

Spiritual Gifts Defined

We believe that spiritual gifts are supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit in believers. Many people only think of spiritual gifts as the “sign gifts,” which include tongues, healing, and prophecy, but there are several other spiritual gifts defined in Scripture.

Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 give us a thorough explanation of the New Testament gifts, although respected biblical scholars disagree on the meaning and distribution of these gifts. Many believe that signs and wonders were used in the New Testament to help people recognize and believe in Christ, while also authenticating the authority of the apostles at the time, but that they are now not available to believers. Others argue that the “sign gifts” should be sought and performed today for God’s glory and others’ good.

However, both views at the extreme hold their own inconsistencies. On one end of defining spiritual gifts, some maintain the view that nothing has changed between the day of Pentecost in Acts and the present.

However, we know from examples in Scripture that some things are dramatically different, such as the apostles ability to heal changing over the course of the New Testament (Acts 5:12-16, Acts 20:7-12, 2 Timothy 4:20) and the admonition to the elders in James to pray for healing of the sick rather than directly performing the miracle of healing (James 5:14-15). The other end of the spectrum includes people who believe the “sign gifts” have completely ceased, which is not explicitly stated in Scripture.

We believe that it is possible to find unity over these differences, although we do not believe that the “sign gifts” can be considered a mark of spiritual maturity. Past this belief, we recognize that there are some differences in thoughts, opinions, and experiences in defining spiritual gifts. The one true Source we can return to without fault is Scripture. The following chart helps us define each gift through the information that the Bible gives to us.

GIFT	DEFINITION	SCRIPTURE REFERENCE(S)	NOTES
Discernment	To clearly distinguish truth from error by judging whether the behavior or teaching is from God or Satan.	1 Corinthians 12:10	
Encouragement	To come alongside someone with words of exhortation, comfort and counsel.	Romans 12:8	
Faith	To be confidently convinced of God’s power and promises to accomplish His will and purpose.	1 Corinthians 12:9	
Giving	To share the resources you have with cheerfulness.	Romans 12:8	

Healings	A means through which God makes people whole physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually.	I Corinthians 12:9, 28, 30	In Greek, this is in the plural and implies different people have different healing gifts. Someone with a healing gift will not be able to heal at will, but when God wills. Paul was able to heal many people (Acts 14:10, 16:18, 19:12, 20:9-10), but was seemingly unable to heal at other times (Philippians 2:26-27, I Timothy 5:23, 2 Timothy 4:20).
Interpretation of unknown languages	To translate the message of someone speaking in an unknown language.	I Corinthians 12:10	It is necessary if the body of believers is to benefit. (I Corinthians 12:7, 13:1, 14:1-25)
Mercy	To be sensitive toward those who are suffering, feel genuine sympathy, speak words of compassion.	Romans 12:8	
Leadership	To give direction and motivate others to accomplish goals.	Romans 12:8, I Corinthians 12:28	
Miracles	To be enabled by God to perform actions which witnesses acknowledge are of supernatural origin and means.	I Corinthians 12:10, 28	
Prophecy	Speech reporting something that God reveals to the speaker	Romans 12:6, I Corinthians 12:10, 14:1-5, 29-33a	Spoken in human words, so there could be mistakes and therefore should be evaluated (I Thessalonians 5:19-21). Should be used to build up the church (I Corinthians 14:3) or evangelistically (I Corinthians 14:24-25). Prophecy is not in the same category as Scripture, but is under (and tested by) Scripture.
Service	To identify needs and use available resources to meet those needs.	Romans 12:7	
Speak in unknown languages	To speak in a language not previously learned so people can hear God's truth in their language, for the benefit of others.	I Corinthians 12:10, 14:1-33a	
Teaching	The ability to understand and instruct people in truths of the Bible.	Romans 12:7, I Corinthians 12:8, 28	
Wisdom	To apply knowledge to life in such a way as to make spiritual truths relevant and practical.	I Corinthians 12:8	