

Unwrapping Your Spiritual Gift **Pastors Joe & Cyndi Ramirez**

Can you remember your favorite childhood Christmas? You anticipated the day for weeks. As soon as you saw the wrapped gifts under the tree, your excitement started to build. Maybe you asked if you could unwrap one gift early.

When the day finally came, there was so much excitement about unwrapping each gift. You opened it up and felt pure joy about the gifts you'd been anticipating.

I want you to channel that childhood excitement, euphoria, and joy, and apply it to the joy you will feel when you unwrap a spiritual gift from God. God has given us each a unique spiritual gift. Even if we think we are deficient and untalented, we can be assured that God has given us a special gift to use for his kingdom.

For many years, I did not think I was good enough. I couldn't sing, I couldn't run fast enough, I didn't like color of my skin, and I thought I was not intelligent enough. It was not until many years later that I started a new walk with Christ and realized that I have an identity in Christ.

When we learn who we are in Christ, it can transform our lives. We are a new creation in Christ. In Christ, the old is gone and the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). All our past mistakes are behind us.

Furthermore, God has given us unique gifts that we bring to the body. When we realize that we have each been given a unique gift, we can experience healing, comfort, restoration, and redemption. We begin to realize, "Maybe I'm not so bad after all. Maybe the flaws I think I have are actually gifts."

As a child, I probably struggled with ADHD. It wasn't easily diagnosed at the time, but I know that I was very energetic. I was all over the place. For the longest time, I couldn't sit still enough to read an entire book.

Later in life, as I spent time in the word, in recovery, and in deep prayer, I realized that what I thought was a flaw was a gift. As I stopped trying to concentrate on 30 different things and narrowed it down to six or seven, I began to flourish. God has given me the gift of being able to do multiple things at one time.

As you pray about it, you may realize that the very thing you think is a flaw may actually be God's gift to you and others around you.

Types of Spiritual Gifts.

Most scholars agree that there are 18 Spiritual gifts. None of these gifts is superior to the others. We need all of the gifts in the body of Christ. If one gift is not operating correctly, it affects the whole body. If my right ear is damaged, smashed, or cut off, it affects my ability to listen. It hinders the way my body is operating. Each of the gifts depend on the proper functioning of the others. Gifts are interconnected and interdependent.

First, scholars identify a category of gifts called the **Miraculous Gifts**. The following gifts belong in this category:

- Apostleship (1 Cor 12:28, Eph 4:11)
- Tongues (1 Cor 12:10, 28, 30)
- Interpretation (1 Cor 12:10, 30)
- Miracles (1 Cor 12:10, 28)
- Healing (1 Cor 12:9, 28)

Often, I see Christians competing in two of these areas: tongues and prophecies.

“Do you speak in tongues?” they ask me. “If not, you *should!*”

Instead of using their gifts for God, Christians exercise their competitive nature. Their gift ceases to be a gift of God and starts becoming an expression of their own selfishness.

Second, God has given us **enabling gifts**. These gifts include:

- Faith (1 Cor 12:9)
- Discernment (1 Cor 12:10)
- Wisdom (1 Cor 12:8)
- Knowledge (1 Cor 12:8)

Many times, the gift of discernment is distributed to women. Women are good at picking up on nuances, mood, and reactions.

Finally, God has given **TEAM gifts**. These include:

- Evangelism: passionately leading others to the saving knowledge of Christ (Ephesians 4:11)
- Prophecy: boldly and fearlessly proclaiming God’s truth (1 Corinthians 12:10, 28, Eph 4:11, Rom 12:6)
- Teaching: making clear the truth of God’s Word with simplicity & accuracy (Romans 12:7, 1 Cor 12:28)
- Exhortation: motivating others to action, application and purpose (Rom 12:8)
- Shepherding: overseeing, training, feeding, coaching/leading (Eph 4:11)
- Serving: providing practical help both physically and spiritually (Rom 12:7, 1 Corinthians 12:28)
- Mercy-showing: identifying with and comforting those in need (Romans 12:8)
- Giving: releasing material resources to further the work of the Church (Romans 12:8)
- Administration: organizing, administering, promoting, leading (Romans 12:8, 1 Corinthians 12:28)

Often, Christians get tripped up by the gift of prophecy. They boast in their celebrity status and distort the gift into something weird and convoluted. Some prophets told me I was a tadpole becoming a frog. Others told me I was going to leave my wife, Cindy. I’m still waiting on some of these so-called “prophecies” to come true!

Other times, the gift of prophecy almost turns into a prosperity gospel, telling people what they want to hear. I don’t mean to criticize other Christians. Instead, I want to encourage you to focus on what are *you* being called to do in the body. How can you use your gifts, even prophecy, faithfully for Christ?

Using our Gifts in the Kingdom through the Body of Christ

God is a gift-giving God. He does not give the gift of salvation simply to secure our eternal relationship with Him, but He saves us and gives us spiritual gifts **so we can participate in what He is doing to redeem people to Him.**

The enemy loves to destroy our ability to advance the kingdom and be that light in the darkness. God wants us to recognize our gifts so we can share them with others in the body of Christ. Jesus loved us first so that we could love others and build his kingdom.

As we unwrap our gifts, we realize our gift is just one piece of the kingdom puzzle. It is part of something greater. We are part of the body, and there are other people who depend on us. We need to ask ourselves, "What is my mission and assignment in his kingdom?" Each and every one of us has an assignment.

The Bible teaches that each follower of Jesus has a spiritual gift that translates into a function within the church. 1 Corinthians 2:7 says, "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." Your gift is for the common good of the church, not a special attribute of personality or a talent. Your gift is a manifestation of God's Holy Spirit in your life that supernaturally empowers you to serve as a member of the body of Christ.

Here are some basic truths about spiritual gifts that can help you in your quest to live as God created you.

1. Every part belongs and has a reason for being in the body.

Paul, the missionary, used this analogy: The eye can't say to the ear that because it is not an eye, it doesn't belong to the body. 1 Corinthians 12:14-16 says, "Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. Now if the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body."

If the whole body were an eye, no one would smell anything! So, no matter the gift God has given you, you belong to the body of Christ. No one can say you don't belong.

The Bible says, "But now God has placed the parts, each one of them, in the body just as He wanted." (1 Corinthians 12:18) If you have trusted Jesus as your Lord, you belong to the body of Christ.

2. Every part needs the other parts.

Again, Paul reminds us that the eye can't say to the hand, "I don't need you." If the hand did not exist, the person could see the food but couldn't get it to their mouth. An eye without a hand would be a disadvantage. No, the eye and hand need each other.

Even those parts that seem less important are necessary for the health of the body.

1 Corinthians 12:22-24 "On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts

need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it." NIV

For example, although the thyroid gland is small and unseen, if it gets sick, the whole body gets sick. We can't say to anyone in our small group or church, "We don't need you." God has made it clear that everyone who is part of the church has a useful function--even if you can't see that clearly. God calls us to honor every member of his body and give special care to those who seem to lack it.

3. Spiritual gifts contribute to the body.

Your gift is to be used to help the body of Christ function in the world. For example, the spiritual gift of service is the hand of Christ in the world. People with this gift perform acts of service that demonstrate God's love to others. Their service may take the form of setting up chairs in the youth center or carrying food to a family in need.

The gift of exhortation or encouragement can be viewed as the arm of the church. As you put your arm around those who are discouraged or need someone to walk alongside them, you extend Christ's arms of mercy to those who need it most.

When you trusted Jesus, God gave you a gift. That gift means you belong to the body, and you have a place of service in the body.

Every Christian needs to know that "to receive God's grace for salvation is to receive God's gift for service." Jesus did not pay the price of a crucifixion death so we can sit happily at home with a remote control in our hand or so we can have the latest "Fast and Furious" version of a Honda Civic. Jesus paid the price so we could have a life of eternal purpose for His glory. He gave each one of us a gift of His Spirit in order to be a functioning member of his body, the church.

How do we discover the gifts God has given us?

1. Spend time praying to the One who gave you the gift.

Spend time with the one who gave you the gift in the first place. Dedicate time to prayer, meditation, and talking to God. Prayer is conversation with God. The more time you spend talking with God, the more opportunity you have to learn what He has gifted you to do as a part in His body. Like an **apprentice who asks the master craftsman** how to use a tool, your prayerful questions will lead you to God's plans for why He has given you the gift. **The Giver of the gift is the best guide to show you how to use it.**

2. Study the Bible.

God has revealed his purposes for your spiritual gift in the Bible. Read and study passages like 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12:1-8, and Ephesians 4:11-13. Knowing these verses will help you sort through all that has been written and spoken about spiritual gifts. Go to the Bible first, then, read what others have written about the gifts.

3. Ask those who know you well.

Since your spiritual gift is intended to be lived out in community, those who know you best can help you discover how God has gifted you for service. For example, a friend may say, "I am amazed at how easily you can talk to our friends about Jesus. I get so scared." A comment like this may be confirmation of your spiritual gift of evangelism. Someone else may comment on how well you help them to understand the Bible. This can be encouragement of your teaching gift. Listen to what others in your community of faith say about how you function as a follower of Jesus.

4. Serve! Get Busy

Just get involved. Find a church, nonprofit, or a friend to serve. As we serve together, we find out what each other's gifts are.

1 Peter 4:10 says, "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."

Often, when we think of Christian service, we imagine that God will call us to a job we don't want to do or can't do. Doesn't it make more sense to believe that God will call us to serve him in a way that suits our God-given gifts and talents? The thing you love doing for God may be the very thing He gifted you to do all along. God has placed a gift under the tree for you to open. It would be absurd to know there was a gift for you under the tree, but not open it. Begin to unwrap the gift God has for you.

Taking the Step of Faith: Accepting Your Gift

God never said that operating in our spiritual gifts would always be easy or comfortable. It can be daunting to step out in faith and accept the gift God has given. Many of God's servants throughout the Bible have felt a similar timidity. Gideon, Peter, and even Moses struggled with fear. Moses said, "I'm not worthy" and "I'm not good enough." But in the end, each of them stepped out and took a risk, using their talents for God's glory.

Jon Dyer said, "When it comes to spiritual gifts, some are passionate with excitement, desiring to discover and use their gifts, while others hide for fear of being convicted to do so. Fear is a common reason we keep our spiritual gifts in a drawer."

Even when it is uncomfortable using our gifts, we are called to step out anyway. When we go forward in faith and use the gifts he's given us, we become a living sacrifice. Stepping out in faith becomes an act of worship. As we take hold of our gift and use it for him, we become a vessel for His glory. He takes our gift, stretches us and multiplies what we have.

God is the giver of gifts, but we have to partner with him in using what he's given us. Rather than wasting our potential, we need to use all that God has given us for the sake of the kingdom.

Maybe you remember this story from Matthew called "The Parable of the Talents." In Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus tells a story about a man who went on a journey. He entrusted each of his servants with money. To one, he gave a smaller bag of gold to safeguard, but to another he gave five large bags of gold, equal to 100 years' salary. This was an enormously overwhelming amount of money.

The man who received the most money invested it and got a return on his investment. He doubled the amount he'd received. Another servant also doubled his investment. But the one who received the least hid the money in fear.

When the master came back, he praised the ones who had doubled their investment. Matthew 25:21 says, "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'"

However, the one who had hid the money received a rebuke. "He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.' But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! 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 at 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 from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'" (Matthew 25:24-30)

Fear, along with an incorrect view of his master's character, kept this individual from investing his talents for the kingdom. God wants us to invest our talents so he can receive a return on his investment. He wants our talents to continue to multiply in the kingdom. If you use your gifts, more will be given, and you will have an abundance.

I don't believe Jesus meant that we will go to hell for not using our spiritual gifts. Instead, he was emphasizing the seriousness of using our spiritual gifts. Giving our love and generosity back to God is of dire importance. God wants us not to be afraid to take a risk in investing our gifts. When we serve him without giving in to fear, we will always receive an eternal return on investment.

If you are wondering what your spiritual gift is, study the spiritual gifts in the Bible. Perhaps you have the gift of prophecy, teaching and preaching, music, helps, hospitality, acts of service, giving, mercy, encouragement, administration, intercessory prayer, faith, or something else. You can find many spiritual gifts inventories on the internet that will help you in this area.

As you learn about the gifts, take a risk and try out some service roles in Christ's body. Get involved in serving the Lord, and you will find out what your gift is. The more you use your gifts, the better you will get at using them. Become a good steward of all that God has given you. Have the willingness to step out and try things. As you do, you will experience the richness of God's blessing and eternal reward.