

The gifts of the Spirit

Deltacourse

A discipleship training to equip Christians for works of service, so that the Body of Christ may be built up (Ephesians 4:11-16)

29

QUIET TIME

Theme: The gifts of the Spirit and our tasks

- Try to make a specific time every day to meet Jesus Christ through reading and meditating his Word.
- Pray, talk with Jesus Christ and make a few short notes about this Bible passage in your notebook.
- Record what you discover, what speaks to your mind and heart, what you find difficult or what you understood.

Day 1 1 Corinthians 12:4-11
The variety of spiritual gifts (cf. also verse 28-31)

Day 2 Ephesians 4:7-13
The gifts which equip the congregation

Day 3^{BS} 1 Corinthians 12:12-31
The variety of tasks

Day 4^{BS} 1 Corinthians 13:1-13
The way spiritual gifts ought to be used

Day 5 Galatians 6:1-5
The task of restoring an erring person

Day 6 1 Timothy 4:1-7
The task of promoting sound teaching

Day 7 2 Timothy 2:1-7
The task of being a soldier, athlete or farmer

Day 8 Hebrews 13:1-3
The task of remembering the persecuted Christians (cf. also Hebrews 10:33-34)

Day 9 1 Corinthians 14:1-25
When exercising spiritual gifts intelligible communication is essential

Day 10 1 Corinthians 14:26-40
Order within the Christian meetings is essential

- Think about John 17:4.
Pray that you may glorify God by finishing the task God has entrusted to you.
- Pray every day for someone or something specific and wait in expectation for what God is going to do (Psalm 5:3).

STUDY

Theme: The gifts of the Spirit

Read study 29 carefully before the next meeting. If you have questions, write them down and mail them to one of your group leaders. We will seek an answer together.

BIBLE STUDY

Theme: Unity within diversity

If you like, you may already prepare the Bible Study for the coming meeting by reading through the Bible passage. Make use of the 5-step Bible Study method. The Bible passage is: **1 Corinthians 12:12 – 13:8**

MEMORISATION

1. Motivation

Jesus memorised Bible verses (Luke 4:4-13). Are you doing that?

2. Memorisation

Memorise this verse in the Bible version of your choice.

MY TASK
Colossians 4:17

Tell Archippus:
See to it that you complete the work
you have received in the Lord.

Colossians 4:17 (NIV)

3. Review and back-review

Review the last 5 memorised verses once every day and back-review all other memorised verses once every three weeks.

29. The gifts of the Spirit

A. Spiritual gifts

1. What is a spiritual gift (a gift of the Spirit)?

A spiritual gift is a special ability or function which God gives by grace to a Christian (1 Peter 4:10; 1 Corinthians 12:4). This ordinary or extraordinary ability or function is a work of the Holy Spirit in a Christian (1 Corinthians 12:11). It is not the result of a Christian's skills or talents.

A spiritual gift is a revelation of God's power, wisdom, knowledge, etc. in different kinds of service (ministries, including some offices) (1 Corinthians 12:5) and manifested in different kinds of working (effects, products, results) (1 Corinthians 12:6-7).

A spiritual gift is always limited in size. Christ gives a gift (or gifts) in smaller and greater measure to a Christian (Ephesians 4:7). No Christian receives all spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:29-30). No Christian receives everything a particular spiritual gift (say: teaching) may contain. And all Christians do not receive one particular gift.

2. The spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament

Read Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 7:1,7; 12:7-10,28-30; 14:6,26; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 4:10-11.

The New Testament mentions about 24 different spiritual gifts or spiritual functions. But there are more. The spiritual gifts are: prophecy and prophets (as an office), service, teaching (as an activity), teaching (as the content) and teachers (as an office), encouragement, meeting needs, giving, leading, showing mercy, celibate, speaking words of wisdom, speaking words of knowledge, faith to move mountains, various gifts of healing, working miracles, discernment of spirits, speaking languages (tongues), translating languages (tongues), being apostles of Christ or apostles of congregations (as an office), abilities to help, directing, receiving revelations (dreams, visions), writing or singing psalms, doing evangelism and evangelists (as an office), shepherding and pastors (as an office).

Some spiritual gifts are not only a special ability, but also a spiritual function (office¹) or a ministry (task), for example: apostle, prophet and teacher.

3. The purpose of spiritual gifts

The purpose of spiritual gifts is not to become better than others, but rather to make use of what God has given to serve the welfare of others. Spiritual gifts are intended for

¹ 'An office' is a public task or service to which Christ and the elders of the congregation calls and appoints someone. This person has authority to execute that task. Examples of offices are: elder, missionary, evangelist, shepherd, teacher, deacon, group leader, youth leader, etc. Except for the elders these offices are NOT the leaders of the congregation, but function in their tasks under the body of the elders!

the mutual service of believers (1 Peter 4:10), for the edification of the Church (1 Corinthians 12:7; 14:12), for the equipment of Christians in various tasks (Ephesians 4:11-12) and ultimately for glorifying God (1 Peter 4:11)!

To serve one another with one's spiritual gift is another way to express love to one another! The service or spiritual gift of the one complements that of the other and so the Body of Christ is built up.

4. Spiritual gifts are given by God

God determines which spiritual gifts and functions he gives and to whom he gives them (1 Corinthians 12:11,18,28; Ephesians 4:7; Hebrews 2:4; 1 Peter 4:10). God does not necessarily give a spiritual gift to *each*² Christian, but sees to it that each Christian receives a place in the Body of Christ.

Although not every Christian necessarily receives a spiritual gift or function, every Christian must love! And although not every Christian necessarily receives a specific ministry, every Christian must serve!

5. Grace is more wide-spread than spiritual gifts!

By comparing Ephesians 4:7 (grace) with Ephesians 4:11 (spiritual gifts) grace seems to be more wide-spread than spiritual gifts. Each Christian receives a special measure of the extraordinary effects of God's grace (Greek: charis) (Ephesians 4:7), but not each Christian receives necessarily a spiritual gift (Greek: charisma).

Examples of grace are: a God-given ability to lay a spiritual foundation (1 Corinthians 3:10), a God-given power to work hard (1 Corinthians 15:10), a God-given strength in situations of weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9) or a God-given ability to do missionary work among the heathen (Galatians 2:9). It may also be a God-given specific ability or function (a spiritual gift) (Greek: charisma) (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 4:10-11). Although grace includes the spiritual gifts (Ephesians 4:7,11), the lists of spiritual gifts

² **The word 'each'** (Greek: hekastos). Christians differ with each other whether each Christian in the world receives a spiritual gift or not.

The word 'each' / 'each one' can have general meaning

– in the sense of 'every person that has ever lived' (Romans 2:6) or 'every person that repents and believes' (Acts 2:38; Romans 12:3; 14:12). Some Christians therefore believe that the word 'each' in 1 Corinthians 7:7, 12:7, 14:26 and 1 Peter 4:10 means that each and every Christian has received a spiritual gift.

The word 'each' can have limited meaning

– in the sense of 'every one belonging to a particular group': every hypocrite (Luke 13:15); everyone in the crowd (John 6:7); every Christian that had need (Acts 4:35). Therefore the word 'each' in 1 Corinthians 7:7, 12:7, 14:26 and 1 Peter 4:10 has limited meaning in the sense of 'every Christian in the Body of Christ whom the Spirit in a sovereign way has given an ordinary or special spiritual gift' (1 Corinthians 12:11,28-30). Therefore it is not absolutely necessary that the Holy Spirit gives a spiritual gift to each Christian in the world!

in the Bible do not include all these other examples of God's grace.

6. Love is more important than a spiritual gift!

By comparing 1 Corinthians 12:31a with 1 Corinthians 31b Paul shows that love is a more excellent way than desiring a spiritual gift. This means that if a specific spiritual gift is lacking in a particular Christian's life or even in a particular Christian congregation, love may never be lacking!

While love is a gift of the Holy Spirit given to all Christians without exception (Romans 5:5; Titus 3:5-6) specific (ordinary or extraordinary) spiritual gifts (abilities or functions or offices) of the Holy Spirit is given in a sovereign way to certain Christians within the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:11)!

It is possible to exercise spiritual gifts without love (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)! It is also possible that a particular congregation possesses all the spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 1:7), but still remains very unspiritual (1 Corinthians 3:1-4)!

B. How do you discover your spiritual gift(s)?

How do you know whether God has given you a specific spiritual gift or a more general ability or function?

1. By studying the Bible and praying

Prayerfully study God's Word about grace and the specific spiritual gifts, their characteristics and functions.

2. By serving in the congregation

Serve in various ministries in the local congregation, as children ministry, youth ministry, helping the needy, encouraging the discouraged, evangelisation, etc. If God has given you a specific spiritual gift, it will only become visible when you serve others and build up the Church. God does not give spiritual gifts as an ornament to display and brag about, but rather as an ability to serve others.

3. By considering how you function

A spiritual gift is an ability which spurs you on to serve in the area of your spiritual gift. You will notice that you have received *a desire* to serve in that specific area. A spiritual gift is meant to serve and to build up and therefore *the effect* of your service and building up is a good indication of your spiritual gift.

Ask yourself: "How do others regard my service and endeavours?" "What do they often ask me to do?" "What do they say I can do well?" "What do they say have helped them?" Then ask yourself: "How do I regard my functioning?" "What do I enjoy doing?" "What can I do well?" "What do I do that builds up others?"

In order to discover your spiritual gift you need humility and faith: When you possess a specific spiritual gift, realise

that you received it from God. Do not claim to possess a spiritual gift which you do not actually have. Do not desire a so-called 'higher or more miraculous gift' than God in his grace has given you. But also do not refuse to acknowledge the spiritual gift which God in his grace has given you or to someone else.

C. A selective and short overview of the spiritual gifts

1. Apostles

The apostles of the congregations are Christians who have been sent out by a congregation to carry out a specific task, especially to plant and to build up another congregation (church) under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit. They are missionaries (Acts 13:2-4; 14:4; 2 Corinthians 8:23; Philippians 2:25).

They are not the same as *the apostles of Jesus Christ* who were unique and have no successors (Mark 3:13-19)! The apostles of Christ were the instruments of Christ to reveal the greatest part of the New Testament Scriptures and they were the layers of the foundation of the worldwide Church (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:20).

2. Revelation, prophets and prophesying

'A revelation' (1 Corinthians 14:6,26) is an unveiling or disclosure of a truth, especially through a vision or dream (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:1; Revelation 1:1,10,12).

The gift of *'prophecy'* or *'being a prophet'* (Romans 12:7) in our time is the special ability or function to proclaim biblical truths that edify, encourage and comfort individual Christians (1 Corinthians 14:3; Acts 15:32) or that build up the Church (Ephesians 4:11-12). Christians who have this gift proclaim openly what God has already revealed in the Bible in a way inspired by the Holy Spirit. They do this in a very convincing manner, with intelligible words (1 Corinthians 14:8) and with power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:10; 1 Thessalonians 1:5).

Prophesying can also consist of revealing the thoughts, motives, attitudes, words and deeds of people that have been previously hidden. The purpose of prophetic words (preaching, teaching, counselling) is to reveal issues to the listener: to call a non-Christian to repentance or a Christian to change something in his life. The effect of prophesying is that someone's sin is exposed (1 Corinthians 14:24-25).

The prophets of today are not the same as the prophets in the Old Testament. The Old Testament prophets were unique: they revealed God's will, spoke God's authoritative words and recorded these words in books that were later incorporated into the Bible. The last Old Testament prophet was John the Baptist (Matthew 11:13).

3. Teachers and teaching

'Teacher' (1 Corinthians 12:28) is a function (office) in the congregation (based on a calling) or a special ability (based on a special spiritual gift). Most of the time the teacher derives his knowledge from the Bible, but sometimes it is based on another special gift, such as 'a word of wisdom' or 'a word of knowledge'.

'Teaching' (Romans 12:7) is the act of teaching or the special ability to pass on the truths of the Bible to Christians. Although Christians should teach one another (Matthew 28:20; Colossians 3:16), not every Christian has received the calling and appointment to be a teacher (1 Timothy 5:17) or have received the spiritual gift to be a teacher.

4. Evangelists

'Evangelist' (Ephesians 4:11) is a function (office) in the congregation or a special ability. Evangelists proclaim the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ to non-Christians so effectively that they are saved and the number of Christians in the Church increase.

5. Shepherds

'Shepherd' (Ephesians 4:11) is a function (office) in the congregation or a special ability. Shepherds feed, protect, care for and lead Christians to spiritual growth and well-being. They seek the lost, return the erring and give loving care to the young and the weak.

6. Leaders and administrators

'Leader' (Romans 12:8) is a function (office) in the congregation or a special ability. The leader leads by walking in front, giving direction and setting a good example. This is especially the task of the elders in the congregation.

'Administrator' (1 Corinthians 12:28) is a function in the congregation or a special ability. The administrator leads by steering the congregation from the background with wise counsel.

7. Serving and helping

'Serving' (Romans 12:7) is a function in the congregation or a special ability. Although every Christian should be serving, some may be appointed to the function (office) of deacon. He sees and meets different kinds of needs.

'Helps' (1 Corinthians 12:28) is a special ability. He assists in various tasks.

8. Speaking: wisdom, knowledge, psalm or encouragement

'A word of wisdom' (1 Corinthians 12:8) is the desire and special ability to explain to people the best practical means to reach the highest goals. Christians who possess this gift advise people how they could best live according to God's will.

'A word of knowledge' is the desire and special ability to clearly explain the meaning of difficult things to people. Christians who possess this gift discern whether certain knowledge is in accordance with the Bible or not.

'A psalm' (1 Corinthians 14:26) is the desire and special ability to speak God's Word to others by means of poems, songs and music.

'An encouragement' (Romans 12:8) is the desire or special ability to stimulate Christians to put God's Word into practice. Christians who possess this gift counsel and coach others in the area of personal growth and service. They show how the teachings in the Bible can be made practical in daily life.

9. Giving and contributing to needs

'Giving' (Romans 12:8) is the desire and the special ability to use your possessions for the highest good of people and for the glory of God. Christians who possess this gift aim at increasing possessions (money) through their jobs and consequently give these possessions to other Christians (congregations or Christian organisations or a specific missionary, etc.) in order to extend and build up God's kingdom.

10. Showing mercy

'Showing mercy' (Romans 12:8) is the desire and special ability to empathise with the needs of others and then to comfort and help them. Christians who possess this gift are often good observers and listeners. They are able to quickly discern or picture the thoughts and feelings of people in need. They are able to sympathise and empathise.

11. Faith

'Faith' (1 Corinthians 12:9) is the desire and the special ability to carry out a special ministry. Christians who possess this gift trust God to enable them to carry out a difficult task (e.g. to live in a foreign country, to persevere in persecution) or to perform great things, even miracles, for God. They believe that God is able to accomplish what humanly speaking seems impossible. By faith Noah, Abraham and Moses accomplished God's purposes (Hebrews 11:6-27).

12. Gifts of healing

'Gifts of healing' (1 Corinthians 12:9,30) are desires and special abilities to restore the health of the bodies and the souls of sick people. God uses Christians who possess these gifts as his instruments to heal people by natural or supernatural means. All healing is divine healing, regardless the method!

13. Workings of powers or miracles

'Workings of powers' or 'miracles' (1 Corinthians 12:10,28-29) are desires and special abilities to perform supernatural deeds (2 Corinthians 11:23-28) or unusual signs and wonders. The purpose of signs and wonders is especially to strengthen faith in Jesus Christ (John 20:30-31), but also to kindle faith in the reality of God.

14. Discernment of spirits

'*Discernment of spirits*' (1 Corinthians 12:10) is the desire and special ability and calling to discern and distinguish between human and demonic spirits. Christians who possess this gift are able to discern whether something (e.g. a spiritual gift) is divine or demonic, spiritual or psychological, true or false, edifying or destructive (1 John 4:1-6; Acts 13:6-12; 1 Corinthians 14:29).

15. Different kinds of tongues (languages)

The '*speaking in tongues*' is a special ability to speak in another existing intelligible language in the world (Acts 2:5-11; Mark 16:17).

In the congregation of Corinth it was 'an unintelligible language of angels' which was ideally spoken not only with the (emotional) human spirit, but also simultaneously with the (rational) human mind (1 Corinthians 12:10,28-30; 13:1,8-11; 14:13-19) or which required interpretation. Some in the congregation of Corinth possessed this gift permanently: "Anyone who *again and again* speaks in a tongue" (present continuous tense) (1 Corinthians 14:13). Note that this is the only spiritual gift that required rules commanded by the Holy Spirit for speaking in public meetings (1 Corinthians 14:27-28).

16. Interpretation of tongues (languages)

'*Interpretation of tongues*' (1 Corinthians 12:10,30; 14:27-28) is the special ability to understand and translate the above intelligible languages of men or the unintelligible languages (sounds) of angels in order to build up the congregation. Christians who possess this permanent gift are able to discern whether people with the permanent gift of speaking in tongues are genuine or false.

17. Celibate

'*Celibate*' (1 Corinthians 7:7,32-35; Matthew 19:10-12) is the special ability or choice (calling) to remain unmarried in order to serve God with an undivided heart. Just as all the other spiritual gifts, this spiritual gift may be given for a period of time, just as long as God deems it necessary, or it may be given permanently.

D. The gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit

The possession and use of the gifts of the Spirit (spiritual gifts) does not prove that a person is 'spiritual' or 'mature' (compare 1 Corinthians 1:7 with 1 Corinthians 3:1)!

The use of spiritual gifts without love is quite possible, but completely useless in God's eyes (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

The genuine proof, that a Christian is living under the control and guidance of the Holy Spirit, is not the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit, but the bearing of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Even though the gifts of the Spirit may be lacking in your personal life or in your congregation, the fruit of the Spirit, especially love, may never be lacking!