

The logo for CPAS, featuring the lowercase letters 'cpas' in a white, sans-serif font, set against a dark blue background that is part of a larger graphic element on the left side of the page.

cpas

exploring spiritual gifts

Your S.H.A.P.E. for ministry

exploring your spiritual gifts

Introduction

"We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us." (Romans 12:6)

Spiritual gifts are those special God-empowered abilities that God gives to each follower of Jesus Christ, in order to equip them to serve him. This document contains some useful advice about exploring your spiritual gifts and an exercise to help you do so.

Understanding which gifts God has given you is a helpful step in understanding more about your calling: the God who calls is also the God who equips.

In order to get the most out of this exercise, read through the notes carefully, approach the exercise prayerfully and give yourself time to reflect fully.

What are spiritual gifts?

Spiritual gifts are:

- **Gifts from God, not rewards for good behaviour.** They are received not achieved (1 Cor 7:7, 12:11). They are gifts given when we come to faith in Christ. Those who aren't Christians don't have 'spiritual' gifts. Most people have several gifts in a 'gift-mix'.
- **Manifestations of grace not marks of maturity.** Not dependent on how long you've been a Christian, children get them as well, or how mature you are as a Christian, although obviously maturity (appropriate for age) helps them to be used wisely.
- **Tools for the job not trophies for the mantelpiece.** They are received for the common good (1 Cor 12:7, Eph 4:12). They are not things to be proud of, show off, but rather to be used humbly in service of the King and his kingdom.
- **Spiritual gifts and not simply natural talents.** They are the expression of God's grace in ordinary people's lives, sometimes transforming a natural talent into something supernatural, sometimes supernaturally giving an individual a gift that they have shown no ability for before.

How do we discover our gifts?

There are a variety of ways. We've included a more reflective approach in this resource, reflecting on some key questions. If you are interested in a more analytical approach using a spiritual gifts inventory we've listed them in the further resources section. One thing to be aware of with such tools is that each of them reflects a particular theological position with varying assumptions.

How do we use our gifts? 1 Corinthians 12

We are called to use our gifts in a way that glorifies the giver, builds the body, and extends the kingdom.

- **Remember the source:** 'There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.' (1 Cor 12:4). We can't boast or be proud, we can only humbly and gratefully receive them as gifts.
- **Develop a right attitude.** 'There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.' (1 Cor 12:5). Gifts are not about status, but service. Sadly churches are riddled with people seeking status, which is why we must model ourselves on the servant character of Christ.
- **Recognise our dependence on God.** 'There are different kinds of working....' (1 Cor 12:6). Each gift is given through grace and used in God's strength. That's why Paul only ever boasts about his weakness.
- **Focus on the common good** (verses 7-11). Gifts are not about self glorification but building the body.
- **Function as a body** (verses 12-31). Verses 18-20 are a watershed in this passage. 1 Cor 12:14-16 identify the problem of those who downplay their gifts, verses 21-24 the problem of those who deny others' gifts. 1 Cor 12:18-20 stress the interconnectedness of the body, welded together by love. We need everyone to use their gifts if we are to function well as the local church.

'Unity in the church is not attained by all being alike; but by all having the same purpose – the desire to glorify God and build up others.'

Bob Buford

reflecting on your spiritual gifts

The following is a practical exercise to help identify what gifts God may have given you.

Look up

Ask God to show you what your gifts are. Be prayerful as you consider your gifts, and flexible as you explore his leading.

Look at

Read through a list of spiritual gifts from the Bible. The one on pages 4-6 is not exhaustive, but may act as a good starting point. Using a pencil assess yourself on each one as follows:

- A = definitely my gift
- B = probably my gift
- C = unsure whether this is my gift or not
- D = definitely not my gift.

Leave the list for a few days, and then see if you agree with your initial assessment. Change them where necessary.

Look back

Think about the past. Where would you identify God's blessing on you? Where have you seen unusual fruit in ministry? What have you enjoyed doing as a Christian? What have you found energizing? When have you heard other people mention you're good at something, or are excited about something?

Look in

As you look into yourself, what do you feel passionate about? What really excites you? If you were guaranteed success, the resources and gifts to achieve it, what one thing would you most like to do for God?

Look out

Ask other people to suggest what they think your gifts are. Choose some people who know you well, and choose some who only know you a little. Be sure they are people who want the best for you. Encourage them to be honest and truthful. Don't be surprised if you get contradicting opinions. You'll need to weigh their insights carefully. Spiritual gifts are recognised and confirmed by other people, so if no one thinks you've got a gift you believe you have, you may need to reassess your position. Insert their assessment of your spiritual gifts on a list, graded A to D.

Look around

As you consider your church, what needs exist? What openings are there for exercising gifts? Do any of these opportunities interest/excite you even if you don't feel qualified or skilled? If you could choose one area of involvement in your church, what would it be? Then ask if you can have a go at some of these things as a way of experimenting whether you have a gift in that area. Set a time frame for the experiment and then review it with someone else.

Look forward

As you reflect on these areas, draw things together by identifying your gift-mix by listing your five most obvious gifts in descending order below.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Then reflect on whether one gift is more dominant and supported by the other gifts. If this is the case place it in the centre space with the other gifts around it. How will you best use your gifts for the kingdom in years to come?

_____	_____

_____	_____

GIFT	MAIN EMPHASIS	DESCRIPTION	BIBLE	YOU	OTHER
Administration	To organize	The person with this gift will be able to organize information, plans, projects to work efficiently in the body of Christ for a particular task.	1 Corinthians 12:28		
Apostle	To perceive the big picture and pioneer new things	This gift enables a person to see the overall picture of how the purposes of God can best be furthered, normally leading to pioneering a new initiative or providing what is lacking in an existing one. Adept at making decisions, envisioning outcomes, investigating new initiatives.	Ephesians 4:11		
Discerning spirits	To discern whether something is from God	This gift is used to discern whether a person ministering in God's name is really acting out of another source, human or satanic.	1 Corinthians 12:10		
Evangelist	To effectively communicate the good news to people who aren't Christians	Whilst all Christians are called to share in evangelism and to communicate their faith in appropriate ways at appropriate times, the person with the gift of an evangelist will frequently and naturally talk about the gospel with non-Christians and will often see them coming to faith in Jesus Christ and becoming full members of the church. The gift may be used in a one-to-one setting, in evangelistic groups or in preaching, it may be used locally or itinerantly or in missionary use abroad.	Ephesians 4:11		
Exhortation	To encourage others	This gift leads to encouragement, comfort, confrontation, challenge and instruction through the application of scriptural truth, leading to growth in faith, hope and love.	Romans 12:8		
Faith	To confidently trust in God for particular things	This is not the same as saving faith (which all Christians have and which is given by God) but is a special faith that a need or needs within the Christian community will be met, according to God's purposes and for the growth of his people.	1 Corinthians 12:9		

GIFT	MAIN EMPHASIS	DESCRIPTION	BIBLE	YOU	OTHER
Giving	To determine physical needs and provide physical resources	Giving money or resources responsibly is part of normal Christian life but the person with the gift of giving has a special ability over and above what is required of the average Christian and will do so with 'liberality and cheerfulness'. The person with this gift may not possess the resources, but is motivated to pray and to see that the needs are met.	Romans 12:8		
Healing	To call on God to heal supernaturally	This gift brings God's power to bear on sickness, be it emotional, physical, or mental.	1 Corinthians 12:9,28		
Helps	To aid others	This gift is a remarkable ability to work alongside another and help that person complete the task God has given them, through a whole variety of practical service.	1 Corinthians 12:28 Romans 12:7		
Interpretation of tongues	To interpret an unknown language	This gift enables a person to understand and communicate the meaning of an unknown language, often in corporate worship.	1 Corinthians 12:10		
Knowledge	To know God's way forward	The gift enables a person to discern, both through spiritual and practical means, God's insights into a particular situation that leads to a proper course of action. It may be exercised to help individuals or churches as a whole.	1 Corinthians 12:8		
Mercy	To empathise with the hurting	The capacity both to feel sympathy with those in need (especially those suffering and miserable) and to manifest this sympathy in some practical helpful way with a cheerful spirit so as to encourage and help those in need.	Romans 12:8		
Miracles	To call on God to do supernatural acts	A miracle is 'an act of God intended as evidence of his power and purpose'. This gift is to be distinguished from the gifts of healing. Biblical examples are Peter's dealings with Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 and Paul's with Elymas in Acts 13:4-12	1 Corinthians 12:10,28		

GIFT	MAIN EMPHASIS	DESCRIPTION	BIBLE	YOU	OTHER
Pastor	To care for the growth of believers	The pastor cares for the spiritual needs of a group and oversees their growth in Christ through modelling maturity, nurturing faith, protecting from error and teaching the faith.	Ephesians 4:11		
Prophecy	To correct	The capacity to deliver publicly, truth (of a predictive nature as well as a situational word) from God in order to exhort, edify or console believers and to encourage non-believers of God's truth.	1 Corinthians 12:10 Romans 12:6		
Leadership/ Ruling	To set a vision for others and motivate others to fulfil it	The capacity to discern God's vision for a group of people and to exercise influence so as to lead the group towards the fulfilment of that vision.	Romans 12:8		
Teaching	To understand and communicate the truth of God in a clear and relevant way	The gift of teaching enables members of the Christian community to learn effectively. It may be used in large groups, small groups or with individuals. It may be verbal or it may be used through written material; it may be didactic teaching or it may be more participative.	Romans 12:7		
Tongues	To speak an unknown language	The capacity to spontaneously give a word from God in unknown words to a group of people, to enhance the worship and help build up the Christian community. It needs to be accompanied by the gift of interpretation. It can also be used in private prayer.	1 Corinthians 12:10		
Wisdom	To discern God's way forward for complex situations	The capacity to know the mind of the Spirit in a given situation and to communicate clearly the situation, facts, truth or application of facts and truth to meet the need of the situation.	1 Corinthians 12:8		

common errors concerning spiritual gifts

Error 1

The faithful use of my spiritual gifts excuses me from obeying God's general commands.

Understanding more about the way that God has designed and gifted you is a wonderful discovery. It frees you to contribute in the body of Christ in ways that uniquely reflect God's character. But focusing on our spiritual gifts does not exempt us from responding to the responsibilities and instructions that are given to every Christian. Each of us will be called on to serve others, whether we have the spiritual gift of serving or not. We all need to be ready to share our faith – even if we don't have the gift of evangelism. There are a multitude of biblical injunctions that apply to every follower of Christ. Don't fall into the trap of limiting your service to the exclusive realm of your spiritual gifting. Instead, think of your spiritual gifts as particular ways to maximize your contribution in the Body of Christ.

Error 2

I can use my spiritual gifts as a way to avoid dealing with deeper character issues in my life.

Maximizing our spiritual gifts is only one of many ways that God works in our lives. In order to make our best contribution to the body of Christ, we often have to deal with underlying motivations and character issues first. We must be careful not to use our gifting as a cover that keeps us from doing that. A teacher, for instance, can hide behind his or her expert presentations in a way that prevents him or her from developing close relationships. Someone with the gift of leadership can misuse the gift to pressure others into adopting their point of view whether they share it or not. Be careful not to use your gifting as a way to avoid tackling the personal character issues that mark true spiritual growth.

Error 3

It is more important that I use my gift than that I exercise discretion.

Part of what it means to develop in our areas of gifting is that we acquire, over time, the ability to know when and how and in what circumstances to offer our contribution. There are times when we need to move over and make room for someone else's opinions or gifts. Sometimes the presence of non-Christians in a group requires that we teach or exhort or help in a totally different manner. Discernment is always necessary in the use of our spiritual gifts.

Error 4

Some spiritual gifts are better than others

Many people hold to the misconception that there is an invisible hierarchy of spiritual gifts – that some gifts are simply of greater value than others. They observe another person's gift of wisdom or teaching and feel it is preferable to their own gift of helps or serving. Or if they compare themselves to another person with the same gift, they measure who has more and who has less and eventually, they are left feeling either false pride or unnecessary shame.

In summary

All of these misconceptions about spiritual gifts result from an inadequate understanding of what it means to be part of the body of Christ. There is a place, a niche for each of us within the body where what is needed is just what God has designed us to give. When we decide that our contribution is not needed, or not good enough, then we are taking on Christ's role as the head of the body, and we are depriving others of benefit. We are quarrelling with the way that God has made us (Isaiah 45:9)

further resources

You can use an online tool at:

- www.buildingchurch.net/g2s.htm
- www.churchgrowth.org/cgi-cg/gifts.cgi.

We've listed them in order of our recommendation.

Graham Cray, *Tools for the Job*, CPAS, a practical workbook to use with groups within a church or organisation. No longer in print but worth borrowing from someone!

The Willow Creek *Network Course* is available from the Willow Creek Association UK at www.willowcreek.org.uk.

Breakthru: A Spiritual Gifts Diagnostic Inventory is available from Lead Consulting, Raleigh, North Carolina, USA, www.leadconsulting-usa.com. Explores gifts by experience and traits.

Jane A.G. Kise, David Stark, Sandra Krebs Hirsh, ***Lifekeys: Discovering Who You Are, Why You're Here, What You Do Best***, Bethany House, ISBN 1-556-61871-9. This book integrates Myers Briggs with some other resources to help you identify gifts and passions.

Aubrey Malphurs, *Maximising Your Effectiveness*, Baker ISBN 0-8010-6317-5. Considers a whole range of elements including spiritual gifts.

Peter Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can help Your Church Grow*, Regal Books ISBN 0-8307-3697-2.