

# Spiritual Gifts - Pitfalls to Avoid and Paths to Pursue

by Bob Kauflin

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*Spiritual gifts are given to empower God's people for kingdom life and service, enabling them to live and minister in a manner that glorifies Christ.*

**Duration:** 1:01:21

**Scripture:** Matthew 25:14, John 13:17, Acts 3:6, Hebrews 4:12

**Topics:** "Spiritual Gifts"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the parable of the talents from Matthew 25. He emphasizes the importance of being faithful in little things and not burying our gifts. The speaker encourages the audience to read, study, meditate on, and obey God's word as a way to see the Spirit working in their lives. He also urges them to expect God to work through them and to encourage others by recognizing and affirming the work of the Spirit in their lives.

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## Transcript

The goals of the class, just to remind you, for those of you who weren't here the first week, to be educated about spiritual gifts. So, we learned a little bit about how, in the Bible, which is our authority, spiritual gifts aren't this technical category that, you know, there are 11 spiritual gifts, or there are 22 spiritual gifts, or, you know, that's so tightly defined. It's a broad category, including even eternal life.

You know, in Acts 6.23, this is the charisma of God, eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord. So, we want our thinking about it to be much broader than maybe some of us have thought about it. To be equipped to use spiritual gifts.

That's, I particularly tried to get into that in the Prophecy Week, and I imagine Robin did last week with the Healing in Tongues. Yeah, just to know, okay, what do we do with these? How do we use them? To expect and enjoy spiritual gifts, and that's what I want to kind of emphasize today. Although we've touched on it in previous weeks, I really want to build our faith and expectation with all the necessary biblical restraints and guidelines.

I still want to encourage you, as I did the last class, that God wants to use you. However He's currently using you, He wants to use you more. And the way He does that is through spiritual gifts.

So, hopefully that will be the effect as you leave today. You'll say, yes, I want to be used more, and I believe God's going to use me more. So, the definition, my favorite definition for spiritual gifts is this.

Spiritual gifts are God empowering His people through the Holy Spirit for kingdom life and service, enabling them in attitude and action to live and minister in a manner which glorifies Christ. Don't you want to have that? Don't you want to do that? Live in attitude and action in a way, live and minister in a way that glorifies Christ? I mean, that's what we're here for. In the end, all the glory is going to go to Him.

So, why don't we live that way now? Well, we can't live that way apart from the Spirit's empowering. Hence, spiritual gifts, which God gives to every one of His children. So, I want to talk about two areas, pitfalls to avoid when we think about spiritual gifts, and then paths to pursue.

Some of them will be redundant, but it's okay. It's good to be reminded of things because we forget, and they're important. Okay, so first, pitfall to avoid.

Treating spiritual gifts as a merely theological or academic topic. It's not something that we just take a class on, as I mentioned. It's something that God wants to see happen in our lives.

It's not just for study. It's for action. It's for obedience.

It's for responding. While it's important to have a biblical basis for what we do, you don't just want to go and read a bunch of books on it. You want to read the books, great, got them, and then go out and seek to serve in the power of the Spirit.

If we don't get to that point, this is a waste. We're not just all trying to get big heads filled with biblical knowledge. It's for the purpose of serving, acting to glorify Jesus Christ.

So, Jesus says to his disciples, if you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. You're not just blessed if you know them. You're blessed if you do them.

So, your participation in this class means that you will be used more fruitfully, or you want to be used more fruitfully in the days to come. Another pitfall to avoid. Becoming or being contentious about spiritual gifts.

It's crazy that where spiritual gifts are emphasized in so many churches, it's brought division. I mean, God poured out a spirit to bring unity. It's like the whole area of music and worship.

We're to worship God. That's meant to be in unity, but in so many places, that category of music and worship has split churches. It's the exact opposite of what it's supposed to do.

Paul says in Ephesians 4, I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. Now, one charismatic author wrote that, not in reference to this passage, but wrote in a book, that basically speaking in tongues is what is supposed to unify Christians. Because he felt a unity, a commonality with other Christians who were speaking in tongues that he had never felt before.

That's wonderful, but that's not what this passage is saying. That's not what the Bible is saying. But that's the exact opposite of what Paul is saying in 1 Corinthians 12-14, that one gift will unify every Christian.

It's one giver of gifts who will unify every Christian. As God pours out his spirit, it's meant to bring us together. So you have 1 Corinthians 12-12, for just as the body is one and has many members and all the members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ.

For in one spirit, we were all baptized into one body. Jews are Greek, slaves are free, and we're all made to drink of one spirit. That's Jesus baptizing every Christian in his spirit, so that we all share the same heritage, so that we all drink from the same well, the spirit of God.

2 Corinthians 13-14, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. So, all that to say that spiritual gifts should not be a source of division among Christians. If our focus is right, and if our hearts are right, spiritual gifts will actually be an area that we can build bridges with.

We don't want to be more specific about spiritual gifts than Scripture is. That's part of the reason that there is a divisiveness. There are numerous times I wish God would have been a little more detailed about some things than he is in Scripture.

He's not. The word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, I used to think the word of knowledge was calling out things to people that I couldn't know apart from God telling me that. You just can't get that from the text.

You just have to inject that into it. It's called exegesis. Exegesis is where you get out of the text what's there.

Eisegesis is where you put into it what you want. I think word of knowledge has more to do, as I understand it in this context, has more to do with God imparting knowledge to an individual about his word, the gospel, as it applies to someone's life. That doesn't mean there aren't times when someone is able to discern something that they couldn't know apart from God speaking to them.

I just would call that prophecy. That's all. I think that's an element of prophecy when Agabus says there's going to be a famine.

Okay, well, how do you know that? Well, God told him this prophecy. Just this week, last weekend, a girl came up to me in Cherry Hill and said, you know, you had a prophetic song nine years ago, which really had an impact on my life. I said, really? So she told me.

I said, can you send me that in an email? She said, sure. So that's what she said. I've been going to church for about two months at a little church in the town I lived in for some strange reason after a group of singles said they were going to some new attitude conference, I felt I should go.

So January 2002, I went to Louisville. I went. The very first meeting, I was overwhelmed.

There were like thousands of Christians. I still viewed myself as not one of them. I wrote on top of my new notebook, Lord, how will I even know when you are speaking to me? After the first night, I decided I wanted to go home.

It was too much for me. I went to the small community group and the leader had encouraged me to stay. I decided to stay.

Well, the next morning, the beginning, you said you wanted anyone that had been saved in the last two years to come forward. Everyone in my little group was like, go forward, go forward. After a bit of pushing, I went forward.

What was ahead of me was outstanding and truly life-saving. You sang a song that rocked my world. First, I'd never heard a prophetic word until then.

I've had people say this to me numerous times. I didn't believe in that stuff. God doesn't care if you believe in something.

When he wants to do something in your life, he will just go ahead and do it. You know what? I don't have to stand up there and say, hey, this is a prophetic word. It's from God, so you better listen.

I'm uncomfortable when people say, yeah, this is from the Lord. I have no argument against that. Okay, well, okay.

God just does what he wants to do. I'd never heard a prophetic song until then. The most beautiful words I'd heard being sung, forgive me, I only remember these words.

Where were you two years ago? Where are you today? Those words rung through my head. Well, only one other person other than me knew where I was two years before that. Two years ago to the day I was in my last week of drug and alcohol abuse.

I was considering suicide, and my depression had hit an all-time low. I was lost, ridden with guilt and shame, and the girl I had become. I had no hope of change or hope of a future.

Then when the words, where are you today, were sung, it was like instantly I realized where I was. I was in loving hands of a God who loved me, forgave me, and gave me his all. I had hope for the very first time.

I was reduced to a girl crying on the floor. God was really speaking to me. What's funny is that I wanted to get that song.

I thought it was something you had written long before. I had no idea it was a prophetic word. What was great is that God had opened my eyes clearly to who he was and what he had done for me.

See, that's the effect. God had opened my eyes to who he was and what he had done for me. Secondly, he'd answer my first question, how will I know you are speaking to me? I'd laugh now and say, if I didn't hear him speaking to me, I would have been deaf.

She said, I just want you to know, the last nine years I've been following the Lord. I'm serving fruitful ministry here. What is that? It's just the Lord working.

He's just using the prophetic gift, just trying to be faithful. That's what the Lord does. He doesn't need prophetic songs to do it.

He can do it through any spiritual gift. But if we spend all our time trying to narrowly define what things are, we end up, I think, in many ways inhibiting what God might want to do, rather than opening the doors for him to do whatever he wants to do. We don't want to be too specific about spiritual gifts.

Allowing various fears to keep you from stepping out in faith. For some of you, maybe from a church where they didn't believe in the continuation of the gifts, of all the gifts, this whole idea of prophecy, tongues, interpretation, healing, just smacks of self-promotion or exhibitionism. You just don't want to do it.

I'd say, you know what? You've had no experience in it. Maybe for you, that's why you're here. I would only encourage you that God may want to use you in those things.

Maybe he has been using you in those things and you just didn't know what to call it. But a lack of experience doesn't mean you can't take steps of faith. I've described some of that where you might just ask somebody a question.

You get a thought, you ask them a question. Does this apply to you? I don't know. A fear of failing.

A lot of times, especially with interactions with people, just fear of saying the wrong thing, fear of doing the wrong thing. Let me tell you, you will do the wrong thing. You will say the wrong thing.

But God redeems those. You can learn from it if you do the wrong thing. You can learn from it.

So it's really a win-win situation. You can't go wrong. Concern with how you might be perceived, how your friends or family might think about you if you believe that someone could actually speak in tongues or prophesy.

Thinking your gifts aren't as special as others. So you just don't do anything. You just kind of mosey along.

I'm just one of the members of the church. Paul speaks so directly to that. God speaks so directly to that.

Parts of the Bible say because I'm not an eye, the foot should say because I'm not a hand, I don't belong to the body. And the ear should say because I'm not an eye, I don't belong to the body. It's just looking at other people's gifts and saying because I can't do what they do, it really doesn't matter.

So you think you're going to be eager to step out in your gift or gifts? No. You're just going to be complaining about how you're not like all these other gifts. And that will hinder you from being you.

So don't fall for that pitfall. Thinking of spiritual gifts primarily in terms of individuals rather than the church. In much conversation, talk, teaching about spiritual gifts, it's applied to an individual.

What are your spiritual gifts? You need this gift. Pursue this gift for you. And that's really not the emphasis of Scripture.

It's really not God's heart. And this was impressed upon me in a fresh way as I prepared for this morning. It's amazing what just like reading God's Word and people who understand it better than you do, their thoughts on it, just how it stirs your heart to see, oh, there's much more going on here than I thought.

So take Pentecost. What was happening at Pentecost? Typically, charismatics will see that as, and I have seen this as, kind of a paradigm for what happens to all Christians. You're saved and then you're filled with the Spirit, baptized in the Spirit, and you speak in tongues and you prophesy and it's great.

I leave out the part about the tongues of fire and the rushing wind, but that's okay. That's what happens and Peter even promises it. You know, be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins and you'll receive the promise of the Holy Spirit that's promised for you and for your children, all who are

far off.

And there it is right there, Acts 2.38. Well, the only problem is that's not really what Luke is saying. He never says that this will be the paradigm, the way that all Christians are to experience their relationship with God and the Holy Spirit. It's very clear what he's saying.

He's saying that the new age has begun. Like what Joel prophesied, what has never taken place in history is now taking place. When God said that he would pour out his Spirit on his sons and daughters, that they would, old men would dream dreams and see visions and that God would no longer be mediated through certain human prophets, priests and kings, but now he would pour out his Spirit on all his children.

It's taking place now. It's happening now. And so God's purposes are being fulfilled.

And it's this corporate cosmic perspective that goes far beyond, well, gosh, should I speak in tongues or not? You know, it's just, yeah, that might be a good question to ask, but let's put it in the context of what's taking place here. Every time the spiritual gifts are mentioned, with rare exception, they're mentioned in the context of the church, God's people. So you have 1 Corinthians 14.12, so with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.

Ephesians 5.18-21 implies that we're filled with God's Spirit as we address one another, give thanks, submit to one another, sing, that that's happening as we're together. 1 Peter 4.10, as each has received a gift, use it to serve one another. Use it to serve one another.

As good stewards of God's varied grace, whoever speaks as one who speaks oracles of God, whoever serves as one who serves by the strength that God supplies, in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

So that's another sign that the spiritual gifts are given to unify the body, not separate the body. So any time we're in a context, maybe a conversation or visit a church where there seems to be this elitist mentality, it's wrong. Or a division over those who have the gifts and those who have the gifts.

It's wrong. It's exactly the opposite of what God intends to do and accomplish through the giving of His gifts. Another pitfall, treating spiritual gifts as ends in themselves.

Saying, I want this gift, I want that, I want to be able to do that. God always connects a spiritual gift to a purpose. So they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

They were filled with the Holy Spirit and evangelized. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and did something. That's the emphasis, that's the focus.

Another pitfall, elevating certain spiritual gifts as the sure sign of God's presence or spiritual maturity. This happens again and again and again. And we just have to keep fighting against it.

I love the prophetic gift. We love the prophetic gift here in this church, in Sovereign Grace. We love to see God actively present, but that does not mean that that is the only way the Holy Spirit moves, the only way God makes His presence known.

God makes His presence known in a hallway. As someone sees someone, ask them how they're doing. Oh, not so well.

Can I pray for you? And serves them through that way. God works His Holy Spirit as people week after week give of their finances, generously, joyfully, lavishly, gladly. That's the work of God.

That's the work of the Spirit. God works through His Spirit as people give testimony to how Jesus Christ has changed their lives and people who are listening are affected and changed and at times even saved. That's the work of God's Spirit.

So for us to say, well, yeah, it wasn't a prophetic word this morning, though. It's just wrong. It's just, it's denying what God is doing.

Now, does that mean you got to hear both sides? Does that mean, well, yeah, who cares about prophetic words? No, I care about prophetic words. I, you know, we would love to see, you know, if God gives us a tongue and interpretation, bring it on. But let's not manufacture it and let's not give the impression that, well, either we don't need that at all or that's the only sign God's doing something.

We just, it's just constant tension, constant tension. You'll be feeling that all the time. That was the Corinthian problem.

They said, you know, if you're speaking in tongues, that was the big gift. And for them, that was the sure sign that you were a spiritual person. That was a sure sign that the Spirit was active.

And so Paul starts, 1 Corinthians 12. It's just in the middle of his letter. It didn't have chapters at that time.

But he says, you know, this is how you tell someone's a spiritual person, verse 3. Therefore, I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says Jesus is accursed and no one can say Jesus is Lord except in the Holy Spirit. That's the big miracle, that anyone can say Jesus is Lord. That's the amazing thing.

That's what the Holy Spirit does that we should be most amazed by. Another pitfall, pursuing spiritual gifts at the expense of the gospel or scripture. We should not have to make that choice.

The work of the Spirit always magnifies God's Word and the work of Christ. So anytime we're in a context where it is certain manifestations of the Spirit that are being emphasized, magnified, talked about, highlighted, drawn attention to, that doesn't lead us to a greater passion for the Word of God, that isn't governed by the Word of God, and that doesn't draw us to a greater appreciation for and amazement at the work of Christ and the glory of Christ, it's off balance. It's out of kilter.

It's a pitfall. It's a thing that we're so prone to, and that is being drawn to experience and what's happening now to the neglect of what God has given us in His authoritative and sufficient Word. We don't want to do that.

We don't want to have to make that choice. We want to be fully governed by God's Word and fully empowered by His Spirit. I was in a course with Don D. A. Carson this week, and it was on the book of Hebrews, and boy, I tell you, after hearing Don Carson talk for 25 hours on the book of the Bible, you just think, I don't know my Bible very well.

I thought I did. One of the most powerful things I came away with, the most enduring things I came away with was a correction to an understanding I had or a thought I had about how the New Testament writers quote the Old Testament writers. There's a lot of that in the book of Hebrews.

He said, we can tend to think that the writers of Scripture just kind of had a, he didn't use this phrase, but kind of a hotline to heaven where they got special revelation about how certain verses in the Old Testament fit in the New Testament related to Jesus. One of the illustrations used was Melchizedek. Melchizedek is mentioned once in Genesis, once in Psalm 110, and then you have him again in Hebrews.

But there's huge implications being made about Melchizedek. I just always thought, well, the writer of the Hebrews, I mean, God told him, well, this is what Melchizedek means, and no one else knows, but I need my people to know, so why don't you tell them? And so Dr. Carson went through and showed how all that the writer in the Hebrews was writing is found in the Old Testament. And he just connected verses and just read it really carefully and said, see, it can't be this because of this, and see, this, he doesn't say this, and this is the connection he's making.

By the end you go, well, that's perfectly obvious. But up until that time, you just thought it was kind of like some magical revelation that this writer received, and I just was struck by how often I'm lazy and just assume that, yeah, the Bible's almost magical, that God just does things. I mean, it's the Word of God.

It has power to change lives. And so I don't want to underestimate what Scripture does, but it really does hold together. And when the writers quote Old Testament passages, there are reasons they quote them and assign the meaning they do to them.

So, okay, all that to say, it was very humbling preparing to teach a class, freshly reminded that I don't know the Bible very well. Okay, so Carson says, if true revival comes to your church, pour all your energy into shaping everything by the Word of God. I love that.

It's just an aside comment he made. If true revival comes to your church, pour all your energy into shaping everything by the Word of God. And the reason I thought that is just because at this point is that oftentimes we don't do that.

And I remember in the mid-90s when many churches were experiencing what people would refer to as the Toronto Blessing, just amazing things happening. And I wasn't here, but they experienced some things here. And I was at a church in Charlotte.

And when I first heard about it from a pastor in the area, I thought, wow, yeah, I'm not so sure about this. I'm a little skeptical. But then God started doing things in our church they couldn't explain.

I mean, people were falling down, people were laughing, people were, you know, things were happening. But you know what was most incredible? It was that people were having a greater love for Jesus. They were loving the scriptures more.

They were evangelizing more. They were loving God's people more. They were wanting to pray more.

I mean, there's all this kind of fruit. So what CJ did here was he said, you know what, we're just going to keep doing the things that God has told us to do. And we're going to emphasize, when people give testimonies, we're going to emphasize the fruit in their lives, not the particular physical aberration that happened.

And so through that, I think a lot of good fruit was born through that time. Now, there are others who said, well, we've got to keep the experiences going. So, you know, we've got to keep laughing.

We've got to keep, you know, so all kinds of zaniness resulted. I mean, you know, where you're soaking in the spirit, you know, let's just let them soak or, you know, we're going to baste you in the spirit. And I've heard of, and this really happened, you know, people go through Holy Spirit car washes where, you know, they walk through a line and people are going like this and saying, where does this come from? Well, it comes from not subjecting everything you're doing to the Word of God.

You know, it'd be funny if it wasn't so sad. I mean, it's really happening. So rather than telling people, you know, we're going to, rather than telling people, we're going to, we're going to preach God's Word to you and we're going to trust God's Spirit to do a work in your heart so we're going to pray afterwards.

It's just, you know, let's get together and just experience these things that, you know, maybe, maybe God did do something at one point, you know, made someone fall over or laugh or God can do that. God has the freedom to do that, certainly, you know. But what do we pursue from that point on? And what do we subject that to? What governs that? So that's what this pitfall is.

And I think it's a big one. And I think that if we're not aware of it, it's easy to fall into because experience is great. I love experience.

Who wants a dead faith? Who wants lifeless orthodoxy? Yep, we're, you know, we're sound. Someone said you're soundly asleep. You know, that's not what you want.

You want life. Jesus came to bring life. And when you read the New Testament churches, things were happening.

But here's the thing. We can tend to romanticize the New Testament churches. They had problems.

They had big problems. You know, you read Paul writing to the Corinthian churches. Yeah, they had the gifts, but boy, they were a mess.

You know, people backbiting, guys sleeping with his father's wife. It's just, oh, you go, okay, that's the New Testament church. There you go.

And he's not content with that. He's saying these things need to be fixed. They need to be changed.

So let's learn what God wants us to learn from the New Testament. Then last pitfall, allowing a desire for spiritual gifts to crowd out a desire for spiritual maturity and godliness. I think I've shared this before.

I think there are genuinely gifted people who don't, who fall into this trap. And then the people who follow them do as well. They love and pursue the sensational more than self-sacrificing service.

So we get all excited that someone's coming who can, you know, say things about you that they didn't know and make you fall down, make a lot of people fall down and see people laugh. And maybe someone will get healed. The problem typically is, well, a couple problems.

One is that because of the expectation, you know, a lot of words get shared that are never tested, that are never proven. A lot of healings take place that are never validated. And there have been attempts, you know, in different places to validate healings.

It's just our tendency to exaggerate, to build up, to want this to happen so bad that we've got to help God. And, you know, I've seen healings. I've been a part of meetings where, you know, guys stood up and said,

I see someone looking at an x-ray and you just found out you have this tumor and, you know, I think God wants to heal that.

And, you know, the person went back and they were healed. I've seen that. We just don't have to manufacture it.

And we don't have to advertise it. And we don't have to make it sound as though this is innately in us to operate, you know, any time we want. So that's what I mean by the difference between about pursuing the sensational versus self-sacrificing service.

Being more drawn to and impressed by gifts than godly, humble character. I have no doubt that, you know, the people who will be, everybody will be happy in heaven. No one will be sad.

No one will have a tinge of sadness. I just think that some people will be happier than others. And, you know, there'll be no envy, no comparison.

We won't have that problem anymore. But I do think some people will be happier than others. And I think that those who will be happiest will be those who have more of Christ in them, more, have known more of his, more of him in this life.

And I don't think that we'll necessarily know who those people are now because no one knows who they are. God knows who they are. And that's part of the self-sacrificial humble service that God loves.

Your father who sees what is done in secret. It's going to be a big surprise, I think. But again, we'll all be happy.

If we're there, we'll be really happy. And we'll care. But let's learn to esteem what God has done for us.

What is most important to God, the fruit of the Spirit, is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. You know what? Those things don't, they don't like draw big crowds. Saying that you can heal people does.

Saying you can read people's mail does. And saying that you can do it any time you want does. And so, you know, recently we had another guy who claimed to do great things.

And people say, why shouldn't we go see him? Why shouldn't we go take part in his meetings? And, you know, it's not that, someone asking me for counsel, it's not that I would deny that God might be using them in some way. I would just say, like on this point, they've fallen way into that. Like the big deal is not that Jesus is a glorious Savior.

It's that this guy has a hotline to heaven. And that he is now a mediator of God's healing and God's power and God's revelation. And that becomes the focus of the meetings.

And I just say, I think it's off balance. I think it's out of kilter. I think it's not in line with what God values.

And so I wouldn't encourage you to go be a part of that. You know, I think, again, we shouldn't have to make people choose between those things. So, okay, those are some of the pitfalls.

And I'm doing a lot better on time than I did the last time, which I'm really happy about. So, what do we pursue? Paths to pursue. First, obviously, read, study, meditate on and obey God's word.

How do you get to see more of the Spirit working in your life? Well, one of the big ways is to find out what the Spirit has already done. And what he's already done is right here. It's in God's word.

It's 66 books detailing God's thoughts, his purposes, his heart, his plans, his commands, his promises, who he is, what he's done, what he's doing, what he's going to do. It's all right here. And, you know, we read it at times.

We just go, oh, that's so hard. I can't read. I'm not a reader.

I don't have enough time. Just whatever excuse you have. It's an excuse.

Just see it as an excuse. Just say, I want to know my God better. I want to be used by him more.

So, God, I want to know your word. If one of the effects of this class is just getting you into your Bible more, it will be a success. I mean, I'll be really happy about that.

Because we get to know God through his word. We get to really know him. And if our tendency is to know him more through experience, he wants to be known through experience as well.

Just all our experience is governed by his word. And so, if I don't know his word very well, I won't know much about whether or not my experience is in line with who he is, and what he wants, and what his priorities are. So, that's why I want to know his word.

Seek to be faithful in the little things. You know, there are gifts that God can highlight. The gift of teaching.

You know, that's a gift. And I know I've met guys who come to me and say, you know, I have the gift of teaching. And I knew one guy who said, you know, I have a file, a cabinet file full of teachings that I've yet to give.

And I thought, oh man, this is a problem. You know, a teacher in search of a congregation. That's not a good way to approach that, I think.

You know, seek out of the spotlight. Seek the lowest place. I mean, isn't that what God intends for us to do? To not put ourselves first, but to be the lowest, to be the servant? Don't associate your gifts with the spotlight.

Don't think, well, the really good spiritual gifts are the ones that everybody knows about. Well, no. I mean, spiritual gifts are operating right now in children's ministry.

No one knows about them. You know, three-year-old kids know about them. You know, which is not really exciting.

But God knows about them. And he sees what's taking place. And that's, you know, that's not, we don't say that just to, you know, fill up the children's ministry teacher rosters.

It's true. It's true. When we've worked with musicians on Sunday morning, I mean, when I came to the church 14 years ago, one of the things we tried to develop in the culture was, it's just as important to sing in the children's ministry as it is to sing for the congregation on Sunday morning.

It's just as important. There's no, you know, oh, this is really important. This is kind of important.

No, they're both really important. They're both using your gifts for the glory of Jesus. That's what we want to do.

So, be faithful in little things. Matthew 25, Jesus tells the parable of, you know, the servants who are given these minas and they're, you know, told to do something with them. So, the guy who gets five makes five more.

The guy who gets two gets two more. And the guy who gets one doesn't do anything with it. So, he says, Master, I knew you'd be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, gathering where you scattered no seed.

So, I was afraid. I went and hid your talent in the ground. You know, the master doesn't say, oh, you know, I understand.

Your gift was so small. Your gift just wasn't a big, like, in the limelight gift. I understand why you just buried it.

He doesn't say that. He says, you wicked and slothful servant. A little bit of a wake-up call.

You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed. Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers and in my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So, take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents.

For to everyone who has will more be given and he will have an abundance. But for the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. I mean, there are a number of ways to apply that parable.

But one of them is, don't despise your spiritual gifts because they're not big and they're not spotlight gifts. And, you know, they're not, you know, thousands are going to be affected by them. Really, it's the simple gifts.

Aren't we all affected when we read stories, you know, individual encounters that no one knew about until we read that story? You know, then it becomes a spotlight story. But at the time it's not. God sees all those stories.

He sees every time you step out in the power of the Spirit to serve someone else with your gift. So that's what we want to pursue, being faithful in the little things. Commit to pray for people and events.

This is so simple, but it can be life changing. If when you pray, assuming that you do pray, when you pray for people or you have an event coming up, you ask God, how would you want to use me at this event? How would you want to use me in this person's life? So it could be standing in the lobby on Sunday morning and looking around and instead of thinking, you know, well, who's going to notice me or, you know, who's well known that I can hang out with or I don't know what you might think. It could be good thoughts.

But how about just saying, Lord, who is there here this morning that you might want to use me to serve, to minister to? You know, just be looking around. And if you do that consistently, it will become so much a part of your life that you won't even realize it's a spiritual gift. You just be doing it.

It's just what you do. I mean, I know people like that. I know people.

CJ's like that. You know, it used to irritate me when I first got here, how we would walk down the hall and we'd never be able to walk to the car, like, just to walk to the car. You'd always have to talk to three or four people on the way.

And he would just be encouraging them. And it'd be very specific encouragement. You know, thank you for what you're doing.

Thank you that you did this the other day. Thank you for doing it. That's so helpful.

That really, you know, I just think, can't we just walk? Can't we just, you know, you always have to allow extra time to get anywhere. But then I saw, you know, it's just his, like, gift of encouragement. He has a gift of encouragement.

I love to be around people who have a gift of encouragement. Because it doesn't draw attention to them so much as who they're encouraging. And through that, through many of those times, I learned to see, myself, that God is working through people all around me all the time.

And actually that's a point I'm going to share later, so I won't get into it now. Commit to pray for people and events. Acts 13, 2. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.

So there you see the Spirit operating while they're just praying and fasting, wondering what to do. Luke 6, 12 and 13. In these days Jesus went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.

And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve whom he named apostles. So I think there's a connection between Jesus praying all night and him picking his apostles, picking his disciples. So how much of a connection is there with you? How much of this is there a connection with your prayer life and the way God uses you? So you go into a seminar, you go into this class, and just say, Lord, if you want to use me in any way in this class, I'm available.

Just making yourself available. It can change the way, it can make every day very exciting. I mean this morning, I did a lot of preparation, preparation last night, this morning, and it wasn't until I got here that I really realized, oh, I should really like ask the Lord.

What, you know, Lord, do you want to do something? Is there anybody you're, you know, you want to speak to? I didn't get anything specific, but yeah, I asked. So that's what I want to do, I want to keep asking. Develop the habit of listening and observing.

Be attentive to needs around you and what God is already doing. It's just opening our eyes and ears. It's just saying, you know, Lord, is there anything here that you might use me to do? It's not approaching spiritual gifts in this kind of mechanical way, well, this is what I do, so I'll just do it.

You know, which is, I mean, you can do that, but I think the way spiritual gifts often operate is just through the needs that are there. You know, if someone came into the room right now and said, you know, this is my first Sunday here and, you know, we're new to the area and we don't have much money, so we're looking for a place to stay. Well, in this size of a group, you know, we'd have numerous ways of responding to that.

Some of us would immediately go to, well, we've got to find you a place to stay. All right, so let me give you some names and I'll call this place and get this number and it'd be the administration kicking in. Some of us would say, okay, well, let me pray for you.

Let's pray right now, you know, prayer of faith. God's going to provide a place to stay. Some of us would say, hey, you know what, why don't you come over for lunch? You know, some of us would say, maybe, can I call you this week sometime? Just different ways of responding to the exact same situation.

Well, what does that reveal? That we have different spiritual gifts. There's no one way of responding that is the right way. It's the body working together.

That's what's meant to happen. So how does that happen? We listen, we observe. Say what, you know, and how might I be able to serve in this situation? And don't downplay the gift God's given you.

You know, you might be here saying, well, yeah, all I can ever think of to do is pray. Oh, gee. You know what? A lot of people never think of that.

I mean, I might be one of them. They never think of praying. They just go into action.

You know, I can solve that problem. Well, you know, hey, you might need God's help. So let's pray and let's ask God for His involvement and empowering right now.

And oh, as we pray, we sense God speaking to us and saying something about how this should go. You know, that's the way it works. Let's not overcomplicate it.

But let's do act. Let's do act in faith and listen and observe. Okay, another pursuit.

Be more concerned about using your gifts than defining them. Oh, you know, I didn't share just from Acts 3 in that last point, this situation where Peter and John are going into the temple and there's a guy there who daily they set at the temple gates to ask for alms every day. So Peter and John must have passed by him countless times.

But on this day after Pentecost, Peter and John, they're about to go into the temple. Peter directed his gaze at him as did John and said, look at us. And he fixed his attention to on them, expecting to receive something from them.

But Peter said, I have no silver or gold, but what I do have, I give you in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk. Oh, man, I would love to have been there. But you know what? It might happen today.

It could happen today. I don't think it's going to happen the same kind of frequency as what took place in the book of Acts. But I think that can happen.

Well, how does it happen? Well, Peter's walking by. This guy's asking for alms. He could be thinking, we've got to preach.

We've got to go into the temple. We've got to convert masses. We've got to, we've got to, you know, proclaim Jesus risen from the dead.

But what does he do? He says, you know what? You know what? I think we have something to give you. It's not money, but here's what I have. Stand up and walk in the name of Jesus Christ.

So he does. We forget, like they were, they were people like us. They didn't know that this was going to be in Scripture, you know, read for thousands of years.

Now, if they knew, that might have changed their approach. But they didn't. They just said, hey, here's what I got.

What do you have that you can give? You know, you might not have a lot of money, but you can pray. You can share thoughts. You can minister to people in different ways.

Okay. So be more concerned about using your gifts than defining them. We talked about some of that in the first week.

I love what Sam, well, you know, we have these like gifts analysis program, you know, tasks that you take. You know, what are my spiritual gifts? Someone asked this last class. I think they have limited benefit.

You know, it can help to give you some categories and say, maybe I am stronger in this than this. But you know, the best way to find out your spiritual gifts? Start serving. Serve in as many ways as you can.

And it will become evident. What ways bear fruit in your life? What bears fruit in the lives of others? What do people say that really ministered to me? Those are your spiritual gifts. And what do you call them? Well, I'm not sure.

Does it matter that much? I mean, you know, someone can say, you know, what I shared was a prophetic song or prophetic word, or someone could call it a word of knowledge, or they can call it just a spontaneous impression, or they call it whatever they want. I'm just most concerned that God is working, that God's working through my life. I want him to work through my life, and you want him to work through your life.

So I love what Sam Storm says. If we spend less time searching to identify our spiritual gifts and more time actually praying and giving and helping and teaching and serving and exhorting those around us, the likelihood greatly increases that we will walk headlong into our gifting without ever knowing what happened. And it's true.

You know, the longer you know people, you can say things like, you know, that woman, she has the gift of hospitality. In fact, that couple, they have the gift of hospitality. Well, how do you know that? Well, because of how many people have been in their house and come away encouraged.

It was great. In Cherry Hill, there was a woman who I was being told about, Kim Betcher, Warren's, the pastor's wife, Kim Betcher's wife, was just saying, yeah, we had a women's meeting yesterday, recently, and about 200 ladies came. And we asked, who has been over to this particular woman's house for a meal at some time in the last, you know, 10 years? All but two people raised their hand.

And so I talked to this woman the next day, and I said, you know, oh, yeah, I was hearing high praise for your gift of hospitality. And she's like, oh, yeah, we just love people. It's not like she's out to earn this badge of hospitality, you know, to wear it, that's my spiritual gift, hospitality.

It's just, this is what I do. I love people. And it's one of those, so what does love for people look like in you? And I'm sure it's more than just one way.

But here's the kicker, you have to love people to see it revealed. I mean, you have to really be others focused. Look outwards, we're going to look into it.

Next one, cultivate gratefulness and amazement that God would use you at all to accomplish His purposes. As we don't want to be excited about our spiritual gifts, like Jesus said to the disciples, don't be excited that you have power over demons that they submit to you. Be excited that your names are written in heaven.

That's what you should be excited about. So Paul prays for the Colossians. Colossians 1, may you be strengthened with all power according to His glorious might for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

Oh, that's so good. Yes, may you be filled with all power, but may you give thanks that you share in the inheritance of the saints in light. That is what is truly amazing.

And then Paul shares in 1 Timothy how he is so amazed, even as he is near the end of his life, that God would save even him. That's what's so amazing. Learn to discern and express gratefulness for the spiritual gifts you see in others.

That is another part of being, oh man, where did the time go? That's another part of being others focused. Yes, there are spiritual gifts. They're all around you.

Well, I don't see any spiritual gifts in this church because we don't have prophecy, I don't hear tongues and interpretation. You are blind. Yeah, that may not be the prophecy and tongues like you wish they were.

But there are spiritual gifts everywhere. Every time someone gets encouraged in the hallway and is strengthened by it, gift of encouragement working. Every time someone has someone over for a meal, gift of hospitality working.

Every time someone proclaims the Word of God and people's lives are being changed, hearts are being exposed, people are getting saved, people have a fresh view of who God is and what Jesus Christ has done for us. Spirit of God is working. Gifts of the Spirit are working.

That's not so limited that we can't see it. So, are you seeing them in other people and are you telling them? Are you saying, you know what, this really encourages me. So, I shared the exact same thing in the last class.

A woman comes up to me and says, you know, you prayed for us eight months ago and you just shared a word about that situation. That word has encouraged me countless times. Oh, praise God! Because I don't know.

I don't know whether it's the Lord or not. I hope it is. You know, lots of times when I pray for people, regular when I pray for people, I'll get a sense, oh, this is something the Lord wants to say to them.

And I always hope that happens, but I don't know. I can't manufacture it. So, she just said, yeah, that really helped.

So, we were both able to rejoice at that moment. Okay, that was the Lord. That was the Lord's Spirit.

Well, let's do it. Let's tell people. Let's make it a regular practice.

Let's just send emails, send notes, phone calls, instant messages, whatever, you know, face to face. That's a new way. Whatever way you want to, let's just say Facebook.

Whatever way you want to let someone know, you know what, God's Spirit is at work through you. Oh, what that does, what that does to encourage more of the same, you know, more of God's Spirit working through that person. They may have been thinking at that moment, yeah, God never uses me.

I'm just in this church. And so, you come up and say, you know what, when you said this to me the other week or I saw you doing this or I heard about you doing this, boy, that's just God working in your life. That just so encouraged me.

Oh, wow, thanks. And also, it opens up the door for God to use us, which is the last point, no, next last point. Expect God to work through you.

Boy, it's amazing. I feel so much better than I did at the beginning of the class. I'm just so excited about that.

Expect God to work through you to do more than you can ask or think. Really, really. We have enough people in this room to seriously impact the church.

We do. The only thing that's keeping us from it is just, you know, thoughts like, well, I can only do this much. Well, my history has been.

Well, I would even call myself a charismatic. Well, you know, I tried this and it failed. Just whatever excuses you want to line up, just line them up and let God just blow on them.

Just blow them away and say, you know what, there is no excuse. It's my spirit. It's not your abilities.

It's not your experience. It's my spirit. And I have poured out my spirit on all my children and I want to use you.

How much? More than you could ask or think. I'll tell you what, more than you could ask or think. It's whatever level you can get to.

God wants to do more than that. And he can and he will. This is what Ephesians says.

Paul is praying for the Ephesians. He says, now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us. I love that, that, you know, he's not doing it from out there.

He's doing it from in here. According to the power at work within us. To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever.

God wants to be glorified in his church. He wants to be glorified in us. So expect him to work through you and finally regularly let's pray for an outpouring of God's spirit on his people so that, specifically on this church, so that it results in a greater passion for Jesus Christ, more consistent and fruitful service, demonstrations of God's active presence among us, and the conversion of unbelievers.

Don't you want that? I think you do. You want to be in this class. What we don't want to do is get all excited about certain spiritual gifts.

What we do want is to see the name of Jesus Christ glorified through a people who are living in the power of the spirit of God, which Jesus has graciously poured out, which the Father has graciously poured out through the Son, to us, to his people, so that we might be a people for his glory. We cannot do that apart from his spirit working in us. There are myriads of ways that God wants to use you.

Some of you have been serving God faithfully in the spiritual gifts for years. Others of you, it's just getting started. Hopefully your eyes are open.

Maybe there's more that I can do than I think. He wants to use some of your natural talents. He may be using things that aren't your natural talents.

It's his call. The thing is, as we pursue God in this way, as we pursue the spiritual gifts in this way, God will use you and the church will be built up, and Jesus Christ will be glorified. Isn't that exciting to think about? I think that's where God wants us to be.

I'm going to stick around. If you have any questions, let's pray. Thank you for coming to this class.

I have an email too if you want to ask questions after this. There's tons we didn't cover, tons, but I trust that we've covered enough to move us one step forward, maybe a few steps forward in recognizing that God, by His Spirit, has put spiritual gifts within us that He wants to use. Someone asked in the last class, he heard a pastor say, if you're not eagerly pursuing all the spiritual gifts, you're in sin.

I don't think that's true. I don't think the Bible says that. But if you're not pursuing them at all, then I think you are in sin.

Any of them. Because that's how God designed the church to be strengthened, to be built up, that we're all exercising spiritual gifts for the glory of Jesus Christ and for the good of His church. So that's what He's called us to.

Let's ask Him to help us pursue that. Thank you that you have, through Jesus Christ, brought a new age, a new era, and the future has been brought into the present. We can experience communion with you.

We can experience complete forgiveness of our sins. We can taste of the powers of the age to come, all because of your gracious mercy in Jesus Christ. We do pray that you would open our eyes to see how you have poured out your spirit, that there might be a demonstration of people who love you, whose lives have been changed by the gospel, so that we might be a people, a church that brings glory to you through the regular, consistent, and ever-increasing exercise of the spiritual gifts that you have poured out so lavishly on us.

We pray that we would step out in faith and not be limited by fear. We pray that you would open our eyes to see gifts in others, so that we would encourage them for those and give glory to you for them. We thank you for the time we've had to talk about this area and trust that it will bear good fruit in the days to come.

For the glory of Jesus, our great Savior and coming King. Amen.

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