

A Basic Understanding of Spiritual Gifts

Rich Nathan

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Spiritual Gifts: God's Way of Building Community

1 Corinthians 12:8-11

I began a series several weeks ago on Spiritual Gifts from 1 Corinthians 12. And what I want to underline today is something that is so obvious that many people miss it. I want to underline the notion of “gift” as we continue to dig into this text in 1 Corinthians 12.

What is the best gift that you have ever given to anyone? I don't mean the most expensive gift, but the very best gift you've ever given? The one that required the most thought, the most planning, the most investment of your time? Maybe you are very good with your hands and you built someone a really cool table. Or you sewed a beautiful quilt for them as a wedding gift. Some of you are talented artists. Perhaps you painted someone an amazing painting, or you wrote a song or a poem for them.

One of the gifts I remember giving was a gift of a ring to my wife on our 15th wedding anniversary. When we got married, we were very young. I was just 19 years old. We had absolutely no money. So I couldn't afford to give Marlene any really nice ring. That bothered me as I thought about it from time to time. Well, our 15th wedding anniversary was rolling around, and by this time I had made some money practicing law and teaching at OSU, and writing a business law textbook.

In any case, I devised this elaborate plan to purchase a ring for her. I took one of her rings from her jewelry box and had it sized, so I knew what size she wore. Then I picked out this great ring and had it made for her. Then I paid for everything with a bank check so she wouldn't see the canceled check in our monthly account. And then I told her, "You know, this year let's not get each other anything. Maybe we can take the money and buy something for the house. Or let's just go out for dinner and enjoy each other's company."

So I took her out to dinner. And in those days, they had a restaurant on top of the Nationwide building. We were sitting at a wonderfully romantic table right by the window overlooking all of Columbus. I had the ring in my pocket. Every year on our anniversary we talk about where we have been on prior anniversaries and what God has done in our lives over the previous year. So we were talking, holding hands, and enjoying one another's company. And at just the right moment, I reached into my pocket and I said, "Oh, I have a little something for you."

She looked a little surprised. I took out the box with the ring in it and I handed it to her. As she opened the box, I screamed. She began to cry. The ring was so beautiful. I was yelling, "Don't you just love it? Isn't it great?"

What's the most memorable gift you've ever given? Don't you love strategizing, thinking about a perfect gift for someone you love?

What's the most memorable gift you've ever received? Let me share a memorable gift Marlene and I received. When we were first married, as I said, we had absolutely no money. We had no car. In fact, someone at our wedding said to us, "Where are you going to go on your honeymoon?" We both said, "Gosh, nowhere. I guess we'll just hang out here in Cleveland and go out for some pizza."

They got really upset and said, "You can't do that." So they lent us their car and we used some of the money we received for our wedding to actually go on a honeymoon. I won't tell you exactly where we went, but it involved walking a battlefield in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and locating the exact spot on the battlefield where Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain made his famous stand on Little Roundtop. I can assure you ladies that it was a really romantic time.

In any case, we got back home and a few months later a friend of ours, who was planning to be a missionary in the Middle East, came over and began talking with us about our need for a car. He handed us a card. Inside the card there were car keys. He started to talk to us about transferring the title and so on. When our friend left, Marlene and I both stared at one another and said, "Did he just give us his car?" He did. This fellow was planning to be a missionary, and his wife had two cars and they decided to give us the best of their two cars – a Volkswagen Super Beetle – as a gift; totally for free.

What's the most memorable gift you've ever received? Some of the best gifts are intangible. My wife's dad recently died. We had a memorial service for him here at

the church and my two children spoke at the memorial service about their grandfather and my wife, Marlene, spoke about her dad. It was interesting for me to listen to my family talk about my father-in-law. I didn't know what they were going to say. But my wife talked about the intangible gifts her father had given her. Marlene is an only child and she said, "There are two things I remember most about my dad. First of all, he never ever made me feel that he would have preferred a boy. My whole life I always felt that my dad was perfectly happy and satisfied that he had had a little girl. And secondly, he was always available. I never remember feeling like I was interrupting him."

My daughter, Sharon, said, "The thing I remember about Grandpa was that he was always there at every piano recital, at all of my graduations, at all of my sporting events – Grandpa was always there."

Some of the best gifts that any of us have ever received are intangible gifts – the gift of a person's presence, the gift of a person's availability, the gift of a person simply being there for us. For some of you the best gift you ever received was your mother allowing you to come into the world alive. Certainly, there are some of you who were born into circumstances in which many moms would have said, "This isn't going to work. I can't handle a baby right now. The only reasonable thing to do is get an abortion." But for some reason your mother, God bless her, resisted the pressure to abort and gave you the gift of life. She fought for you. She wanted you and here you are.

Many of the very best gifts are things like friendship, time, and acceptance. Every true gift is an act of love.

I want to underline this concept of gift today as we move forward in this series on Spiritual Gifts. I've called today's message "A Basic Understanding of Spiritual Gifts." Let's pray.

1 Corinthians 12:8-11 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All of these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

Many of you are aware of the fact that there is enormous confusion within the Christian church at large about this list of gifts that we've just read about in 1 Corinthians 12. Some churches teach that many, if not all, of these gifts are no longer given by God to his church today. God stopped giving these gifts in the 1st century AD. Many of you have attended churches that taught this.

Other Christian churches focus so much attention on the gifts listed here in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 that they undervalue other gifts not listed here – gifts like the gift of mercy, the gift of hospitality, the gift of teaching, the gift of administration, the

gift of giving. Many of these other gifts are listed in Romans 12. But by the overemphasis and over-focus upon the 1 Corinthians 12 gifts, there is a tendency to set up an elitist hierarchy in which some more spectacular gifts mark someone out as more spiritual. And a person who has less spectacular gifts is made to feel less spiritual. The church across America swings widely across a total neglect of the gifts in this text, and an obsessive focus upon the gifts to the neglect of other gifts and other qualities that God wants for his church.

Why is there so much confusion, so much debate, and so much controversy concerning spiritual gifts?

Certainly, one of the reasons there is so much confusion is because Satan desires a weak, powerless, fearful church. Satan wants an ineffective church. He wants a church that just goes through religious motions and plays at church, but can't actually do anything. Confusion and ignorance is the calling card of Satan.

For example, many Christians are confused about our position in Christ. Many Christians view the Christian life like this: you trust in Christ and his atoning work on the cross, his death for your sins and as a result of your trust in Christ and his finished work on the cross, you receive the forgiveness of your sins and eternal life. But now you have to struggle through the rest of your life and you basically are going to lose your struggle with sin. You are going to constantly be defeated and your only hope is that the Lord will return one day, or you will go to heaven when you die. But the average Christian, I'm afraid, knows nothing about the power that is available to

them through the Holy Spirit to overcome sin. The average Christian knows virtually nothing about how to really battle temptation. The average Christian knows nothing about how to access and hook into the power of the Holy Spirit.

The average Christian is completely confused and ignorant about our position in Christ. Many of you are constantly working to gain God's acceptance, rather than living out of a position of acceptance. The average Christian believes that if I do certain things, if I pray, if I try not to sin too much, if I try to be a good mother or father, if I do a good job at work, and I try to be nice, and I go to church, then God will approve of me.

And nothing could be further from the truth. The truth is the Christian life is not about trying to gain God's acceptance or approval. The Christian life is about working from a position of God's acceptance and approval, because of what Christ has done, not because of what you've done. Because of Christ's merit, not because of your merit. Because of his good deeds, not your own good deeds. God, as a gift, gives you acceptance and approval.

The way that a person gets healthy in life is to really get drenched in the truth that because of what Christ has done, because of his finished work on the cross, right now I am loved by God my Father even as I am, right now. I am accepted by God my Father. I am approved by God my Father. I am righteous in God my Father's eyes. God's wrath is no longer on me. The chains of sin that used to bind me have fallen

off. And with these realities as my foundation, I live according to the truth of what God says about me.

Certainly, a second reason for the confusion regarding spiritual gifts, frankly, can be that many people have attempted to write about and speak about spiritual gifts without ever having experienced the gifts, or seen them in operation. You know, there is so much about the Christian life that you cannot understand without first experiencing it. The Christian life is not something you can stand outside of, apart from, and say, “Ah, now I get it. I’ve got it all figured out.”

Some of you today are in the position of standing outside of Christianity and much of it is very confusing to you. You may have tried to speak about it or argue about Christianity with a friend or family member. But the truth is you really don’t understand it because you are on the outside. You haven’t experienced it yet.

I’ve often pictured Christianity being like one of those old cathedrals with stained glass windows. You stand on the outside of one of those old cathedrals and the stained glass windows look like they’re gray. If you’ve ever looked at a stained glass window from the outside, you can’t make out what the picture is in the stained glass. It’s only when you enter a cathedral and you look up at the stained glass that the picture becomes clear. You say, “Oh, now I get it. I’m on the inside. I get it. I see in the stained glass the face of Jesus. I see in the stained glass his death on the cross, his glorious resurrection.”

That's the way Christianity is. Friends, you'll never be able to get it on the outside. You'll never be able to figure it out completely by arguing about it or discussing it or even reading a book about it. You can't get it from the outside looking in.

I know that many of you have had the experience of not really understanding the Bible very well before you made a commitment to Christ. You tried to read the Bible, but it was just this boring, unintelligible book. You lost interest in it. The sayings in it were dark and opaque. But then you made a decision to trust in Christ. There was a moment when you knelt down and said, "Jesus, I need you in my life. I'm going to welcome you and allow you to take control of me." There was a moment in your life when you trusted Christ and in his death on the cross. And suddenly the Bible came alive because the Holy Spirit is now in your life. He's illuminating the Bible. You are on the inside. For the first time in your life you have an appetite for scripture.

Friend, if Christianity is just this gray, confusing thing to you, it is because you are on the outside looking in. Today, why not step in? Choose today to step in. Today, why not take this occasion to trust in Christ, to ask him into your life, to welcome his presence? And I guarantee you that if you welcome the presence of Christ into your heart and life, and you turn control of your life over to Christ, you'll get it. Things that didn't make sense before will suddenly become clear to you.

And I believe this same principle is operative concerning confusion about spiritual gifts. Many folks talk about spiritual gifts and write about them and teach about

them without ever having experienced them. They are writing about the stained glass window from the outside and it can't be done.

Let's clear away the fog today. Let's clear away the confusion today and answer the question, why does God give spiritual gifts?

The first and most obvious reason that God gives spiritual gifts is because he is generous. As I said in my introduction, a true gift is always an act of love. Spiritual gifts are given to manifest to you and me the love of God. We read in v. 7, *To each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.* That word "manifestation" I told you several weeks ago literally means to make the invisible God visible. How do we know that God loves us? The way we know it is because he gives us gifts. God is a gift giver because God is a lover.

I looked up the phrase "God gave" and "God gives" and "the Lord gives" in a concordance recently. I found the phrases "God gave," "God gives," and "the Lord gives" several hundred times in my concordance. There were too many to count. There are hundreds of individual references in the Bible to God giving. You could say that the regular characteristic of God in the Bible is to give gifts. When you think about the God in the Bible, one of the chief things that you would say about the God in the Bible is that the God of the Bible is an extraordinarily generous giver.

We read that God gave the land to the children of Israel. God gave the Jews precious promises. He gave them manna in the wilderness to feed them. God gave the

people judges and kings and prophets. God gave Joseph success in everything he did. God gave Moses the law on Mt. Sinai. God gave barren women like Sarah, Rachel and Hannah the gift of children. God gave David victory, wherever he went, over his enemies. God gave Job his children, his wealth, his home, his social standing. God gave Solomon wisdom. He gave Daniel knowledge and understanding. God gave Paul his gospel. God gave John the apostle the prophetic revelation that we read. God gave his one and only Son to us. And through him God gives the forgiveness of sins and peace and eternal life. God gives through his Son new resurrection bodies for all who die in Christ. To all who receive him and believe, God gives the right to be called a child of God.

Friend, are you in touch with how generous God is? This is what I bank on when I address God in prayer – his generosity. For me, one of the chief characteristics of God, the centerpiece of my theology, is that God is extravagantly generous. That at the very heart of my faith is this rock-solid conviction that my Father in heaven is very generous.

Is that what you believe about God? Do you believe that God is generous enough to forgive you for any and every sin that you confess to him and bring to the cross? Do you believe that God is generous enough to answer your prayers, or do you think God is stingy and withholding? Do you believe God is generous enough to give you a gift of healing for someone, or a gift of prophecy? Christian, what is the nature of your Father in heaven? The Bible teaches that God is so generous that he gives gifts even to the utterly unworthy. He is the one whom I've labeled in the past the prodigal

Father, who gives, in Jesus' parable in Luke 15, the gift of freedom and forgiveness and the gift of a party and the fattened calf to all who return to him.

God is so generous that he gives success and wealth to people like Eminem and the Osbornes. Let me tell you how generous God our Father is. God is so generous that he gives spiritual gifts to Christians who don't even believe in them. God gives spiritual gifts to Christians who teach that the gifts have passed away.

One of the greatest preachers in the history of the Christian church was a man named Charles Haddon Spurgeon, a Baptist preacher, who preached in the second half of the 19th century. Spurgeon, like most of his contemporaries, believed that the gifts we read about here in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 had been withdrawn from the church at the death of the apostles. Nevertheless, God the Father was so generous that he frequently gave Spurgeon the gift of prophecy, even though Spurgeon didn't believe in it. Here is an incident that I'm reading verbatim from Spurgeon's own autobiography:

While preaching in the hall on occasion, I deliberately pointed to a man in the midst of the crowd and said, "There is a man sitting there, who is a shoemaker, he keeps his shop open on Sundays, it was open last Sabbath morning, he took nine pence, and there was four pence profit out of it; his soul is sold to Satan for four pence!"

A city missionary, when going his rounds, met with this man, and seeing that he was reading one of my sermons, he asked him the question, "Do you know Mr. Spurgeon?"

"Yes," replied the man, "I have every reason to know him, I have been to hear him; and under his preaching, by God's grace, I have become a new creature in Christ Jesus. Shall I tell you how it happened? I went to the Music Hall, and I took my seat in the middle of the place; Mr. Spurgeon looked at me as if he knew me, and in his sermon he pointed to me, and he told the congregation that I was a shoemaker, and that I kept my shop open on Sundays, and I did so. I should not have minded that; but he also said that I took nine pence the Sunday before, and that there was four pence profit out of it. I did take nine pence that day, and four pence was just the profit; but how he should know that I could not tell. Then it struck me that it was God who had spoken to my soul through him, so I shut up my shop the next Sunday. At first, I was afraid to go and hear him again, lest he should tell the people more about me, but afterwards I went and the Lord met with me and saved my soul.

Spurgeon then adds this comment: I could tell as many as a dozen similar cases in which I pointed to someone in the hall without having the slightest knowledge of the person or any idea that what I said was right except that I believe I was moved by the Spirit to say it. And so striking has been my description, that the persons have gone away and said to their friends, "Come see a man who told me all the things I ever did"; and not only so, but I have known many instances in which the thoughts of men have been revealed from the pulpit. I've sometimes seen persons nudge their

neighbors with their elbow because they got a smart hit, and they've been heard to say as they were going out, "The preacher told us just what we said to one another when we were talking in our homes."

God is so generous that he gives spiritual gifts even to people who don't believe in them. Even in churches that do not believe in the gift of healing, they continue to see healings. In churches that don't believe in prophecies, God continues to give prophecies.

Why are spiritual gifts given? To manifest God's love, to give God glory. I've seen the responses of people to the true exercise of a spiritual gift and it almost always is to give glory to God. You see, the Father always points to the Son, doesn't he? And the Son gives glory to the Father and speaks to us about the Holy Spirit. And then the Holy Spirit comes along and points us back to Jesus. Each of the members of the Trinity is always giving glory, honor, and deference to each other.

Do you understand that when the Trinity is at work in the church, the members of the Trinity are always going to be giving glory to each other? When the gifts of the Spirit are operative in the church, the church is going to be giving God more glory, more worship. For those of you who know your bibles, do you remember what the result was of Jesus healing the paralytic, who was brought to him on a mat by his friends? Jesus looked at that paralyzed man and raised him up. He employed a gift of healing on his behalf. And what was the result of that dramatic healing? It says in Luke

5:25, *Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God.* The man went home praising God for his healing.

And then in Luke 5:26 we read, *Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."*

This is what happens when spiritual gifts are operative. People are drawn toward God and they give God praise.

Some years ago I read a historical account of the great St. Augustine and his church. One Easter morning a brother and sister came into his church. They both suffered from palsy, at least that's what the condition was called back in the 5th century. As Augustine describes it, it sounds like a condition very much like Parkinson's Disease.

This brother and sister walked in and they were both violently shaking. They couldn't walk very well. These two were known in the community as having this affliction. During the worship time, the brother felt the power of God come upon him. And he was instantly healed. His shaking stopped. He was standing in the middle of the church and suddenly his shaking and trembling stopped. People looked over and word began to spread. Folks began to point at the man. There was this spontaneous outburst of worship. In the middle of this Easter service as people saw this afflicted man that they knew visibly in front of them healed.

His sister was standing in the back of the church and she was shaking as people began to spontaneously worship God. She lifted up her hands to God and the power of God came on her and she was instantly healed. Augustine writes that the Easter service that year was the most memorable he had ever celebrated.

Why are spiritual gifts given? To give God glory.

Spiritual gifts are given to build up God's church. Paul writes, *Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.* And in 1 Corinthians 14:12, the apostle Paul writes, *Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.* To build up, to use a biblical word, edify the church. I have often called spiritual gifts God's body-building equipment.

I have worked out at gyms around the city for two decades now. And in almost every gym I go to, you basically see the same kinds of people. About half the people who go to a gym work out on only one or two pieces of equipment. People go to the gym and find their favorite piece of equipment, the one they find the easiest, and then they work away at that. There are guys at the gym that I work out in who spend all their time working out on the bench press. They have these skinny little legs, but enormous chests. Some are very overweight. There they are 3-4 times a week on the bench press. That's all they do.

Other people are on the stair stepper or treadmill. Every other part of their body is underdeveloped. They have great aerobic capacity, but they can't lift ten pounds over their heads.

Now this selective use of body building equipment is a good picture of what happens in churches all across America. In some churches many of the spiritual gifts are suppressed. Only a few gifts are allowed to be exercised. In some churches the only thing you have are a mouth and feet. The pastor preaches and people run around doing evangelism, but the church doesn't seem to have any hands. There's very little prayer for healing. And the church doesn't seem to have any ears. There's little ability to hear from God in prophecy. And there are no arms to embrace through the gift of hospitality.

Now I don't believe that any church that is a true Christian church could properly be labeled "non-charismatic." As I said before God is so generous that he gives spiritual gifts even to churches who don't believe in many of them. God is so generous that he gives spiritual gifts even to churches that teach against them. Well, we certainly can suppress spiritual gifts.

And on the other hand there are certain churches, as I said before, that so overemphasize the list of gifts that we read about in 1 Corinthians 12, that they have underdeveloped ministries of hospitality, and they neglected body-building gifts like the gift of mercy, or the gift of helping, or the gift of giving. The church in America is

doing what the people in the gym are doing. They say, “Well, I really don’t need that piece of body-building equipment. I’m going to neglect this piece of equipment.

And you know what we end up with? A severely underdeveloped body. Until all of the gifts of the Spirit – the spectacular ones and the unspectacular ones – are welcomed and practiced in the church, in some way or other we have a weakened body. The reason why 80% of the work of the Kingdom never gets done is because 20% of Christians are doing the work and the gifts of 80% go unrecognized, unappreciated, unwelcomed and unused.

The last reason gifts are given is to serve God’s world. You know, friend, it doesn’t take great sensitivity or compassion to see needs everywhere in this world. Everywhere there are people who are hungry. Everywhere there are people who are sick. Everywhere there are people who are confused, people who are depressed, people who are suicidal. God gives spiritual gifts so that we in the church can meet the needs of people in the world.

The gifts are not given to be stored up in the church as if spiritual gifts are part of our private bank account. Spiritual gifts are not to be simply employed in the church. I believe one of the major reasons we struggle with the seeming infrequency of the miraculous is because we confine spiritual gifts to the four walls of the church. Have you ever noticed that many of Jesus’ miracles took place outside the synagogue and the temple? There were occasional healings in a religious context, but most of the

healings of Jesus occurred not in the temple, not in the synagogue, but in the world, in the streets, in the marketplace.

Listen, where do we find Jesus in the world? Where is he? Jesus tells us anywhere there is someone hungry, anywhere there is someone thirsty, anywhere there is someone in need, there he is. You remember the parable of the sheep and the goats where people say to Jesus in the last judgment: when did we see you hungry or thirsty? When did we see you? Where would we find you in the world? And Jesus answered and said, “As you’ve done to the least of these my brethren, you did to me.” As you feed someone who is hungry, as you visit someone who is in prison, as you meet someone’s needs, there you find Jesus.

Let me bring this down to earth. You can’t go to a nursing home and pray for people without encountering Jesus there. You can’t go to a homeless camp and give someone a blanket or a hot cup of coffee or something to eat without encountering Jesus there. You want to experience more spiritual gifts? You want to see the kingdom come? Then start bringing these gifts out of the four walls of this church and out into the community. Spend time with a kid that has no father. When a coworker complains about something bad that’s going on in their marriage, God the Holy Spirit is tapping you on the shoulder and saying, “Here’s an opportunity for my reign and rule to be extended in another person’s life.”

Last year I was in Starbucks, which is my home away from home. I was getting a cup of coffee and the server there was complaining to one of her coworkers about her

headaches and the pain she had in her body, and that she couldn't sleep. I got my coffee and cream and went to sit down at the table. The Holy Spirit kept nudging me, tapping me on the shoulder, saying, "Here's an opportunity for my kingdom to be extended in this place. Go to that woman and offer to pray for her." So I sat struggling – gosh that is so awkward; this is not the place; this is kind of embarrassing. I felt the press of the Spirit and I decided to obey.

I went up to the counter and waited for the rest of the customers to get their orders and I said to this woman, "You know, I heard you mention before that you are not able to sleep and that you have these different physical problems."

She said, "Yes." And she began to describe her problems in great detail. She had a whole host of medical problems.

So I said to her, "You know I'm a pastor of a Vineyard church right down the street here, and I would be happy to pray for you that God would heal you."

She said, "That's nice. Thank you very much."

I said, "No, I don't mean that I'm going to go away and pray for you at church. I mean I would like to pray for you here."

She looked at me as if she had seen a ghost. She said, "Here?"

I said, "Yes, right here."

She said, "I don't go to church."

I said, "That's OK. God can answer prayer anywhere."

She said, "OK. You can pray for me."

I said, "Well, you are going to have to step out from behind the counter."

She said, "Well, you know I don't go to church."

I said, "I know, you said that. But God can heal you anyway."

She came out from behind the counter. And we stepped out into the main area of Starbucks. People were walking by us. I said, "May I put my hand on you?"

She said, "OK, but you know I don't go to church."

I said, "Yes, I think you told me that. But I don't think God cares. He may heal you anyway."

Right there in the middle of Starbucks, I invited God's presence to come and to heal her. A week later I came into Starbucks. The server saw me and ran out from behind the counter and threw her arms around me. She said, "Rich, God healed me."

I said, "Really?"

She said, "That night right after you prayed for me was the first time I slept through the night for months. I've been sleeping like a baby. The pain is gone."

I have always believed that one of the reasons why the church today, even that part of the church that considers itself charismatic, sees spiritual gifts so infrequently is because gifts are confined to the four walls of the church building and are not taken out to the marketplace.

So in light of the value of spiritual gifts in manifesting to us God's love and causing people to give God glory, and enabling us to build up God's church, and allowing us to serve God's world, there ought to be no one here who is satisfied with their present experience of spiritual gifting. Wherever you're at, whatever your church background, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, there ought to be something inside of you tugging you, pulling you away from a sense of complacency so that you might say to God, "Lord, give me these gifts."

The apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12, in the very last verse says, *Eagerly desire the greater gifts.* And in 1 Corinthians 14:1, Paul says, *Eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.*

The Bible gives us several examples of people who sought empowerment through the Spirit. In the Old Testament, Elisha would not leave his mentor until he received Elijah's empowerment. In the New Testament, the apostles regularly prayed for Christ to pour out miraculous signs and wonders on them. And Jesus himself taught us to ask God for gifts. He reminds us of the Father's generosity when he says, "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?"

God our Father is very generous. The heart of our faith is that when we kneel to pray, we are approaching a God who reveals himself to us in scripture as a giver. Ask. Ask God for spiritual gifts. Pursue God. Lay hold of God in prayer and ask him; cry out to him; ask God for gifts you have not yet experienced. Ask him. Seek him. Pursue him, because he is extravagantly generous. Let's pray.

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1 Corinthians 12:8-11

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