

Unlimited Possibilities



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Cor. 12:12, Matt. 3:16–18, 1 Cor. 12:7, 1 Cor. 1:4–9, Matt. 25:14–30.*

Memory Text: “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills” (*1 Corinthians 12:11, NKJV*).

God calls us to witness for Him (*Acts 1:8, Isa. 43:10*). Witnessing is not a special spiritual gift that only a select few possess. Witnessing is the divine calling of each Christian.

The Bible uses different expressions to describe our calling before God. We are to be “the light of the world,” “ambassadors for Christ,” and a “royal priesthood” (*Matt. 5:14, 2 Cor. 5:20, 1 Pet. 2:9*). This same God who calls us to witness and for service equips us for the task. He imparts spiritual gifts to each believer. God does not call the qualified. He qualifies those whom He has called. Just as He gives salvation freely to all who believe, He gives His gifts to them freely, as well.

As we consecrate ourselves to God and dedicate our lives to His service, our possibilities to serve are endless. “There is no limit to the usefulness of one who, putting aside self, makes room for the working of the Holy Spirit upon his heart, and lives a life wholly consecrated to God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 159.

In this week's lesson, we will study our unlimited possibilities for service through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 8.

Differing Gifts: United in Service

Have you ever considered how different from each other the disciples were? Their backgrounds, personalities, temperaments, and gifts greatly varied. But this was not a liability for the church. It was a strength. Matthew, a tax collector, was precise, exact, accurate. In contrast, Peter often spoke quickly and was enthusiastic and impulsive, but he also had natural leadership qualities. John was tenderhearted but outspoken. Andrew was a people person, extremely aware of his surroundings, and sensitive to others. Thomas had the natural inclination to question, and he often doubted. Each of these disciples, though having different personalities and gifts, was powerfully used by God in witnessing for Him.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12, 13, 18–22. What do we discover in these verses about the need for people of different gifts in the body of Christ, the church?

God delights in taking people of different backgrounds with different talents and abilities and imparting to them gifts for service. The body of Christ is not a homogenous group of people who are all alike. It is not a country club with people of the same backgrounds who all think the same. It is a dynamic movement of people of different gifts, united in their love for Christ and for Scripture, and who are committed to sharing His love and truth with the world (*Rom. 12:4, 1 Cor. 12:12*). The members of the body of Christ have different gifts, but each one is valuable; each one is critical to the healthy functioning of the body of Christ. Just as the eyes, ears, and nose have different functions but are necessary to the body, all gifts are necessary, as well (*1 Cor. 12:21, 22*).

If you carefully consider the human body, even the smallest parts have a crucial role. Consider our eyelashes. What if we did not have something as apparently insignificant as eyelashes? Dust particles would blur our vision, and the resulting consequences could potentially cause irreparable damage. In the same way, the member of the church who seems the most “insignificant” is an essential part of the body of Christ and has been gifted by the Holy Spirit. When we dedicate these gifts totally to God, each one of us can make an eternal difference.

No matter how talented you might be, what are the things that you are *not* very good at but that others in the church are? How should this help keep you in your proper place?

God: The Giver of All Good Gifts

According to 1 Corinthians 12:11, 18; Ephesians 4:7, 8; and James 1:17, God is the originator of all gifts, and “every perfect gift” comes from Him. Thus, we can rest assured that He will impart to us the very gifts of the Holy Spirit that are best suited to our personalities, and He will best use our skills to serve His cause and glorify His name.

Read Mark 13:34 and 1 Corinthians 12:11. To whom does God give spiritual gifts?

The Bible is clear. God has a special assignment for each one of us in sharing the gospel with others. In Jesus’ parable of the householder who leaves his house to his servants and asks them to care for it, the master of the house gives his servants their appointed work (*Mark 13:34*). There is an assignment for every individual, and God gives spiritual gifts to all to accomplish the divine task or ministry that they are called to. When we surrender our lives to Christ, and through baptism become members of His body, the church, the Holy Spirit imparts gifts so that we can serve the body and witness to the world.

In 1903, Ellen G. White wrote a letter to a certain man to encourage him to use the gifts God had given him in service. “We are all members of God’s family, all in a greater or less degree entrusted with God-given talents, for the use of which we are held responsible. Whether our talent be great or small, we are to use it in God’s service, and we are to recognize the right of every one else to use the gifts entrusted to them.

“Never should we disparage the smallest physical, intellectual, or spiritual capital.”—Letter 260, December 2, 1903.

Read Acts 10:36–38, Matthew 3:16–18, and Acts 2:38–42. What do these texts teach us about the promise of the Holy Spirit at baptism?

Just as Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit at His baptism to prepare and fully equip Him for His ministry to the world, each one of us is promised the Holy Spirit at our baptism. God longs for us to have the positive assurance that He has fulfilled His Word and imparted spiritual gifts to us to bless His church and the world.

The Purpose of Spiritual Gifts

Read 1 Corinthians 12:7 and Ephesians 4:11–16. Why does God impart spiritual gifts to each believer? What are the purposes of those gifts?

Spiritual gifts serve several purposes. God gives them to people so they can nurture and strengthen His church to accomplish His ministry. They are designed to develop a unified church ready to accomplish His mission in the world. The Bible writers give us examples of the spiritual gifts that God imparts to His church, such as ministering, serving, proclaiming, teaching, encouraging, and giving. They also speak about the gifts of hospitality, mercy, helpfulness, and cheerfulness, to mention only a few. For a more complete list, read Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12.

You may be wondering about the relationship between spiritual gifts and natural talents. Spiritual gifts are divinely imparted qualities that are given by the Holy Spirit to each believer to equip them for their special ministry in the church and service to the world. They also may include natural talents that are sanctified by the Holy Spirit and used in service for Christ. All natural talents are God given, but not all are used in the service of Christ.

“The special gifts of the Spirit are not the only talents represented in the parable. It includes all gifts and endowments, whether original or acquired, natural or spiritual. All are to be employed in Christ’s service. In becoming His disciples, we surrender ourselves to Him with all that we are and have. These gifts He returns to us purified and ennobled, to be used for His glory in blessing our fellow men.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 328.

Also, God has established such special gifts as the gift of prophecy and specific offices in the church, including pastors, elders, and teachers, who are teachers within the body of Christ to nurture and equip each member for service (*see Eph. 4:11, 12*). The function of all church leadership is to assist each member in discovering their spiritual gifts and teach them to use these gifts to build up the body of Christ.

What are some natural talents that you have that, however useful and beneficial in a secular environment, also can be a blessing to the church?

Discovering Your Gifts

Compare 1 Corinthians 1:4–9 with 2 Corinthians 1:20–22. What do these passages tell us about the promises of God, especially spiritual gifts prior to the second coming of Christ?

God promises that His church will manifest all of the gifts of the Holy Spirit just before the return of our Lord. His promises are sure. He has given us the witness of the Holy Spirit in our hearts to guide each of us to an understanding of the gifts He has given to us. It is God who gives the gifts and God, through His Spirit, who reveals them to us.

Read Luke 11:13, James 1:5, and Matthew 7:7. If we desire to discover the gifts that God has given to each one of us, what does He invite us to do?

We receive the gifts of the Spirit as we consecrate ourselves to God, and ask Him to reveal to us the gifts He has given us. When our hearts are emptied of self-glory and our priority is to serve Jesus, His Spirit will impress us with the spiritual gifts He has for us. “Not until through faith and prayer the disciples had surrendered themselves fully for His working was the outpouring of the Spirit received. Then in a special sense the goods of heaven were committed to the followers of Christ. . . . The gifts are already ours in Christ, but their actual possession depends upon our reception of the Spirit of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 327.

Spiritual gifts (*see 1 Cor. 12:4–6*) are qualities that God imparts so we can serve Him effectively. Ministries are the general areas we can express our gifts in, and activities are the specific events that allow us to use our gifts. Spiritual gifts do not come fully developed. As the Holy Spirit impresses you with some area of service, pray that He will lead you to a specific ministry to exercise your gift through an outreach activity.

What are your specific gifts and, more important, how can you improve those gifts for the Lord’s service?

Growing Our Gifts

Read the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14–30. What is the most significant thought that stands out to you in this story? Why were the first two servants commended by God and the last servant condemned? What does this parable tell us about the use of our talents? Particularly notice Matthew 25:29.

The master gave to each servant talents according to their “own ability” (*Matt. 25:15, NKJV*). Each individual received a different amount. One received five talents, another two, and another one. Each servant had a choice of how to invest or use the talents that they were given. A crucial point here is that what they were given wasn’t their own. It belonged to someone else who gave them charge over it.

The concern of the master was not who had superior or who had inferior talents. It was not how many talents each was given. The concern was what each one did with what he had been given.

Paul puts it this way in 2 Corinthians 8:12 (*NKJV*): “For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.” For God, what matters isn’t so much what you have but, rather, what you do with what you have.

God commended the first two servants because they were faithful in using their talents. Their talents increased with use. The “wicked” servant did not use the talent the master had given him, and it did not increase. It is an eternal truth that “the law of service becomes the connecting link which binds us to God and to our fellow men.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 326. The unfaithful servant squandered his opportunity to serve and ultimately lost the ability to serve.

When we use the gifts that God has given us for the glory of His name, they will increase, expand, and grow. How can you discover the gifts God has given you? Humbly ask God to reveal to you the areas He desires you to serve in for ministry. As He impresses you, get involved. Your gifts will grow as you use them, and you will find satisfaction in His service.

Think about this parable and apply it to your own life. What, if anything, does it say to you about what you are doing with what you have been given by God? (Remember, anything that you have is a gift from God too.)

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Talents,” pp. 325–365, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*.

The correct understanding of the biblical teaching of spiritual gifts brings unity to the church. The recognition that each one of us is valuable and a needed member of the body of Christ is a unifying thought. Every member of the church is necessary for the accomplishment of Christ’s mission. Every member is gifted for service.

“To everyone there is given a work to do for the Master. To each of His servants are committed special gifts, or talents. ‘Unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability.’ Every servant has some trust for which he is responsible; and the varied trusts are proportioned to our varied capabilities. In dispensing His gifts, God has not dealt with partiality. He has distributed the talents according to the known powers of His servants, and He expects corresponding returns.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 282.

Remember also that the gifts of the Spirit are given for God’s glory and not our own. God gave them to us to exalt His name and advance His cause.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Dwell more on the thought that each one of us has received gifts from God. What practical implications does this have for your local church? What difference can this thought make in the involvement of each member in service?
- 2 Share with the members of your Sabbath School class how the gifts of another member have blessed you. Share with the class how you discovered your own spiritual gifts. What do you think your gifts are, and how are you using them to bless others?
- 3 This lesson pointed out that our gifts grow as we use them. Look back over your own life. Can you think of gifts God has given you that have expanded as you have used them to the glory of His name? At the same time, ask yourself again the question, first broached at the end of Thursday’s study, about how faithful you are with what God has given you.