

# Unlimited Possibilities



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *1 Cor. 12:12; Matt. 3:16, 17; 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?

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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 you know where you can serve most effectively?**

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## 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?

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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, 17; and Acts 2:38–42. What do these texts teach us about the promise of the Holy Spirit at baptism?

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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?

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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?**

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## 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?

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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?

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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?**

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## 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.

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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.)**

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**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.

## He's Simply "Carlos"

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

If J. Carlos Sanchez Ruiz were president of a Seventh-day Adventist union office in his native Peru, church members would courteously address him as "Pastor-President." But in Uruguay, where Carlos is president of the Uruguay Union of Churches Mission, he is known simply as "Carlos."

Men call him "Carlos." Women call him "Carlos." Even small children call him "Carlos."

No one addresses him as president. No one uses the word *pastor*. He is just "Carlos."

Coming from Peru, a country where people are very conscientious about hierarchy, it took Carlos about a year to adjust to Uruguay when he first was elected president in 2011.

"Uruguay is a country unlike any other in South America," Carlos said. "Even though Uruguayans recognize and respect leadership, they do not accept the hierarchical model. A leader is equal to everyone else."

The Uruguayan mind-set, which Carlos linked to a strong European influence, makes the country a promising mission field, church leaders said. The Adventist Church has only 7,358 members in the country of 3.5 million people, or one Adventist for every 470 people, one of the smallest ratios in South America. About half of Uruguay's population lives in the capital, Montevideo.

"How will we reach Montevideo and other cities around the world?" Adventist Church president Ted N. C. Wilson asked pastors during a 2019 visit.

Opening his Bible, he read Jeremiah 32:27, which says, "Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?" (NKJV).

"God responds to His own question in a powerful way," Wilson said. Then he turned to Jeremiah 33:3 and read, "Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know."

"Claim this promise for Uruguay and for your work in the cities," Wilson said. "You face challenges of secularism and materialism very much like Europe. But nothing is too hard for the Lord."



In an indication that nothing is too hard for the Lord, people are being baptized in Uruguay after attending programs at community centers, or "urban centers of influence," operated by the church. Among the new members is a young man, Fernando Aguirre, who gave his heart to Jesus in 2019 after taking stress-management courses at an urban center of influence in Montevideo. Please pray for Uruguay and the other promising mission fields in secular societies around the world.



**Key Text:** *1 Corinthians 12:1–11*

**Study Focus:** *1 Corinthians 12:12–22, Romans 12:3–8, Ephesians 4:7–16.*

## ***Part I: Overview***

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This week’s lesson surveys the topic of spiritual gifts in the Bible. Many Christians have practical questions about the gifts of the Spirit: What are spiritual gifts? Are they reserved for just a few super-Christians? Are they for every believer? How do I discover my spiritual gifts? What is the purpose of these spiritual gifts?

Spiritual gifts are intimately linked to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The reason Scripture calls them “spiritual” gifts is because they are gifts, abilities, or talents imparted by the Holy Spirit to each believer for the glory of God. Spiritual gifts are given by the Spirit not to glorify ourselves. They are not to be used in selfish exhibitionism to show how talented we are or to draw attention to ourselves. Rightly understood, all the gifts imparted by the Holy Spirit are given for two essential purposes: to nurture or strengthen the body of Christ and to fulfill the mission of Christ in reaching the world with the gospel.

Spiritual gifts are imparted to each believer. These gifts have different functions. In Christ everyone has equal value, but we do not have the same roles or the same gifts. This diversity of gifts strengthens the church and empowers its witness to the world. These differences are a strength and not a weakness. It is the Holy Spirit who chooses which gifts to impart to each believer, based on his or her background, culture, and personality in light of felt needs in the church community. The Holy Spirit knows best which gifts to give that will bring satisfaction in Christ’s service and the greatest blessing to the church and the world.

## ***Part II: Commentary***

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The apostle Paul begins 1 Corinthians 12 with these words, “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant” (*1 Cor. 12:1, NKJV*). The reason the apostle Paul spends the entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 12, most of Romans 12, and a large portion of Ephesians 4

on the topic of spiritual gifts is because a proper understanding of spiritual gifts is vital for both the nurture and growth of the church.

Let's first answer some basic questions regarding spiritual gifts. What are spiritual gifts? How do they differ from natural talents? Who receives spiritual gifts? What is their purpose, and why are they given? Spiritual gifts are divinely bestowed qualities given by the Holy Spirit specifically to build the body of Christ and enable believers to be effective witnesses in the world. Spiritual gifts are the channel through which our ministry for Christ flows.

Of course, all our abilities, whether we are believers or unbelievers, come from God. Every talent we have is God-given. Spiritual gifts, however, are different from natural talents in two distinct ways. First, they differ from natural talents in the way they are used and, second, where they are used. The motivation for natural talents may be self-glory. The motivation in using spiritual gifts is always God's glory. Natural talents are often used to advance one's standing in the world. Spiritual gifts are unselfishly used to bless and expand God's church.

Spiritual gifts are promised to each one who commits his or her life to Christ. Discussing spiritual gifts, the apostle Paul states: "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills" (*1 Cor. 12:11, NKJV*).

When we commit our lives to Jesus, the Holy Spirit imparts the gifts for witness and service. Unconverted individuals may have natural talents in some specific area of their lives. When they are converted, the Holy Spirit often redirects or repurposes those natural talents for the glory of God and the advancement of the cause of Christ. There also are times that the Holy Spirit imparts gifts to individuals that they never had before or imagined that they ever could have. They now find fulfillment in using their newly discovered gifts for the service of Christ. As part of the body of Christ, they find joy in making their contribution to upbuilding Christ's church and participating in His mission.

According to our passage in 1 Corinthians 12:11, the Holy Spirit distributes spiritual gifts to "each one individually as He wills" (*NKJV*). The Holy Spirit does not impart the same gift to everyone, but He does impart gifts to each believer. He does not overlook one individual. Each believer shares in the gifts of the Spirit. Ellen G. White underscores this vital truth: "To every person is committed some peculiar gift or talent which is to be used to advance the Redeemer's kingdom."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 618.

Emphasize that each member of your class has been given a spiritual gift or gifts through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. If we believe God's Word, we can thank God for the gifts He has given us; pray that He will reveal them; and, when He does, use them for His glory. The Holy Spirit does not give gifts to a select few and neglect or bypass others who may seem less talented. The Holy Spirit imparts God's gifts to each one individually as He wills.

### **Illustration: The Holy Spirit Chooses the Gifts**

Let's suppose it's a friend's birthday. Who chooses the birthday gift you will give? You will, of course. I remember as a boy I would make my birthday list, but my parents would ultimately be the ones that chose my gift. Most of the time the choice that they made was far better than the choice I would have made. They knew what I would be happy with better than what I thought might please me.

The Holy Spirit knows what gifts to impart to each believer to best glorify Jesus in his or her life. As *The SDA Bible Commentary* says, "The Holy Spirit distributes His gifts to believers in accordance with His knowledge of their capacities and the needs existing in the experience of each individual. It is not an arbitrary decision, but one based on supreme knowledge and understanding."—Vol. 6, p. 772. This should be a great source of encouragement to each one of us. We have the absolute assurance that not only has the Holy Spirit imparted gifts to us but also that they are exactly the ones we need in order to be most effective witnesses for Christ. The gifts you have are the ones that the Holy Spirit has seen most needful for your spiritual growth and the cause of Christ.

### **Varied Gifts Best Contribute to Christ's Body**

Although the church is one body, it is composed of a variety of members all contributing to the one goal of revealing Christ to the world through its witness. Writing to the members of the church at Rome, the apostle Paul states, "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them" (*Rom. 12:5, 6, NKJV*). The apostle amplifies this thought in 1 Corinthians 12:12, "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ" (*NKJV*).

There are a few things that will be important to underline for your class as you discuss the body of Christ analogy with them. In the human body, each of the members has a function. There are no inactive members. Each member has been placed in the human body to play a certain role. Each one has its own unique function. Each member of the human body contributes to the overall well-being of the entire body. The church needs active members who are committed to contributing to the overall health of the church, the body of Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4, the Bible gives us examples of some of the gifts that God places in His church. Some of those gifts are leadership gifts such as being apostles, prophets, teachers, evan-

gelist, and pastors that have guided God’s church through the centuries. The purpose of these leadership gifts is to facilitate unity, foster spiritual growth, and equip church members for mission. These same passages also speak of gifts that are ministry gifts given to each believer. A few examples might be hospitality, liberality, helps, mercy, faith, and healing.

Many of these gifts are qualities of a converted heart. We are all to exhibit hospitality to others in our daily walk with Christ. Each believer is called to be liberal in his or her giving patterns. Help, or support to others, and mercy are part of the life of each Christian. We all are to seek ways to bless and minister God’s healing grace to others. If these qualities are the natural response of the converted heart to be revealed in the lives of all believers, why are they considered spiritual gifts selected by the Holy Spirit for some and not others?

The answer is simply this: while all believers are called to reveal a gracious, hospitable spirit in their lives, every believer is not called to the special ministry of hospitality. While we are all called to be liberal, we are not all called to a ministry where liberality becomes our means of service for Christ. Conversion brings changes in our lives. We long to reveal the qualities of a Christlike life daily. The Holy Spirit amplifies and expands those qualities, and as He does, some of these qualities become our channel of service in Christ’s church. At times, He imparts totally new qualities as spiritual gifts in order for us to discover our most satisfying and productive role in the body of Christ. As the apostle Paul states, this creates an “effective working by which every part does its share” and “causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (*Eph. 4:16, NKJV*).

### ***Part III: Life Application***

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If the Holy Spirit imparts spiritual gifts to all believers for the upbuilding of God’s church and its witness in the world, how can we discover our spiritual gifts? Here are some simple steps that you will want to share with your class. Invite class members to follow these suggestions:

- 1. Tell God they believe He has given them spiritual gifts and ask Him to reveal the gifts He has imparted. Scripture reveals, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (*James 1:17, NKJV*). The God that imparts His precious gifts to each one of us will reveal them through His Holy Spirit as we ask Him. (*See Luke 11:13.*)**

2. Counsel with respected spiritual leaders about how God is leading them and the areas of service that might be available and open for participation.
  
3. Begin using their gifts that God reveals. The purpose of the gifts God gives is service. As we begin using the gifts that He has given us, our gifts will expand, and our abilities will increase. Our spiritual gifts do not come fully developed. We become more effective in our service and our gifts enlarge as we use them. As Ellen G. White so powerfully states, “He who will give himself fully to God will be guided by the divine hand. He may be lowly and apparently ungifted; yet if with a loving, trusting heart he obeys every intimation of God’s will, his powers will be purified, ennobled, energized, and his capabilities will be increased.” —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 283.

As we use the gifts God has given us, we will find joy, satisfaction, and effectiveness in our service for Christ. Others will confirm our giftedness in a particular area, and the church will be blessed.

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