult things easy to understand." "I've never thought about it that way

before.” “You’ve given me something to think about.” “I’ve been in church all my life, but I learned something new today.” These affirmations all became confirmations to me of what God wanted to do with my life.

Sometimes, spiritual gifts coincide with natural abilities you already have. God takes a natural talent and “supercharges” it for his purposes. Paul was a great thinker and leader before he became a Christian. We learn in Acts 22:3 that he’d been to Pharisee University and he studied under Gamaliel, one of the greatest teachers of his day. For Paul, his gifts and calling coincided with his natural abilities.

Other times, though, God gives spiritual gifts that have little to do with your natural talents. I think he does this in part to highlight that power in ministry comes from God, not from our own mad skills. There’s a young woman who is terribly shy around people, yet God has given her an unusual ability in evangelism. It makes no sense. When she starts talking to people about Jesus, she blossoms like a flower, and becomes someone almost completely different. She just effectively brings other people to Jesus and it’s obvious the Spirit is working in her.

On the flip side, there are great public speakers who can’t preach their way out of a paper sack. There are people who are great leaders at work. They oversee departments of dozens and dozens of people, but they simply are not effective as church leaders. As one saying goes, “Sometimes God calls those he’s gifted; other times he gifts those he’s called!” ...

4. Spiritual gifts arise out of the unique ways God has written our life stories.

Every one of our lives is shaped by various experiences that provide a context for God’s gifts in our lives. In Acts 26:16, the apostle Paul shares how his life story uniquely prepared him to do what Jesus called him to do. Paul here is quoting what Jesus said to him when he spoke to him on the road to Damascus.

*Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of **what you have seen and will see of me.***

Paul’s giftedness was rooted in his own story. He experienced and encountered Jesus in unique ways that enabled him to do what Jesus called him to do. You have your own story that has shaped you and how you have experienced and encountered Jesus.

(Advance Slide)

Maybe your life story has been shaped by divorce, or chronic illness, or some abuse that you’ve suffered. Who you are today might be shaped by what you experienced when you were deployed overseas. Maybe you experienced a tremendous success that led you down the wrong path. Maybe you’ve battled and overcome addiction. Maybe you’ve struggled to find God’s grace through mental health issues you’ve faced all your life.

Each one of us is a unique story, and God's gift in you is going to look different than it will for anyone else. Even if you have the same gift as me, it will manifest differently in your life than it will mine. You will reach and bless people I never will. And I will say this for every one of you. There are people you can reach, that no one else here can. Your life experience, your personal story will intersect with their story in just the way that they need to meet Jesus.

We've all been given a gift. If you are a follower of Jesus you have a spiritual gift, but a gift is only good if it is opened and used.