

What Is My Spiritual Gift?

1 Corinthians 12: 1-11

Spiritual gifts are the ways God gets worked into our lives. They are the ways we reveal God to others and others reveal God to us. What is the difference between spiritual gifts and talents? The difference may be just a matter of our perspective. Talents are abilities and potential. They are what we do well, what we love to do, and how we do what we are needed to do. Spiritual gifts are abilities and potential – what we do well, love to do, and how we do what we are needed to do. Beyond that, spiritual gifts are the way of understanding and trusting that everything is in God and comes through God. The Apostle Paul says they are the ways we proclaim “Jesus is master” with our lives.

What are the spiritual gifts? How many are there? Is there a certain list? Paul tells us there are various gifts – really a cornucopia, an abundance. Specific spiritual gifts are as diverse as we are. All the gifts originate with God's Spirit. They represent the many ways God's ministries are carried out, the many ways God's power is expressed. God's own presence, however we understand or explain it, is behind it all.

Embracing and expressing your spiritual gifts is being in synch with the underlying power and reality in the universe. Each person is given something to do that shows who God is – an amazing responsibility. Everyone also gets in on its benefits. All kinds of things are handed-out by the Spirit to all kinds of people!

How do I learn about my spiritual gifts? Some folks know a lot about spiritual gifts. Some know very little. You can take workshops, tests, and indicators. These can tell you a lot about your spiritual gifts. Self-examination can show us a lot as well. Other people who know us can tell us, too. Ultimately, we need to recognize our gifts in ourselves. We validate our gifts in our living.

At heart, each of us has a mixture of “core competency” with experience and passion. This mix provides the potential each of us has to bear witness to God's reality in the world and in our lives. By exercising and developing our spiritual gifts, we can become “all that we can be” through God's Spirit.

What are some examples of spiritual gifts? Paul mentions some that were present in the Corinthian community. This is not an exhaustive list, but includes: “wise counsel, clear understanding, simple trust, healing the sick, miraculous acts, proclamation, distinguishing between spirits, [speaking in] tongues, and interpretation of tongues.

Corinthian community included all these gifts. They all seemed to be present in the community, though the particular gifts differed among the people. Unfortunately, pride, envy, and jealousy were also present and resulted in division within that community.

If someone were to write a letter to the Crossroads community and include in that letter a list of spiritual gifts, what gifts would be represented? Were I to write that letter, the spiritual gifts would certainly include: hospitality, compassion, creativity, imagination, accounting, peacemaking, reflection, prayer, and enthusiasm.

Some of us have some of these gifts, but they cannot be a source of pride or worthiness. Our particular gifts are not indicative of God's love for one over another. All gifts and all people are of inestimable value.

Please consider yourself. What gifts do you see? Is there one that stands out more than others? Do you have a primary gift? Is your gift shining through? Is it (are they) being invested freely? Are others benefiting? Are you becoming all you can be in the Spirit?

My answer, honestly, is “no,” not really – not as much as I would like. For example, I have a gift to express myself through writing. I have at least three significant writing projects begun with great enthusiasm. When I return to them, I have such strong feelings of self-doubt – “who would want to read what I have to say?” – that my creativity gets stifled. My own negative messages stifle the expression of a spiritual gift.

What gets in your way? Fear? Envy? What about confusion? Could it be feeling overwhelmed? When any of these feelings causes us to hold back or hide our gifts, we will all do well to remember that quotation by Marianne Williamson often attributed to Nelson Mandela:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.
We ask ourselves
“Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?”
Actually, who are you not to be?
You are a child of God.
Your playing small does not serve the world.
There’s nothing enlightened about shrinking
So that other people won’t feel insecure around you.
We are all meant to shine as children do...
And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously
give other people permission to do the same.

Families, organizations, and communities have a corporate spiritual giftedness. As a group, they are the real and specific ways we reveal God. A community’s corporate gifts are not merely the sum of all its individuals’ gifts.

Can you name the corporate spiritual gifts of Crossroads congregation. We can begin doing this today, but clarity will take much more effort and discernment together. My list is intentionally short: hospitality (inclusion), questioning (inquisitiveness), and a willingness and desire to be heard (interactive). I remember this list as three “i’s”: inclusive, inquisitive, and interactive.

Is our giftedness shining through? Are our corporate spiritual gifts being invested freely? Are we, as a community, becoming all we can be in the Spirit? Probably not. What, then, gets in our way? Fear? Envy? Confusion? Guilt? Do we feel overwhelmed?

Thomas Merton reminds each of us:

Perhaps I am stronger than I think.

Perhaps I am even afraid of my strength, and turn it against myself, thus making myself weak. Making myself secure. Making myself guilty.

Perhaps I am most afraid of the strength of God in me. Perhaps I would rather be guilty and weak in myself, than strong in Him whom I cannot understand.

Can we begin to let go and bring down the barriers inhibiting our gift(s)? WILL we begin to let go and bring down those barriers? We will probably have to begin with you and me individually letting go and allowing our primary gifts to shine through everywhere in our lives, and here in and through church. We’ll have to work together as community to let go and bring down those barriers in our communal life.

One of the best ways to learn about our congregation's spiritual gifts and how to let them shine through is by asking our newest members. "Why did you come?" "What were you looking for?" "What have they found?" Another way is to ask our youngest members: "Do you love being in this community?" "What do you love about it?"

Our newest and youngest can tell us more clearly than anything else who we are, what gifts we bring, and how we reveal God with our life. What we learn about ourselves tells us with what we can approach our neighbors, minister to them, and invite them to join us. It tells us why others would want to come here. Most important, it reveals to us how we show God to the world

God's work of art,
That's us?
Then Beauty must lie
In the eye of the
Beholder.

We feel more like
One of those statues
Michelangelo left
Half emerging
From the marble block;
Full of potential,
On the verge of life,
But 'prisoned still
By circumstance and
Fear.

Yet part of us is free –
And you are still creating,
Bringing to life
The promise that is there.

Sometimes by
Hammer blows
Which jar our being,
Sometimes by
Tender strokes half felt
Which waken us to
Life.

Go on, Lord.
Love us into wholeness.
Set us free
To share with you
In your creative joy;
To laugh with you
At your delight

In us,
Your work of art.
(with apologies to Ann Lewin, "Revelation," in *Candles and Kingfishers*, 1993)

Amen.