

# Talents Vs. Gifts

By Chris Shirley

## Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

### Assignment One

Make a list of at least ten different ministries in your church (example: worship team), estimate how many people lead or serve in each ministry, and add these numbers together to find a total number of people serving in all these ministries. If you need help with this project, contact a church leader. Prepare to share your work when your group meets.

### Assignment Two

Other than supplying spiritual gifts, how does the Holy Spirit influence ministry in the church? Write a brief summary of His role in ministry. You can use the following verses to assist you: John 15:26; Acts 10:38; Romans 5:3–5; 1 Corinthians 2:13; Galatians 5:22. Prepare to share your work when your group meets.

### Assignment Three

Read 2 Corinthians 12:9; Ephesians 2:8–9; 2 Corinthians 8:7. Each of these verses contains the word *grace*. How does each of these verses describe a different type of grace? Prepare to share your answer when your group meets.

### Scripture to Memorize

*“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of ministries, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.”* 1 Corinthians 12:4–6

### Session Goal

Consistent with God’s Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will understand the difference between spiritual gifts and talents or skills.

**Chris Shirley** is associate professor of Adult Ministry at Southwestern Seminary, where he teaches courses in adult discipleship, men’s discipleship, and family ministry. Prior to coming to Southwestern, Chris was involved in over twenty years of ministry experience in Christian camping and in local churches as youth minister, minister of education, minister of family life, and associate pastor.

Chris is a frequent conference speaker in family ministry, men’s discipleship, adult education, and teacher training. In addition, he was written youth and adult Sunday school curriculum and Bible book studies for LifeWay Christian Resources. His article on comprehensive discipleship in the local church, “It Takes a Church to Make a Disciple,” was published in the *Southwestern Journal of Theology*.

Chris and his wife, Isabel, have been married for over thirty years and have two adult children, Andrew and Haylee, and (so far) one grandchild.

## It's in the Book

30 minutes

### Real-Life Scenario

A large number of entertainers and athletes claim to be born-again Christians. Would you say these celebrities are using their *spiritual gifts* to serve the Lord? Possibly, but we can only know the answer to that question if we see the way God uses them to minister within His church. Spiritual gifts, talents and skills are not the same. Although all our abilities are God given and useful for our Christian witness, spiritual gifts are given for a special purpose: to serve the church for the glory of God.

Read Romans 12:1–5 out loud.

### Studying the Passage

**Verse 1. living sacrifice, holy...** Paul first introduced the concept of spiritual gifts following a discussion about the basics of Christian service. First, we are obligated to serve God as a holy sacrifice based on our gratitude to Him for the mercy He extended to us through Jesus Christ. Paul uses the word “living” because the sacrifice represents the entire life of the believer offered to God for His purposes. The people of Paul’s day associated sacrifices with death because animals were killed in the sacrificial process. **the mercies of God.** However, because of Jesus’s death on the cross, animal sacrifice was no longer required for those who placed their faith in Christ. **holy.** Their lives were now *holy*, or “set apart,” for God’s purposes. **spiritual worship.** Their sacrifice would take the form of living acts of service to Jesus.

**Verse 2. conformed . . . transformed.** According to the apostle, a supernatural process enables us to recognize God’s will and understand His best plan for our lives. Paul shared the secret to this process: instead of being “conformed to the world” (squeezed into its mold), be “transformed.” The Greek term for this word is similar to the word *metamorphosis*, which means “to be changed from the inside out.”

This transformation occurs as our minds are renewed, implying that our actions are controlled by our thoughts. How do we renew the mind? We don’t. Spiritual renewal is the work of the Holy Spirit (see 2 Corinthians 3:18; Titus 3:5). As the Holy Spirit transforms us, we can see more clearly God’s will and join His work with acts of spiritual service.

### On Your Own

Are you truly presenting your body as a “living and holy sacrifice”? In the space below, list three indicators that demonstrate your acts of ministry are done for God’s glory.

### Studying the Passage

**Verse 3. not to think of himself more highly.** The second obligation of every disciple of Jesus is to serve one another. If he is transformed by the Spirit—acting more like Christ and less like the world—he will naturally think of others’ needs first and not of himself. This type of thinking

requires more “we” and less “me.”

**Verse 4. many members.** Paul used one his favorite illustrations—the church as a body—to drive home his point. The church is like a body with multiple parts: eyes, mouth, nose, arms, legs, feet, etc. Every part has a function, and each part is essential to the health and well-being of the body.

**Verse 5. one body in Christ.** Likewise, every member of the body of Christ—the church—has an important role to play in the ministry of the church.

### **Assignment One Feedback**

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now report on the total number of people serving in all the ministries of the church.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:1–6 out loud.

### **Studying the Passage**

**Verse 1. spiritual gifts.** Similar to his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the importance of finding their role or function in the body of Christ. This time he used a specific term to describe that role: “spiritual gifts.”

Even though the NASB translates the Greek word *pneumatikōn* as “spiritual gifts,” the word actually refers generally to things pertaining to the Spirit. The translators have assumed Paul was referring to spiritual gifts because of the later discussion of gifts (vv. 4–11). Before he began his explanation of spiritual gifts, Paul reminded the disciples in Corinth that only through the power of the Holy Spirit can they truly glorify Jesus Christ.

### **Assignment Two Feedback**

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now report on the role of the Holy Spirit in ministry.

### **Studying the Passage, vv. 4–6**

**Verse 4. gifts.** The word for “gifts” refers to a gift of grace or an undeserved blessing. Combining the terms for “spiritual” and “gift” provides a fuller understanding: a spiritual gift is a special manifestation of the Spirit in the life of a Christian, given freely by God’s grace.

**Verses 4–6. varieties.** Notice this word occurs three times in verses 4–6, indicating different types of gifts distributed among “all persons” (v. 6) in the church. There are many gifts among the members of the church, and every member has a gift given by God through His Holy Spirit.

- Unlike talents, which are innate or developed abilities (playing guitar, running a marathon, or painting a portrait) used for the pleasure and benefit of oneself or others, spiritual gifts do not bring honor or glory to an individual.
- Spiritual gifts represent the presence of the Holy Spirit in the personal ministry of a disciple (see 1 Timothy 1:6–7).
- Unlike common skills, which are developed through experience and repetition (driving a car, cooking a meal, or using a computer) and are used for life management, spiritual gifts are used in the church.
- The gifts the Spirit provides are given to build up the church and its ministries for the glory of God (see 1 Corinthians 12:7).
- Spiritual gifts are reserved exclusively for benefitting the church, while talents and life skills

are used both inside and outside the body of Christ.

### **Assignment Three Feedback**

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now report on three different concepts of grace in the New Testament.

### **On Your Own**

In 1 Corinthians 12:4–6, Paul uses a different noun in each verse to describe the work of the Holy Spirit. Based on 1 Corinthians 12:1–6 and the information in this lesson, compose your own definition of spiritual gifts using these three words: gifts, ministries, and effects. Write your definition in the space below.

### **Discussion Question**

How has God used your spiritual gift(s) to serve Him in the church?

### **Heart and Hands**

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven.

Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart (the real you) for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something in your life for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit says to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

### **Since Last Week**

5 minutes

### **Grace-Filled Accountability**

5 minutes

### **Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service**

5 minutes

### **Prayer**

7 minutes

## **At Home: Nail It Down**

How are our spiritual gifts different from our talents and skills? Since we are created in God's image (Genesis 1:27), then all our talents and abilities are God given. In Colossians 3:17, Paul emphasized that everything we do "in word or deed" should be done "in the name of the Lord Jesus" and with thankfulness to Him. These passages remind us that we should use everything God has given us to honor Him and proclaim Christ to the world.

The Word of God is clear about the special nature of spiritual gifts. The primary passages that present the meaning, purpose, and use of the gifts are Romans 12:1–8; 1 Corinthians 12; 13; and 1 Peter 4:10–11 (some include Ephesians 4:11–16 as well).

In Romans 12:1–5, the apostle Paul introduced the idea of spiritual gifts by first laying the foundation for personal ministry. Those who have received the grace of God through Jesus Christ should gratefully lay down their lives for His service. Paul calls this being a "living sacrifice, holy..." Those who joyfully sacrifice their lives to Christ no longer live for themselves but for Him and one another. We serve God by ministering to the body of Christ in the power of the Spirit.

We minister to the body of Christ through our spiritual gifts. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he pointed first to the source of the gifts: the Holy Spirit, who glorifies Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 12:1–3). The most important gift from God is the Holy Spirit, who lives within every believer. When He controls our lives, He freely provides us with the gifts we need to serve King Jesus through the church.

Spiritual gifts come in a variety of forms. There are as many gifts as there are ministries in the church (1 Corinthians 12:4–6). Most importantly, the Spirit provides every disciple with a ministry gift. And that includes you.

### **Follow up Question**

*What unique talents and skills God has given to you? How are these abilities different from your spiritual gift(s)?*

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.