

## LESSON 7

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# The Gifts of the Spirit

Operating in spiritual gifts is one of the great joys of a Spirit-filled and Spirit-led life. On the Day of Pentecost, the early disciples discovered what it meant to be filled with the Spirit (Acts 2:1–4). As they obeyed the Lord's specific direction, understood the connection of Scripture to the Spirit, and realized that God's glory had been revealed to them, they went about sharing the good news and leaving evidence of God's presence. That evidence was most often the result of spiritual gifts in operation. Spirit baptism opened up the receivers to the full range of spiritual gifts. After the Day of Pentecost, there was a higher incidence of gifts in use than in days gone by.

It is the same today—to experience the full range of spiritual gifts, we need to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. We are all called to share the good news; God still puts the evidence of the good news in people's lives.

Fortunately, we have the benefit of learning from the experiences of the early church. Whereas the book of Acts shows us several of the gifts of the Spirit in operation, 1 Corinthians gives us the most comprehensive teaching on them. Most of what we learn will come from these two books of the New Testament. Therefore, I strongly recommend becoming familiar with them. Be assured that God wants to manifest His presence and power through you. Knowing this, the apostle Paul exhorts us to “follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy” (1 Corinthians 14:1). The simplest way to go about this is to pray for that desire to be fulfilled by your growing in the knowledge of the Word of God and becoming sensitive to the Spirit's leading.

## LESSON OUTLINE

What Are Spiritual Gifts?  
The Need for Order  
Dysfunction and Spiritual Gifts

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. *Explain what spiritual gifts are.*
2. *State guidelines for using spiritual gifts.*
3. *Identify dysfunction in using spiritual gifts.*

### What Are Spiritual Gifts?

#### **Objective 1:**

*Explain what spiritual gifts are.*

The ability to explain spiritual gifts, formally or informally, begins by learning what they are and experiencing them firsthand. These gifts were never meant for mere study, but for active participation. The more familiar a person becomes with spiritual gifts, by way of knowledge and involvement, the more capable he or she is of helping others encounter the Holy Spirit.

First Corinthians 12:7–11 lists nine different gifts or manifestations of the Holy Spirit. These are word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healings, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. Each gift comes by way of revelation from the Spirit and aims to edify the body of Christ and/or affect unbelievers in some good way (1 Corinthians 12:7). The following definitions will introduce you to spiritual gifts, broken down into three categories: gifts of explanation, gifts of demonstration, and gifts of intimation.

## Gifts of Explanation

These gifts explain some purpose of the Holy Spirit's presence in an individual or group of people. These verbal manifestations of the Spirit follow a simple process with which you ought to become acquainted. First, the Spirit determines the one through whom a gift will be shared (1 Corinthians 12:11). Second, He gives the gift to that person (1 Corinthians 12:7). In this case, the gift is an explanation of some purpose of God's presence among those gathered. Third, the person shares what he or she believes to be from the Spirit (Acts 21:4, 10–11). Fourth, those gathered evaluate what the person shares (1 Corinthians 14:29). This is an important part of the process since not everyone who claims to speak for God actually does so and not every message spoken in God's name is from God (see Matthew 7:22–23). If a word is acknowledged to be from the Spirit, it should be received. If it is acknowledged that the word is not from the Spirit, it should be dismissed (1 Thessalonians 5:19–22). I will explain this later.

## Word of Knowledge

A word of knowledge is not necessarily a single "word." More often it means a "message" from the Holy Spirit. But it is not a message that comes by way of academic learning. It is received spontaneously by revelation from God. Thus, a word of knowledge is imparted knowledge from the Holy Spirit that testifies to God's presence in a given situation.

What God wishes to do in a person's heart through this knowledge is to leave an undeniable mark of His existence or presence. Acts 27 is a good example of word of knowledge. Paul warned the centurion about what was coming, but the centurion chose not to listen to him (vv. 9–11). After the storm (vv. 13–20), Paul reassured all on board that God was still present and that He could be trusted (vv. 21–44). After everyone was safely on land, it became apparent that what Paul had said was true. Hebrews 11:6 says, "Anyone who comes to him [God] must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek

him.” The word of knowledge is one way God seeks to help people believe that He exists and is present.

### Word of Wisdom

Like the word of knowledge, the word of wisdom is most often a “message” and not just a single word. The difference between the two lies in the purpose. A word of wisdom is inspired guidance from the Holy Spirit to help solve a difficult problem. One example is found in Acts 4:1–27, where Peter and John give account of their role in healing the crippled beggar. Verses 8–12 and 18–22 highlight the wisdom by which Peter and John spoke. The rulers and elders were astonished (v. 13) and consequently let the disciples go.

Another instance of word of wisdom is in Acts 6, where the disciples faced an internal church problem. How should they resolve a conflict between two groups of people (v. 1)? The apostles met together (v. 2) and sought the Lord. God rewarded their seeking. Verses 3–7 record the plan, tell how it was received, and make it clear that the solution was from God.

### Prophecy

There is so much said about prophecy in the Bible that it is difficult to do it justice in this lesson. First Corinthians 14 gives the most comprehensive teaching on prophecy in the New Testament. As a spiritual gift, prophecy is the Holy Spirit’s timely disclosure of the declarative or predictive Word of God or mind of God to confirm the will of God. Acts 2:12–41 gives a vivid description of the gift of prophecy. This is the account of what happened immediately after the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Day of Pentecost. Peter became God’s prophetic mouthpiece to the confused crowd (v. 14). The prophecy (vv. 17–36) declared to the people what had just transpired by the Holy Spirit. In no way should we think this message of Peter’s was rehearsed. It was spontaneous. Peter had no way of knowing what would take place after, but God did. The prophetic word left thousands of people “cut to the heart” and repentant (vv. 37–41).

In Acts 9:1–18, the gift of prophecy is at work again. In this instance, it was not spoken to thousands of people, but to one person. Saul was on his way to persecute Christians when Christ spoke to him (vv. 3–9). As Saul was blinded and left to wonder about what would happen next, God spoke to a disciple named Ananias to go minister to Saul. The content of God’s message to Ananias for Saul was a personal prophetic word, and Ananias delivered it courageously (vv. 10–18).

### Message in Tongues

In 1 Corinthians 12–14, Paul devotes a great deal of thought to tongues and interpretation. Speaking in tongues is defined as the enablement from the Holy Spirit to speak a message from God in an unknown language. It seems almost unimaginable that we could speak a different language without having learned it first and that the language would be a word from God. Yet, this is a means by which the Spirit manifests himself.

In 2000, I was ministering in Madagascar at a pastor’s seminar. During the seminar, a Malagasy woman gave a message in tongues. The tongue she spoke in was English, my native language. Normally, she did not speak English! Yet, I was able to understand what she herself did not. After the interpretation was given in Malagasy, I asked a missionary if the interpretation conveyed the message spoken in tongues. He said it did. It was awesome to observe that work of the Spirit.

### The Interpretation of Tongues

This gift functions alongside the message in tongues. Interpretation is the Holy Spirit’s given understanding of a message in tongues to edify the church. Paul is emphatic that when there are messages in tongues in gatherings of believers; there must also be the interpretation of those messages in tongues for the edification of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 14:5, 9–18, 26–28).

## Gifts of Demonstration

These gifts demonstrate or show characteristics of the Spirit's power. They are visible manifestations of His ability to transform chronic or terminal conditions as well as circumstances beyond human control.

## Gifts of Healings

This manifestation of the Spirit provides healing from bodily sickness, deformity and malfunctions apart from medical, natural, or other forms of healing. Acts 3 provides the first account of the power of the Spirit in the early church transforming a physical condition. As it is with the gifts of explanation, the Spirit determines the one through whom the gift will be shared (verse 4). Secondly, He gives the gift to that person (v. 6). Then, the person shares what he or she believes to be from the Spirit (vv. 6–7). Acts 9:12–18 also shows this gift in operation following the same manner. The ability from the Holy Spirit to heal may come by God specifically telling a person what to do, as in the case of Ananias and Saul. It may come as God slows us down to see what we were previously indifferent to, as in the case of Peter and the cripple. Or it may come in the form of prayer (see Acts 28:7–10). Whatever method the Spirit uses to release healing, He does so to cultivate our awareness of His sufficiency in us to minister. Remember, spiritual gifts flow out of the Spirit-filled believer (John 7:37–39).

## The Working of Miracles

The working of miracles is the most demonstrative of spiritual gifts. Working of miracles is the ability from the Holy Spirit to work miraculous deeds for the benefit of others. They are unique, out-of-the-ordinary, often unexplainable, and sometimes misunderstood. Acts 5:15–16 refers to people laying out the sick so that as Peter passed by, at least his shadow would fall on them for healing. Acts 9:36–42 records the story of Peter raising Dorcas from the dead. Acts 19:11–12 tells that God did incredible miracles of healing through Paul.

It is not the divine intervention of God through a willing servant that is unique. The Old Testament and the Gospels are full of people's lives being changed by God's miraculous power. (See 2 Kings 2:4–6; Mark 1–8.) The peculiar feature is how God brings the miracle about. While the working of miracles does follow the determining, giving, and sharing process described earlier, the means by which the miracle is effected does not seem to have a recurring pattern. Thus, the worker of miracles needs an ardent faith and sensitive ear to hear the leading of the Spirit.

### Gifts of Intimation

The gifts of intimation disclose the Spirit's direction on an underlying level. These gifts are unseen but very real spiritual manifestations of the Spirit. First Corinthians 2:6–16 describes the connection between God and the man who has the mind of Christ. This connection is not primarily intellectual; it is spiritual. Keep in mind that "spiritual" does not mean irrational. It means something more than what humans are capable of receiving on the natural level. As born-again believers indwelt by the Spirit, we are capable of receiving spiritual communication and impartations from God.

### Faith

The faith mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:9 is an infusion of confidence from the Holy Spirit to help people face, persevere in, or overcome trying circumstances. This infusion would qualify as an internal witness of the Spirit's work, even though an individual may not recognize it as such.

To illustrate, we read in Acts chapter three that the apostle Peter healed a crippled beggar. In this case, Peter did not have to pray, fast, or wait on God. Full of God-infused faith, he simply commanded the cripple to rise and walk. God healed the man, and moments later the man went walking, jumping, and praising God into the temple courts. Here we see the gift of faith and the gift of healing operating together.

## Discerning of Spirits

Discerning of spirits is revelation from the Spirit to impartially and accurately judge a person's words or actions so as to protect the church from demonic or human deception. For instance, this gift helps the church determine when a so-called "prophetic word" or a purported interpretation to a message in tongues really is not caused by the operation of the Holy Spirit.

## The Need for Order

### *Objective 2:*

*State guidelines for using spiritual gifts.*

## Doing Things Decently

It is essential to discuss the need for a procedure that encourages the orderly flow of spiritual gifts in services. Paul closed out his teaching on the gifts by saying that "everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Corinthians 14:40). Therefore, when a person feels the Spirit's leading to share a gift in a service, if he or she does not know how to go about it, he or she may do something entirely inappropriate. Each church has the responsibility to establish some format so that people know how to proceed. The pastor who wants to build mature Christians not only encourages people to desire spiritual gifts, but also disciples those who operate in them, so that there will be a free and orderly expression of gifts. Following are five simple principles that will help you present spiritual gifts in a fitting way.

1. In a public church service, recognize that the "shepherd" bears the responsibility for the "flock" (Acts 20:28–30). Some people will simply speak forth a gift whenever they feel so moved. Though this is an accepted practice in some churches, it is not recommended, for it creates an environment where anyone could say anything at anytime. A very wise course of action would be to wait for appropriate junctures in the service or meeting

when an utterance can be given. You may want to inform the pastor of what you believe to be God's leading prior to presenting the gift publicly. In smaller group meetings, it is also wise to wait for an appropriate moment or juncture before sharing or attempting to operate in a gift.

2. Whenever possible, wait to be acknowledged by the leader. This is courteous and communicates respect for everyone present (Acts 13:14–15).
3. As you sense the Spirit preparing to move through you, do not assume that the impulse, however strong it may be, to act or speak means you have lost control of your body or tongue (see 1 Corinthians 14:32). You do not become a marionette or puppet that simply reacts to the inputs of a divine puppeteer. You are still in control of your body and mind. There is no need to behave in an unnatural and bizarre manner.
4. Be willing to accept that just as you feel led to share a gift, there are others who are being led to carefully evaluate what you say (1 Corinthians 14:29). Discernment is also a spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:10) that God gives for safeguarding the body of Christ.
5. Do not try to convince those who are present that God is speaking through you. Let them decide (1 Thessalonians 5:19–21). Some people, eager to convince themselves or others that God is speaking through them, will use this common form of address, “Thus says the Lord.” At times, this is appropriate. But it also can be a manipulative tool. Take care as to how you articulate your gift. Those who consistently operate in spiritual gifts know that speaking in God's name is an awesome responsibility. We do not want to take His name in vain. Therefore, I recommend that you address others in one of the following ways:
  - “I believe the Lord wants me to share . . .”

- “Please carefully consider what I am about to say . . .”
- “I feel the Lord is saying . . .”

Following this basic procedure will help develop godly believers in their giftedness. It also provides a means of measuring levels of dysfunction.

## Dysfunction and Spiritual Gifts

### *Objective 3:*

*Identify dysfunction in using spiritual gifts.*

### Sources of Dysfunction

If the aim of spiritual gifts is to minister to people for their well-being, then dysfunction would be something that works against godly spiritual edification and church unity. The New Testament reveals three threats to the edification and unity of the body that come from within. We will identify each threat and look at how to deal with it.

First is the person who is gifted but ignorant of the responsibilities that accompany spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1). This person, like the Corinthians, loves God and is sincere in his or her faith, but is not maturing in Christ (1 Corinthians 3:1–3). He or she makes regrettable mistakes that hurt others and is short on love in the presentation of gifts (1 Corinthians 13:4–5). The majority of 1 Corinthians highlights several problems that lead back to the importance of staying connected to Christ. In doing so, believers grow.

Second, we have a problem that is more serious in its influence, especially over those who struggle with submitting to God's ordained authority (Hebrews 13:7, 17). Revelation 2:20–23 talks about a woman, Jezebel, who refers to herself as a prophetess. She has a self-appointed title, is deaf to God's voice, and influences believers. She is also not accountable to any church for what she does. This is tragic. Today, those who exhibit these same characteristics claim to be accountable only

to God. Though they appear to be spiritual, they are defiant to any who question their position or function.

Third is the most destructive means to church unity and edification. In Matthew 7:15–23, Jesus says that false prophets are wolves in sheep’s clothing. The false prophet is an artist at deceit; he or she seeks to mislead people for personal and financial gain (Acts 20:30; 2 Peter 2:1–3). False prophets are exceptionally capable of taking advantage of believers who are naïve, weak, or who have not submitted themselves to ongoing discipleship (Hebrews 5:11–14).

So how do we confront the dysfunctions that come from within the body? The Word of God gives simple and authoritative direction for facing each threat. Paul indicated that the Corinthians needed to be corrected in the early stages of their immaturity. First Corinthians 13:11 captures the essence of the problem: “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.” Today, immature persons still need to be taught to grow up in Christ, or they will run the risk of becoming self-serving in their ministry to others. If people receive correction at this level, they can change (2 Timothy 3:16). If not, they run the risk of eventually becoming a Jezebel or false prophet.

The original Jezebel was the wicked wife of King Ahab (1 Kings 21:5); she represents all who reject submission to God and godly leadership. Jezebels (men or women) put up a front of submission toward God, but spiritually, they seethe with pride. Both Jesus and Paul warn Christians not to tolerate the presence of a Jezebel. Jezebels need to be disciplined (Matthew 18:15–17) by the pastor and leaders. If a Jezebel rejects godly discipline, he or she will continue in self-deception, perpetuating lies under a veneer of truth. Thus, a Jezebel must not be allowed to minister.

The false prophet is not even to be tolerated. He or she is to be expelled (1 Corinthians 5:12–13; Galatians 1:6–9). False prophets look like “sheep” and know the habits and language of sheep. This is their means of

deception. Confronting a false prophet can be intimidating since they put up a bold front (Proverbs 21:29). But godly discernment with wise counsel will prevail. Once a false prophet is exposed, it is likely he or she will leave.

## Conclusion

Spiritual gifts are exactly that, gifts from the Holy Spirit that we bring to others and others bring to us. Knowing that God reveals His heart in the giving of gifts explains why we are told to “eagerly desire” them. Unfortunately, some will reject God’s gifts, and some will even deny they exist. But do not let this unsettle you. There is no limit to the number of gifts God would give through you to minister to others. And He would develop in you the particular characteristics of the gifts most often manifested through you. God wants you to excel. So becoming acquainted with the procedure for the presentation of gifts is not just a means of encouraging edification and unity, it also serves a secondary purpose. As churches communicate their procedure, in verbal and written form, it discourages Jezebels and false prophets from asserting themselves. May God richly bless your desire for spiritual gifts and your learning how to operate in them.

## SUGGESTED SCRIPTURES TO MEMORIZE

John 15:16

Acts 9:17–18

1 Corinthians 1:7–8

1 Corinthians 12:1, 7, 11

1 Corinthians 13:11

1 Corinthians 14: 40

2 Timothy 1:7

## SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct answer for each question.

1. Which statement is true?
  - a) Acts shows us the spiritual gifts, and 1 Corinthians teaches us about them.
  - b) Acts teaches us about the gifts, and 1 Corinthians shows us them.
  - c) Acts and 1 Corinthians only deal with certain gifts.
2. The three categories of spiritual gifts are
  - a) gifts of illumination, demonstration, and transformation.
  - b) gifts of explanation, presentation, and illumination.
  - c) gifts of explanation, demonstration, and intimation.
3. Which words describe the process of the verbal gifts?
  - a) Give, bless, and receive, judge
  - b) Determine, give, share, evaluate
  - c) Manifest, work, listen, weigh
4. The gifts of demonstration
  - a) teach people how to act.
  - b) are visible expressions of God's ability to change terminal conditions.
  - c) showcase the natural talent of Christians.
5. Enablement from the Holy Spirit to speak a message from God in an unknown language is the definition of
  - a) interpretation.
  - b) wisdom.
  - c) tongues.
6. It is important to be careful in articulating a gift so you
  - a) can convince others that God is speaking through you.
  - b) will show off your talents.
  - c) do not take God's name in vain.

7. *It is necessary to have a procedure for the operation of spiritual gifts so that*
  - a) *we can keep track of how many gifts are manifested.*
  - b) *the pastor can feel important.*
  - c) *people will know how to proceed.*
8. *The types of dysfunction that work against edification and unity arise from*
  - a) *poor Bible study habits.*
  - b) *within the church.*
  - c) *cults.*
9. *The secondary purpose of having a procedure for spiritual gifts is to*
  - a) *discourage Jezebels and false prophets from asserting themselves.*
  - b) *determine who rejects or denies spiritual gifts.*
  - c) *decide where a gift should fit in the service.*
10. *The message of word of knowledge*
  - a) *is always just a single word.*
  - b) *is only given to intelligent people.*
  - c) *testifies to God's presence in a given situation.*

## ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

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Note: You can check your answers by using the answer guide. The numbers in the parentheses indicate which objective in the lesson to check.

1. *a* (7.1)
2. *c* (7.1)
3. *b* (7.1)
4. *b* (7.1)
5. *c* (7.1)
6. *c* (7.2)
7. *c* (7.2)
8. *b* (7.3)
9. *a* (7.3)
10. *c* (7.1)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS LESSON

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