

SPIRITUAL GIFTS, TALENTS, AND SKILLS

Cornerstone Growth Series

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INTRODUCTION – THE CULTURAL SETTING

Characteristics of Popular Culture (Self-centered)

- Individualism
- Information (Everything is “knowable”)
- Instant gratification

Characteristics of Christian Culture (God-centered)

- Life is non-linear and not “controllable”
- Outcomes and results are rarely instantaneous
- Community – living with and serving others

It’s essential that we keep these aspects of “God’s Culture” in mind as we explore and discuss the topic of spiritual gifts, talents, and skills. Because we are all influenced in one way or another by popular culture, it’s important to recognize how it impacts our approach to spiritual growth and development as followers of Jesus.

Are we adopting and pursuing a *self-centered* or *God-centered* approach to that process? Apart from community and a commitment to serve others as God intended, the process of learning about our spiritual gifts, talents, and skills could become nothing more than an exercise in Christian self-actualization that ultimately impacts no one but us.

Albert Schweitzer was a physician who sought to spread the gospel through the example of Christian service. He believed that service to others in God’s name was a form of evangelism and that those who served in this way literally **became** the *good news* of God to people. Based on this principle, he spent most of his life practicing medicine as a missionary to equatorial Africa. During his lifetime, this concept was very controversial. Today, it’s a well-accepted aspect of what we call *incarnational ministry*.

Regarding service to others, Schweitzer made the following statement:

I don’t know what your destiny will be, but one thing I do know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve.

WE HAVE A COMMON IDENTITY IN JESUS

As followers of Jesus, we all start our journey with the process of getting to know Him and in turn, to know who we are **in Him**. We call this our *identity* in Jesus; which is something we have in common with all His followers. Consider the following scripture:

So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. We are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. We who believe are carefully joined together, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. (Ephesians 2:19-21, NLT)

What does this passage say about our common identity in Jesus?

- We are all part of God's family.
- Each of us is a unique **stone**, designed to fit in a specific place in the house that God is building for Himself.
- Our lives are built upon the work of those who have gone before us (apostles & prophets) and anchored in Jesus (the cornerstone).
- The house that God is building is a **holy temple** where His Spirit will dwell with us for all eternity.

DISCOVERING YOUR TRUE SELF IN JESUS

Although you have a common identity in Jesus – as children of God and members of His family, He did not intend for you to be clones! **You are a unique creation of God** and as such, your life was designed to have meaning and purpose.

Consider this scripture:

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. (Ephesians 2:10)

You are not just an afterthought or side effect of God's plan, but a masterpiece. You were made in God's image, the *imago dei*, and you all have a different piece of His image within you. Because no two masterpieces are the same, each of you has a true **self**, created by God for a unique purpose.

As God's **masterpiece** you are not meant to be "placed on shelf" to be seen and enjoyed by God and others, but to be used **for a specific, God-given purpose in life**. Consider this scripture:

God has given each of you some special abilities, be sure to use them to help each other, passing on to others God's many kinds of blessing. (1 Peter 4:10)

The "special abilities" described by Peter in this passage are spiritual gifts; the primary means by which God works His purposes in us and through us. In 1 Corinthians 12:1, Paul begins his discourse on spiritual gifts with the following statement:

And now, dear brothers and sisters, I will write about the special abilities the Holy Spirit gives to each of us (NLT)

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant (NKJV)

The Greek word used by Paul in this verse is *Charismata*, which literally means a thing of grace or a grace gift. The implication is that spiritual gifts are not something we earn. On the contrary, we receive them solely because of God's grace, as a gift.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

In verses 4-7 of 1 Corinthians 12, Paul goes on to say that regarding spiritual gifts, God's plan is for there to be **unity in the midst of diversity**:

Now there are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but it is the same Holy Spirit who is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service in the church, but it is the same Lord we are serving. There are different ways God works in our lives, but it is the same God who does the work through all of us. A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church. (NLT)

God gives us spiritual gifts not for our own glorification or benefit, but that we might use them to bless others and help the church. In addition to spiritual gifts, God has given each of us natural abilities and talents. He also provides us with opportunities to develop unique skills that complement our abilities, talents and giftedness. It is God's intention that we use all of these in service to others. This is what we call **Ministry - God's people using God's resources to meet the needs of others**.

Learning more about our abilities, talents, giftedness, and skills can improve our effectiveness in ministry. Nevertheless, in pursuing this "knowledge", we face a risk that was alluded to at the start of the class. That is, the risk of becoming self-centered; of focusing on our own relationship with God and who **we** are, to the exclusion or neglect of others. The Bible demonstrates time and time again (particularly in the Older Testament) that God works in the lives of individuals while simultaneously working on the community as a whole. This reinforces the principle that in God's kingdom, personal transformation and spiritual maturity rarely take place outside the context of community.

This is why God designed His kingdom to include, and actually require, great variety and diversity. None of us can survive (spiritually) on his or her own. I like the way the apostle Paul explains this interdependence:

Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body {the Church}. We are all parts of His one body, and each of us has different work to do. And since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others. (Romans 12: 4-5, NLT)

Not only do we need one another, but it's essential to God's plan that we "work" together for the common good (our spiritual welfare). This is where God's "design" comes in.

Under his [God's] direction, the whole body is fitted together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love. (Ephesians 4:16, NLT)

Where do spiritual gifts fit into God's plan? What purpose do they serve?

... to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ, until we come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature and full grown in the Lord, measuring up to the full stature of Christ.
(Ephesians 4:12(a)-13, NLT)

In the passage above, we see that spiritual gifts are given specifically to:

- **EQUIP** God's people for the work of ministry.
- **BUILD UP** (strengthen) God's people.

In that context, how do we define a spiritual gift?

- A **supernatural** gift or ability given to a person by **Christ** (through the Holy Spirit), to be utilized in his/her **ministry** for the **building up** and **maturing** of God's people

We have included definitions and scriptural references for the spiritual gifts identified in the Cornerstone assessment in **Appendix A**.

USING OUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

As previously noted, our use of spiritual gifts should never be for our own notoriety or advantage but strictly for the glory of God. However, because we are fallible human beings, this is often easier said than done. For this reason, God never fully releases us into our gifting until we submit ourselves to His processing.

If we become involved in a ministry where we have to rely almost exclusively on our gifting, but have not yet submitted ourselves to God's **processing**, it's very

likely that our participation in that ministry will not be truly effective. This is because God's intention is for us to minister in **His** power, through the Holy Spirit, not through our own devices.

Although the Bible does not group spiritual gifts into categories, it is helpful for our purposes to view them in this manner. The three categories of spiritual gifts that we will use in this class are: Equipping, Supporting, and those growing out of Prayer and Worship. This listing and a quick reference guide on these gifts is contained in **Appendix B**. Additional information regarding the Equipping and Supporting Gifts may be found in **Appendix C**.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS WITH SPIRITUAL GIFTS

1. **Disagreement:** Different denominations, churches and individuals may disagree as to definitions of the gifts and even if certain gifts actually exist.
2. **Neglect:** There may be ignorance of and/or neglect of spiritual gifts among different denominations, churches and individuals.
3. **Confusion:** There is often confusion between the supernatural and the natural; where are the lines drawn between natural abilities, skills and spiritual gifts?
4. **Abuse:** Certain spiritual gifts may be emphasized by some as signs of a **necessary** work of the Holy Spirit. This undue emphasis at best can cause spiritual pride and at worst can be divisive.
5. **Imposition:** Similar to abuse, this occurs when an individual attempts to force his/her spiritual gift upon another under the assumption this gift is something that all followers of Jesus should manifest.

SPIRITUAL GIFT PRINCIPLES

There are five principles that should guide our use of and reaction to spiritual gifts.

1. Disagreements are usually caused by a lack of **conclusive** Biblical evidence. Be tolerant and allow others to express their views without dogmatically insisting upon your own particular view or interpretation.
2. Begin slowly. Observe the modeling of gifts in the lives of others. Look for ways that the Holy Spirit may already have been using spiritual gifts in your life.

3. Don't worry unnecessarily about the distinctions between spiritual gifts, natural abilities and acquired skills. Try to make sure that you use all of them in service for God trusting Him to use them for His glory. At the same time, you can ask God in prayer to clarify the distinctions for you, if you believe it will make your ministry more effective.
4. Beware of stressing one gift or a particular type of ministry above another.
5. Encourage the exercise of spiritual gifts in the community of the church but discourage using them as a sign of *spirituality*.

GIFTEDNESS PROFILE

Many of us find it difficult to distinguish between our spiritual gifts, our natural abilities and the experiences and skills we have acquired over time. As such, we would like to briefly define and discuss natural abilities/talents and acquired skills.

Natural abilities are abilities, capabilities, or aptitudes unique to an individual, that are inherited or "hard-wired" into a person at birth. There seems to be a general consensus among social scientists that these "natural abilities" begin to emerge during infancy and can be observed and quantified (as to level) by the teenage years.

In general, "natural abilities" may be grouped into at least four categories.

1. Action-based; such as being able to learn music by ear or having sight memory.
2. Having an innate sensitivity to things that pass through one of the six senses (i.e. being acutely sensitive to facial expression, voice intonation, or body language).
3. Having an awareness that is not based on logic or mental reasoning (some might call this intuition).
4. Knowing something that is beyond memory or normal thinking (i.e. having a strong sense of direction).

If we think about "natural abilities" in these general categories, it is easy to see how they might be confused with certain spiritual gifts.

Acquired skills are abilities or capabilities that an individual has developed over time, through the experiences of life. These may be grouped into at least two categories.

1. Action-based; such as learning a trade or craft, becoming proficient in some form of physical activity (usually a sport), or developing other “hybrid” types of skills such as public speaking, cooking, organizing things, etc.
2. Intangible; such as learning how to be a good listener, developing analytical skills, and developing disciplines for mental/emotional processes (i.e. reflection or meditation).

While it is important to understand the distinctions between these factors, we often use them interchangeably or in combination, so that one becomes virtually indistinguishable from another. When we identify a specific, recurring combination of these factors that results in more effective service, we call it a *giftedness profile*.

In the slide, each component of the giftedness profile is relatively the same size, with spiritual gifts being the leading or **dominant** component. In real life, the size of each component (signifying its level of influence on the whole set) may vary significantly and in most cases, the largest is also the dominant. Let's examine some real-life examples.

Appendix E contains an excerpt from Bruce Bugbee's book: “What You Do Best in the Body of Christ”. The enclosed section is entitled “Confusion about Spiritual Gifts” and it deals with the difference between natural abilities or talents and spiritual gifts.

APPENDIX A

SPIRITUAL GIFT DEFINITIONS & SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES

The following table contains basic definitions and scriptural references for spiritual gifts (in alphabetic order). While not intended to be dogmatic or final, this information does correspond to the spiritual gifts identified in Cornerstone's online Spiritual Gifts Evaluation.

**** In defining spiritual gifts, the term ability refers to something that is God-given or "supernatural"; meaning that it extends beyond our natural talents and any skills we may have acquired over time.**

ADMINISTRATION – The ability to clearly understand the goals of a particular unit of the body of Christ and to devise and execute effective plans for their accomplishment.	Luke 14:28-30; Acts 6:1-7; Titus 1:5
APOSTLE – With full authority from God, the ability to build spiritual foundations and start new churches and works that expand the ministry and scope of the Church (universal).	Ephesians 4:11-12; Romans 1:5; Galatians 2:7-8
CRAFTSMANSHIP – The ability to use one's skills to advance the kingdom of God through artistic and creative means. This typically involves designing and/or building things that support the ministry of the Church (universal).	Exodus 30:22-25; Exodus 31:1-6
DISCERNMENT – The ability to distinguish between truth and error; to identify what is happening – spiritually, in a given situation. The purpose of this gift is to prevent confusion and false teaching from infiltrating the church.	Acts 16:16-18; 1 Corinthians 12:10; 1 John 4:1-6
EVANGELISM – The ability to share the gospel with unbelievers in such a way that they respond in faith and become followers of Jesus Christ.	Ephesians 4:11; Acts 8:5-6; Acts 8:26-40; 2 Timothy 4:5
EXHORTATION – The ability to encourage, strengthen, comfort, challenge, or rebuke others to action in such a way that they respond.	Acts 14:21-22; Romans 12:8; 1 Timothy 4:13
FAITH – The ability to trust God with extraordinary confidence, knowing that He will fulfill His purposes in every situation.	Acts 11:22-24; Romans 4:18-21; Hebrews 11 (the entire chapter)

Spiritual Gifts, Talents, and Skills

Cornerstone Growth Series

July 2010

Page 9

<p>GIVING – The ability to freely, cheerfully, and sacrificially contribute one’s money or possessions to the work of the Lord.</p>	<p>Mark 12:41-44; 2 Corinthians 8:1-7; 2 Corinthians 9:2-8</p>
<p>HEALING – The ability to serve as a human intermediary through whom God’s healing power is applied for restoring people to wholeness (emotionally, physically or spiritually).</p>	<p>Acts 3:1-7; Acts 5:12-16; Acts 28:7-10</p>
<p>HELPS – The ability to unselfishly meet the practical needs of others and in so doing, enable them to exercise their spiritual gifts.</p>	<p>Mark 15:40-41, Acts 6:1-4, Romans 16:1-2, I Corinthians 12:28</p>
<p>HOSPITALITY – The ability to freely and without reservation, in one’s home or elsewhere, provide an environment where guests can feel welcomed and served (with food, fellowship and shelter) in the name of Jesus.</p>	<p>Acts 16:14-15; Romans 12:9-13; Hebrews 13:1-2; I Peter 4:9</p>
<p>KNOWLEDGE – The ability to receive and share revealed knowledge which was not otherwise known, or to gather and clarify Biblical knowledge (truth), pertinent to the growth and wellbeing of the body, with unusual spiritual insight.</p>	<p>1 Corinthians 12:8; Acts 5:1-11; Colossians 2:2-3;</p>
<p>LEADERSHIP – The ability to provide vision, direction, and motivation about the purposes of God in such a way that people willingly agree to participate and work together.</p>	<p>Hebrews 13:17; Romans 12:8; Acts 7: 9-10</p>
<p>MERCY/COMPASSION – The ability to show genuine empathy and compassion for individuals who suffer physically, emotionally, or spiritually, and to translate that into cheerfully-done deeds which reflect Christ’s love.</p>	<p>Matthew 5:7; Acts 16:33-34; Luke 10:33-35</p>
<p>MIRACLES – The ability to authenticate the ministry and message of God through supernatural interventions (altering the ordinary course of nature) which glorify Him.</p>	<p>Acts 9:36-42; Acts 20:7-12; Romans 15:18-19</p>
<p>MISSIONARY – The ability to exercise one’s other spiritual gifts in cross-cultural context.</p>	<p>Acts 13:2-3; Romans 10:15; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23</p>
<p>MUSIC/CREATIVE COMMUNICATION – The ability to communicate God’s truth through a variety of art forms (singing, playing instruments, drama, etc.)</p>	<p>1 Samuel 16:14-16; Psalm 150; 1 Chronicles 16:41-42</p>
<p>PASTOR/SHEPHERD – The ability to care for, nurture, protect, and guide people toward ongoing spiritual maturity and becoming more like Christ.</p>	<p>John 10:1-18; Ephesians 4:11-14; 1 Peter 5:1-4</p>

<p>PRAYER/INTERCESSION – The ability to pray for extended periods of time on a regular basis and see frequent and specific answers to prayer, to a degree much greater than that which is experienced by most Christians.</p>	<p>Colossians 1:9-12; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; Colossians 4:12-13</p>
<p>PROPHECY – The ability to reveal God’s present and future truth and proclaim it in a timely and relevant manner for understanding, correction, repentance, or edification.</p>	<p>Acts 2:37-40; 1 Corinthians 14:1,3; 2 Peter 1: 19-21</p>
<p>SERVICE – The ability to identify the unmet needs involved in a task related to God’s work, and to use whatever resources necessary to practically meet those needs.</p>	<p>Acts 6:1-7; Galatians 6:2, 10; Titus 3:13-14</p>
<p>TEACHING – The ability to understand, clearly explain, and apply spiritual truth, especially from the scriptures, in such a way that people learn.</p>	<p>Acts 18:24-28; Acts 20:20-31; Ephesians 4:11-14; 2 Timothy 2:2</p>
<p>TONGUES/INTERPRETATION – An utterance inspired by the Holy Spirit that enables one to speak in a language unknown to the speaker, for the purpose of building up the body of the church through its interpretation.</p> <p>The ability to interpret words spoken in tongues into the language of the listeners.</p>	<p>Mark 16:17; Acts 2:1-12; 1 Corinthians 14:26-28</p>
<p>WISDOM – The ability to apply spiritual truth to a specific issue in a relevant fashion, and to make proper choices in difficult situations, based on sufficient information.</p>	<p>Acts 6:3; 1 Corinthians 12:8; James 1:5</p>

APPENDIX B

CATEGORIES OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Equipping	Supporting	Prayer / Worship
Pastor / Shepherd	Helps	Knowledge
Apostleship	Service	Prophecy
Leadership	Administration	Tongues / Interpretation
Evangelism	Mercy / Compassion	Miracles
Teaching	Giving	Healing
Wisdom	Craftsmanship	Prayer / Intercession
Discernment	Hospitality	
Exhortation / Encouragement	Music / Creative Communication	
Faith		
Prophecy		
Missionary		

APPENDIX C

QUICK REFERENCE: Equipping and Serving Gifts

Equipping Gifts	Key Word(s)	Desires	Leads by
Pastoring	Shepherd	To care for/protect	Sensitivity to people
Leadership	Conductor	To give direction	Vision / team building
Exhortation	Encourager	To motivate	Inspiration, practical application
Evangelism	Soul Winner	New followers of Jesus	Strength of Conviction
Apostle	Foundation builder	New churches, works	God-given authority
Teaching	Teacher	To teach / impart	Biblical knowledge / insight
Wisdom	Understanding	To apply knowledge	God-given insight
Supporting Gifts	Key Word(s)	Desires	Leads by
Helps	Assisting	Free others to use gifts	Being helpful
Administration	Planner / organizer	Organization	Providing the structure / details
Service	Meets needs	Help; wherever, however	Practical support
Faith	God-given	To step out	Unwavering conviction
Mercy	Comforter	To show compassion	Kindness
Giving	Liberal giver	To share resources	Sharing

APPENDIX D

Inventory of Gifts, Talents, and Skills

<i>Spiritual Gifts</i>	<i>Natural Talents / Abilities</i>	<i>Acquired Skills</i>

APPENDIX E

Don't confuse spiritual gifts with natural talents.

(Excerpted from "What You do Best in the Body of Christ" © Bruce Busbee)

Talents can be an indicator to your giftedness but do not necessarily equate to your spiritual gift. Everyone has some natural abilities, but God has reserved his spiritual gifts for believers. Only those who have personally trusted Jesus Christ and received his Holy Spirit have a spiritual gift. Let's compare and contrast natural talents and spiritual gifts.

Natural talents are given at our physical birth; spiritual gifts are given at our spiritual birth.

In the same way that we have particular talents that distinguish us from others when we are physically born, we receive a spiritual gift that enables us to make a unique contribution when we are spiritually born.

Natural talents are an expression of God's common grace to all who have life. Spiritual gifts are **His** specific grace given to those who have received new life. Although natural talents and spiritual gifts are not the same, *all* that we have ought to and can be used to glorify God and edify others.

Natural talents may be transformed by the Holy Spirit and empowered as spiritual gifts.

There does not appear to be a definable pattern when a person's natural talents are affirmed as spiritual gifts, but that can be the case for some. For example, someone may be an effective nurse in the city and be recognized as having a mercy gift in the church. A graphic designer in the workplace may discover that he or she has a spiritual gift of creative communication. And the successful salesperson could be affirmed with the gift of evangelism.

After personally leading over thirty thousand people through this discovery process, I have not been able to identify when, and for whom, a natural talent will be equivalent to a spiritual gift.

In fact, many times there is no correlation between natural talents and spiritual gifts. Being a teacher in the public school system does not mean a person has a spiritual gift of teaching. Being an effective manager in the marketplace does not guarantee anointed leadership or administration gifts in the church. In order to determine whether or not there is a relationship between a natural talent and a

spiritual gift, ask yourself, “Does my natural ability regularly glorify God and edify others in the church?”

Both natural talents and spiritual gifts can vary in degree and kind.

Just as there are athletes with tremendous natural abilities and others with less, so too do spiritual gifts fulfill different capacities according to God's purposes.

Just as there are good singers and great singers, some of those with the spiritual gift of leadership will lead tens, others hundreds, and others thousands. Some with the gift of helps will use their gift in specific ways each time, while others with the same gift will help in a variety of ways and situations.

Both natural talents and spiritual gifts are God-given.

Both natural talents and spiritual gifts need to be identified, developed, and used to the glory of God. We are stewards, responsible for all that he has given us. Our talents and gifts are specific ways in which God has extended his grace to us in order for us to be a gracious blessing to others. Your spiritual gifts are your primary ministry contribution to the body of Christ. Your talents may or may not be a contributing factor.