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woman

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Using Your Spiritual Gifts

Become all God intended you to be.



Using Your Spiritual Gifts

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Using Your Gifts

Discovering them is one thing; being willing to use them is quite another.

By Marian V. Liautaud

I first heard of spiritual gifts at the church my husband and I joined when our kids were young. We attended an all-day event in which a guest speaker walked us through an assessment to discover what gifts God had built into us for his good purposes.

I was dismayed to learn that my primary spiritual gift was teaching. How could I have the gift of teaching? I was too shy to speak in front of a group. How would I ever be able to teach people if I was always tongue-tied? *There must be a mistake*, I thought, as I feverishly re-took the assessment. Once again, I scored much higher on teaching than

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on any other spiritual gift. *Okay, God, I bargained, I'll use this gift, but you're going to have to grow me. I can't speak, so I have no idea how you intend for me to use this gift.*

About the same time, God led me to my first job as an editor. All my life I wanted to be a writer and an editor. Suddenly I saw the synergy between the dream God planted in me for writing and the prospect of teaching. Perhaps God intended for me to teach through my writing! Suddenly, the gift I wanted to give back to God made sense. Knowing he had "gifted" me to teach gave my writing purpose and significance. I wasn't writing for just anyone; I was writing for the King!

For 12 years, I wrote articles and edited books, most of which focused on encouraging and equipping women to become all that God intended them to be as individuals, wives, and mothers.

Recently, I retook a spiritual gifts inventory. Can our spiritual gifts change? Does God give us certain gifts for a season and then re-gift us with a new strength for a new season? According to my new score, the spiritual gift of faith is now my strong suit, and teaching ranks far down on the list of possibilities.

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As I've gotten older and God has allowed me to walk through some difficult life-changing experiences, I feel I have far less to teach others, but a much higher capacity to trust God. Maybe learning to trust God is what he intended for me to teach others all along.

Peace,

Marian V. Liautaud

Contributing Editor, TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN downloads



Leader's Guide

How to use “Using Your Spiritual Gifts” for a group study

“Using Your Spiritual Gifts” can be used for individual or group study. If you intend to lead a group study, some simple suggestions follow.

- 1. Make enough copies for everyone in the group to have her own guide.**
- 2. Depending on the time you have dedicated to the study, you might consider distributing the guides before your group meets so everyone has a chance to read the material. Some articles are quite long and could take a while to get through.**
- 3. Alternately, you might consider reading the articles together as a group—out loud—and plan on meeting multiple times.**
- 4. Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting women to open up.**
- 5. When working through the “Reflect” questions, be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It’s important for women to know that others share their experiences. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.**
- 6. End the session in prayer.**



Experiencing God's Presents

What are spiritual gifts, and is every believer guaranteed at least one?

By J.I. Packer

What are spiritual gifts? None of the New Testament passages that speak of them (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 12–14; Eph. 4:11–16; 1 Pet. 4:10–11) define them. Since these passages all come from letters to churches where gifts were already in use, and the only question was whether they were being used well, that need not surprise us. But constructing a definition is not hard.

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Gifts are manifestations of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4–11), given to build up the church (12:7, 14:4) and the individuals within it. It is only through Christ, in Christ, and by learning and responding to Christ that anyone is ever edified. Therefore, gifts should be defined in terms of him—as powers of expressing, celebrating, displaying, and obeying Christ. Gifts communicate his reality through word or action in service of God and others (fellow believers and non-Christians too).

Gifts vary. There are gifts of speech and of Samaritanship; Paul's flitting to and fro between the two kinds in his gift lists (Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 12:8–10) shows that there is no scale of values attached to them. There is no pecking order between helping, serving, giving, administering, encouraging, and being kind, on the one hand, and preaching, teaching, leading, and exhorting, on the other, let alone such "sign-gifts" as healing, speaking in tongues, and interpreting tongues.

The key truth is that in the church, which is one body in Christ, we're all members—that is, body parts of Christ, and, in him, of each other.

Among the variety of God's gifts, some are natural abilities and character qualities sanctified, while others correspond to nothing that was previously seen in the person's life. That the gift is from the Holy Spirit is more evident in the latter case than in the former, but the reality is that all our capacities for expressing Christ are spiritual gifts. By means of them, Christ from his throne uses us as his hands, feet, and mouth, even his smile, and speaks, meets, loves, saves, and sustains.

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As the test of whether you are a leader or teacher is that others follow you or learn from you, so the test of whether you are exercising a spiritual gift is that people in the church feel the influence of Christ through what you say and do. Natural abilities, however spectacular, are not spiritual gifts as such, whereas diffident clumsiness of word and gesture is no sign that a spiritual gift is not in action.

That the indwelling Holy Spirit imparts to every Christian believer at least one gift appears both from Paul's image of the body growing toward the full stature of Christ, its head, "when [and clearly only when] each part is working properly" (Eph. 4:16), and from his emphatic declaration: "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7, cf. 11). It is plain that every-member ministry in the body of Christ is Paul's, and therefore Christ's own, ideal.

The church is not to be like a bus, where passengers sit quietly and let someone else do the driving, but like an anthill, where everybody is at work. Not everyone who thus ministers will be a church officer, nor will the service they render always be appreciated. But just as every bit of that fabulous complex, the human body, has a job to do, so it is with each of us who believe.

How can Christians identify their own gift or gifts? By trying out paths of service that attract them, or that others, who know them well enough to discern their potential, urge upon them. The presence or absence of a gift will quickly become apparent.

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When, as sometimes happens, all attention focuses on the spectacular "sign-gifts" that, over and above their benefit to the church, specifically authenticated the apostles' personal ministry, the truth about gifts is skewed. God seems to have given some renewal of "sign-gifts" in recent years (though some doubt this), but it is clear that, as in New Testament times, not all Christians become channels of these manifestations (see 1 Cor. 12:29–30). Most are gifted in less eye-catching and more unobtrusive ways.

Paul told the Corinthians to seek the best gifts. Other things being equal, the best gifts will always be those that express most love and do most good to most people.

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Reflect

- *If you had to guess, what would you say your spiritual gift(s) are?*
- *Spend some time meditating on the following verses: **Romans 12:3–8; 1 Corinthians 12–14; Ephesians 4:11–16; 1 Peter 4:10–11.** Which gifts are mentioned in these passages?*



How Do I Uncover My Spiritual Gifts?

3 ways to discern how God wired you.

By Nancy Ortberg

Discovering and utilizing your spiritual gifts is one of the most exciting adventures a person can have with God. The Bible says spiritual gifts are abilities God bestows on every believer for the common good of the body of Christ. They're a large part of the answer to the question, "What should I do with the life God gave me?"

Passages like 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and 1 Peter 4 go into specific detail about what these gifts are and how they should be used. It's clear every spiritual gift is a reflection of God's nature that you carry within you. And because your spiritual gift

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reflects God's design and direction for your life, you'll find great passion, joy, and satisfaction in expressing it. Your spiritual gift also will be a place of deep spiritual formation in your life, as God uses it both to powerfully connect you to him and to expose areas of your soul that need his forgiveness and redemption.

So here's a process to start:

Pay attention. Notice the things that energize you and seem to come naturally. In the movie *Chariots of Fire*, Eric Liddell explained to his sister why he was postponing his return to the mission field in order to race in the Olympics: "Because when I run, I feel the pleasure of God."

Every spiritual gift gives off clues. Your spiritual gift will cause you to react a certain way in a given situation. If there's a problem, people with the spiritual gift of shepherding will be immediately concerned that people are cared for and growing in Christlikeness as a result of the issue. Those with the gift of intercession (prayer) will immediately say, "We need to pray about this," while those with a leadership gift will begin looking at solutions for the problem.

Try. Once you've gathered enough information to create a list of some possible gifts (perhaps gifts of mercy, evangelism, encouragement, or hospitality), exercise your options. A great place to start would be a volunteer position at your church. While you're trying it out, you'll discern whether you're good at it or not. Also, others will tell you!

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When my kids were young, our church needed help in the nursery during the worship services. I volunteered for a three-month opening. I didn't feel the pleasure of God; the children didn't feel the pleasure of God. It was so not my spiritual gift. Part of learning what you're good at is having to go through the pain of learning what you're not good at.

As you try different things, you'll eventually find yourself engaged in something during which time flies, and you find a deep sense of connection to God. Pick that road to continue your adventure.

Develop. In 2 Timothy 1:6, the apostle Paul encourages Timothy to "fan into flame the gift of God." We're responsible to develop our gifts. Perhaps one of the best ways to do that is to mentor someone who's just starting on this discovery process. People with the spiritual gift of wisdom are probably the best people to develop someone else with the spiritual gift of wisdom, and so on for each of the gifts.

It's remarkable how you can deepen your relationship with God as you uncover and live out the spiritual gifts he's bestowed on you. What could the church and our world look like if each of us used the gift God's given us?

Nancy Ortberg is a church leadership consultant and popular speaker who lives in California with her husband, John, and their three children.

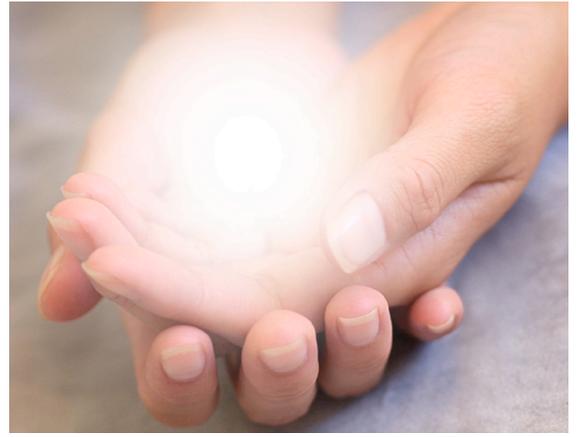
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How Do I Uncover My Spiritual Gifts?

Reflect

- *Recall a time when you sensed that what you were doing gave God pleasure. What was it, and how have you maintained this activity?*
- *Has anyone ever encouraged you to pursue a certain line of work or volunteer effort? What clues have you received as to what your gifts might be?*



A Better Fit

One size doesn't fit all or even most—or me.

By Jonalyn Grace Fincher

When I got married, I received something I'd wanted for a long time: a beautiful KitchenAid mixer. But after setting up house, I realized I had no idea how to use the bulky contraption. It looked professional and impressive, but I already had a simpler electric hand mixer. So I found myself owning a gift I was now unsure I wanted. I'd heard its uses were amazing, but I hadn't experienced them.

Sometimes a spiritual gift feels like an expensive KitchenAid mixer; we want to have one, but we're not sure what it does and even less sure how to use it.

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Life without limits

As a teenager, I heard that we should discover our gifts by taking a spiritual gifts test. It sounded accessible and easy. A natural test-taker, I discovered a smattering of gifts that matched my personality and seemed to make sense. Some of my friends didn't seem to fare as well, feeling their tests came back all "vanilla." In the end, many lost confidence in this whole spiritual gift thing. But God gives regardless of our man-made inventories.

The lists gleaned from New Testament passages are more like starter kits, designed to get our creative juices flowing. The rest of Scripture doesn't give tidy, predictable ways for understanding the Spirit's work, so why would we expect the "gifts inventory" to be so neat and tidy? When the Spirit first fills people in the New Testament, he's like a violent wind, uncontrollable and life altering. The Spirit's gifts range from speech to a donkey to prison breaks (Numbers 22:28, Judges 15:14). He's hardly limited by our list.

The Pink or Blue Question

Often I've mused how much more practical and comfortable it would be to have the gift of serving instead of my gifts of teaching and exhortation. If I had the gift of serving, I could imagine myself happily on the sidelines supporting my husband's ministry, preparing sustenance (healthy snacks for the road) and encouragement (sweet notes tucked in his suitcase) without the distraction of my own busy schedule.

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But our gifts are a lot alike—mine and his—and I sometimes find others don't welcome or know what to do with a female working alongside her husband. Frankly, I puzzle over finding a fit for my spiritual gifts both in my family and in outside venues.

At rare times it feels like a man should have gotten my bundle, not a woman who loves kids and homemaking. But I don't see support for the argument that the Spirit reserves some gifts just for men. The Spirit of God has the power, the freedom, and the joy to distribute his gifts "to each one, just as he determines" (1 Corinthians 12:11).

In both complementarian (ministry roles differentiated by gender) and egalitarian (equal ministry roles for both genders) camps, there are theologians who believe God gives to both men and women all formal spiritual gifts listed in Scripture. In the book *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, New Testament professor (and complementarian) Craig Blomberg writes, "Virtually every Bible student today agrees that when these terms (teachers, administrators, leaders, evangelists, and pastor-teachers) are used as spiritual gifts, women may receive and exercise them just as powerfully as men may."

I don't believe the Spirit doles out his gifts in pink and blue wrappings: A man may have the gift of helps or service (Samuel helps Eli in 1 Samuel 3). A woman may have the gift of teaching (Priscilla, alongside her husband, corrects and teaches Apollos in Acts 18:26)

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or leading (Deborah guides Israel in difficult times in Judges 4–5) or prophesying (Josiah consults Huldah, the prophetess, in 2 Kings 22:14).

So many knobs and switches

The only pattern I've noticed in God's gift-giving strategy is that he gives to fill the gaping holes in his people, his church. So his gifts are ready-to-use, powerful, customized abilities we'll want to use because they're needed right now. Like my KitchenAid with its many amazing features.

I stuck to the hand mixer for years. For cakes and pancakes, it's handy. But for really big batches of cookies or double batches of banana bread, the KitchenAid with its big stainless bowl is just the thing. Given time and the need, I may yet use its many capabilities. As well as the ones God has given me.

Recently I joined a church where I was invited to help with women and children to use my gift instead of teaching to benefit the whole body. So I volunteered for the nursery and taught women's groups. But this summer my husband and I came up with a new idea: We open our home for a weekly Bible study that's available to everyone. Families attend together, young teens ask questions, their parents give input alongside their children; church leaders, pastors, elders, presidents of local nonprofits share in a context that also allows us to teach as a husband-wife team. Our church's elder board is excited about the work we're doing.

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And in the process, I'm finding a better fit for my gifts—teaching, along with the opportunity to serve. If the opportunity to use our gifts doesn't already exist, we have to pray so God will show us how to create one. At this intersection of my gifts (including teaching) and my passion (helping people know Jesus), I'm finding the right fit.

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Reflect

- *Have you ever felt like you were given the wrong gifts for the life you live? In what ways have you seen God use your gifts in spite of gender obstacles or other setbacks?*
- *Do you sometimes wish you had been given a different spiritual gift? Why, and which one?*



Hearing God's Call

How can I figure out what God wants me to do with my life?

By Nancy Ortberg

There are few things more attractive, more noticeable, than someone who's pursuing an activity she loves and is good at. We've all had the remarkable experience of sitting in a classroom listening to a teacher who engages and awakens the deepest parts of who we are. I have a friend who runs a gardening service, and as I listen to him talk about keeping a family's yard looking nice, the joy and skill he brings to what he does are obvious.

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It's an amazing and fulfilling thing to live life in line with God's design and calling on your life. But it can seem difficult and overwhelming to discover it. Here is my suggestion: *Pay attention to who God made you to be.*

What gives you life? What are you good at? What do you love to do? What consistent patterns are noticeable in you that may be clues to your design and calling? Before he met Christ, the apostle Paul was an activist and a zealot—an articulate *opponent* of the church. When he met Christ, he continued to be an activist and a zealot, but he changed for whom he worked. Acts 9:20 says he at once began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. He didn't change who he was by design, but he did change the Lordship in his life

Noticing what you're not good at is also valuable information. We only have so many "yeses" we can give, so don't spend them on what you don't do well.

We each have a unique design. You may be able to learn by watching someone else, but your calling isn't her calling. Don't get caught in the comparison trap like the apostle Peter. In John 21, right after Jesus says three times to Peter, "Take care of my sheep," Peter looks at John the disciple and says to Jesus, "Lord, what about him?" (v. 21). It's as if he's saying, "Yeah, I heard what your calling for me is, but before I decide, I'd like to hear about John, compare the callings, and then decide."

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Jesus replies to Peter in words that are pretty direct and a bit harsh: "What is that to you? You must follow me" (v. 22).

So, while I'm no help in the nursery, I've found things I *am* good at—things that make me feel alive, that others notice I do well. When I'm teaching a group of people or leading a meeting, good things often result, and I get the sense this is what I was made to do. Teaching and leading—these are my spiritual gifts and a large part of my calling.

Finally, remember that God's calling for your life goes way beyond what you *do*. It's who you are, where you belong, who and how you love. In our culture's preoccupation with success and celebrity, it's easy to approach calling in a way that's not much more than those two things covered by a thin veneer of spirituality. Parker Palmer wrote a wonderful book called *Let Your Life Speak* that directs us to discover and live a life wherein our God-given design intersects with what the world needs. A life operating in the gifts God has given us—and mindful of meeting the needs of others—is a life that beautifully reflects God. The world could use more people like that.

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Reflect

- *Nancy Ortberg encourages her readers to "pay attention to who God made you to be." What gives you life? What are you good at? What do you love to do?*
- *What consistent patterns may be clues to your design and calling?*



Growing Their Gifts

How can I nurture my kids' God-given abilities?

Q & A with Lisa Whelchel

Q: *Any advice on how to figure out a child's spiritual gifts? My four kids have very different personalities, and I'd like some clues on how to plug them into activities at church and in life that are in sync with how they're wired.*

A: Understanding my children's gifts and temperaments has been invaluable to me as a parent, so let me share three books that have helped me tremendously. The first was my children's favorite "read aloud" book, *The Treasure Tree* by John and Cindy Trent, and Gary and Norma Smalley. My kids each identified with one of the story's characters and learned to appreciate their unique strengths and weaknesses through them.

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As they got older and sibling conflicts grew louder than a dull roar, I found a book entitled *Different Children, Different Needs* by Charles Boyd. As I put my children to bed, I read to them from the chapter about one of their sibling's personality traits. It was amazing how much more grace was extended when the proverbial light bulb clicked on and they realized their bossy sister or talkative brother simply was being whom God created them to be.

My favorite resource has been *Discover Your Children's Gifts* by Don and Katie Fortune. I pull this book off the shelf every few years and give my kids the various giftedness tests for different age groups. They love discovering how God created them for a specific purpose, and it also helps me be more tolerant of their weaknesses and intentional in focusing on their strengths.

You'll be amazed at how much you already know about your children's gifts. God's given moms uncanny discernment when it comes to their kids. These books, and others like them, simply will catapult you to the next level of guiding your children into God's will for their lives.

This article first appeared in TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN magazine.

Reflect

- *What strengths do you see in your child(ren)?
Which spiritual gifts might these point to?*
- *Part of discerning a child's spiritual gifts comes by exposing him or her to different opportunities. What activities or experiences has your child participated in that have highlighted his or her spiritual gifts?
How can you nurture these gifts?*



Additional Resources

Books, Bible studies, and articles to help you further.

Books:

Finding Your Spiritual Gifts Questionnaire by C. Peter Wagner (Gospel Light, 2005). A ministry tool in an easy-to-follow new format—with an updated 137-question Houts inventory—helps church members, group leaders, teachers, and pastors identify and use their spiritual gifts. This booklet lists 27 gifts found in Scripture, with references and descriptions. [&p=1026979](#)

Discover Your Spiritual Gifts the Network Way by Bruce Bugbee (Zondervan, 2004). At one time or another, you've probably taken a simple, one-dimensional inventory to determine your spiritual gifts—and may have questioned the accuracy of the results. That's why Bugbee offers four assessments (experiences, traits, convictions, and observations)

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Additional Resources

that measure your strengths from different approaches—making sure you've correctly identified your God-given talents. An additional assessment allows you to gauge the effectiveness of your ministry and whether your ministry employs your gifts.

Discovering Your Spiritual Gifts by Phyllis Bennett (Women of Faith Series, Zondervan, 1998). You and your small group will enjoy your time together, grow closer together, and discover biblical truths together with the Women of Faith study guides. Learn how and why each person is unique and uniquely gifted by God with specific spiritual gifts. Look closely at where these gifts are mentioned in the Bible and how best to use them. Six lessons with leader's guide included.

Bible Studies:

Use Your Spiritual Gifts by ChristianBibleStudies.com (Christianity Today International). This five-session course on spiritual gifts looks at our predisposed talents and how these change when we give our lives to Jesus Christ. Some spiritual gifts fit our personality, and others challenge us to grow and change. Spiritual gifts provide clues to God's intention for how we should live out our days and affirm the uniqueness of our calling as human instruments of his grace. Included is a personal inventory to help you determine your spiritual gifts.