

**A Biblical View of Spiritual Gifts**  
**For The Common Good**  
**Chapter 4**  
**The Serving Gifts (Part 2)**

**Knowledge and Wisdom**

Since these two grace gifts are usually inseparable, we will discuss them jointly. Knowledge comes from a careful and intentional study of the God's Word. A believer with the spiritual gift of knowledge will make it their life's ambition to study the word intensely for the express purpose of sharing God's truth with others in order to help them grow. God never intended for believers to just "soak up" knowledge just for the sake of having it. God wants believers to pass on everything that they receive from Him to others.

I have used this example many times over, but for the sake of illustration I will use the analogy of the dead sea. The dead sea is a body of water in the southern part of Israel. It was formed after the destruction of the infamous Sodom and Gomorrah in **Genesis Chapter 19**. Before God destroyed these wicked cities of the plain for their shameful depravity, the Jordan River flowed unrestricted through this plain causing the land to be lush and fertile (**Genesis 13:10**). When God rained fire and brimstone down upon the plain, however, the landscape was radically changed from a well watered plain into a deep depression in the earth. The life-giving water from the Jordan could no longer flow through this valley, but instead it became trapped in the depressed earth and caused it to stagnate in a foul pool now aptly called The Dead Sea.

When water is not allowed to flow freely from one place to another, it stagnates and subsequently loses its ability to sustain life. This same phenomenon can also occur in a spiritual sense in a believer who "drinks in" the life giving truth from God's word yet refuses to share it with others. They take life in, but nothing flows out, and as a result they become spiritually stagnate. They aren't passing on "life" to those who thirst for it. A stagnate Christian is one of the most miserable people on earth for they are serving no purpose in the kingdom. Those who have the gift of knowledge are required to pass it on, and that brings us to the spiritual gift of wisdom.

Wisdom is what is imparted when someone with the gift of Knowledge uses that gift to instruct others on how they are to live. In short, they teach others how to apply the truths of scripture into their everyday lives, thus making them better followers of Christ. Their deep knowledge of God's word has given them insight into the heart of God, and they are now equipped to instruct others, based on Biblical precepts, how to handle any situation that arises according to Biblical truth. These people are very accustomed to having their phone ring at all hours with young believers on the line asking for advice. They use their knowledge to dispense wisdom, and God's truth flows through them like a river.

In **Titus Chapter 2**, Paul instructs Titus, his young protege, to instruct the various people within the church "according to sound doctrine" so that they in turn may teach younger believers (**Titus 2:1-8**). Sound doctrine is found in those with the spiritual gifts of knowledge and wisdom. The healthy church usually has more than a few people with this gift. These men and women have walked with God for many years and have been given the grace to advise younger believers in the way they should go. This particular set of gifts takes many years to mature, because no one can become filled with knowledge and wisdom over night. It is an arduous process that comes from both digging in the truths of God's word along with walking with God for many years.

The Bible also commands those who desire to have wisdom to ask God for it (**James 1:5-7**), and he will give it generously. He does this through the diligent study and application of The Scriptures, for they contain all the knowledge and wisdom that we will ever need. Do you have a discipline for studying God's word? Have you been walking with God through both the joys and the trials of this life for many years now? Do you have the ability to put young believers back on "the straight and narrow" when they get off course? Does your phone ring at all hours with Christians seeking your spiritual guidance? Then you might have the spiritual gifts of knowledge and wisdom.

## Encouragement / Exhortation

The gift of encouragement, also known as the gift of exhortation, is often found in conjunction with the gift of mercy. Christians who possess this particular spiritual gift have an amazing ability to sense when someone needs a word of encouragement to help them carry on. I cannot begin to tell you how many times that I have been discouraged in the ministry. When you try to serve God in this fallen world, the enemy is constantly sending his troops to try and cause you to stumble and fall. It is the very nature of spiritual warfare.

So many times I have just wanted to quit and just walk away. But in those times God has graciously sent one or more encouragers (depending on the severity of the depression) to speak a word of encouragement to me and help me refocus upon the task at hand. The encourager knows just what to say and at just the right moment. The sentence usually starts with, "Brother, I don't know what you're going through, but I just felt led to come to you and say that God is using you in a mighty way to...". Just when you need it the most, the word of encouragement comes like a rain shower upon a parched field! Thank God for those who bring this message of hope to us at just the right time.

None of us who serve in the kingdom with a true spirit of sincerity are doing it for a "pat on the back". We all have been called to serve our Lord with a spirit of gratitude because of what He has done for us (**Romans 12:1**). However, everyone needs an "atta-boy" or an "atta-girl" now and again. Without the right amount of encouragement, a child will never have the confidence to attempt anything difficult in this life. Every parent knows that they must often encourage their children so they can grow up to be confident adults who live productive lives. Unfortunately, many in this world don't ever realize just how much encouragement that we as adults also need to continually be productive. Jesus was a great encourager, He knew just when to console His disciples, and just when to give them a push in the right direction. The encourager who is using their spiritual gift will be able to discern this as well. For sometimes a word of encouragement needs to be gentle and loving, while other times it needs to be a "kick in the pants" so to speak.

Simon Peter was a pretty emotional guy, and Jesus had His hands full keeping him on track. When ol' Pete would go off the deep end, sometimes Jesus would get pretty rough with him in order to set him straight (**Matthew 16:23**), and then other times Jesus would be very gentle to keep Peter from getting discouraged or afraid (**Luke 22:31-34**). Encouragement oft times needs to be correcting in nature. This is why the gift is often called "Exhortation".

To Exhort means to build up or strengthen. The Greek word for exhortation (*parakaleo*) literally means "to call to one's side". It carries with it the image of one who is wiser and more mature putting their arm around someone to show them the right path. Sometimes a Christian will become discouraged because they have strayed from the "narrow way" due to some sin they have allowed to creep into their lives. The encourager needs to be bold in dealing with this type of situation by speaking the truth in love in order to put the wounded warrior back in the battle (**Galatians 6:1**). To be an encourager/exhorter sometimes calls for speaking harsh truths not just giving pats on the back for a job well done.

A Spirit filled encourager seems to always know what to say and just when to say it. Do you find yourself always looking for someone to build up? Are you often led by the Holy Spirit to give a word of correction or encouragement to other believers? Do you ever have a strong desire to walk up to someone and tell them to keep fighting the good fight, and hear them say, "You don't know how much I needed to hear that at this very moment!?" Are you willing to tell people hard truths that they don't necessarily want to hear, but desperately need to help them stay on track in their spiritual walk? Then you may have the gift of encouragement/exhortation.

## **Discernment**

The gift of discernment is the supernatural ability to determine the difference between truth and falsehood. In **1 John 4:1**, we are told as Christians to "test the spirits" to prove whether they speak truth or not. All Christians have a certain amount of discernment, but those who have the spiritual gift of discernment have an exaggerated sense of being able to recognize truth when they hear it. Conversely, anything that is false will be clearly evident to those with the gift of discernment. Quite often those with discernment will find themselves at odds with those who are motivated by other spiritual gifts, such as mercy.

People who have the gift of mercy truly want to see the best in everyone. This sometimes causes them to be taken in by well crafted stories by, shall we say, less than scrupulous individuals who would take advantage of the church. Those with the gift of discernment can readily see when they are being "played", and will feel compelled to warn the church of falsehood. For example, for several years I was on staff at a rather large church who had a substantial part of its annual budget (10%) set aside for benevolence ministry. The church gave away thousands of dollars each year to help with everything from utilities to monthly rent payments in order to help those in need in our community. It was a great way to allow us to share the love of Jesus with our neighbors around the church.

While a ministry such as this can be a great asset, it also can be a detriment if not properly managed. We soon learned that people with the spiritual gift of mercy were drawn to this ministry, as would be expected. What we were not prepared for was the outcry that arose within our community, that our church was giving money away that was being used to buy alcohol, drugs, and various other, shall we say, unproductive items (let your mind fill in the blanks) in the neighborhood. Needless to say, what started as a well intentioned outreach had suddenly turned into a public relations nightmare for our church.

Upon careful review of just how things had gotten so bad, we discovered that everyone who was involved in our benevolence ministry program had the gift of mercy. We had no administrators, nor did we have anyone in the program with the gift of discernment (obviously). We quickly made some changes. What we found was that although this type of ministry didn't readily attract those Christians with administrative or discerning gifts, those gifts were desperately needed for the ministry to function properly. The administrators set guidelines for the way money was to be disbursed. No one who came to our church with a need would be turned away. However, we never gave away money again. We paid utility bills directly to the utility itself. We paid rent to the leaseholders. We bought groceries and gave them directly to the people instead of giving out grocery money.

One of my favorite things that was put in place was the system of graduated assistance. For example, if someone came with a need we would help them, but if they agreed to come to a church service and hear the gospel, we helped them more. If they attended regularly, we helped them even more, and so on. No longer did we just give money and take every hard luck story at face value. Those with the gift of discernment carefully listened to every case, then they fully checked the situation out to find if what was being told was true. When the discerners warned us of falsehoods, we heeded those warnings. As a result, our public relations nightmare turned into one of the most effective ministries of our church. Thanks in no small part to those with the spiritual gift of discernment.

Another way that discerners help the church, is with the identification of false doctrine. There are so many so-called theologians in the world today, spouting the most ridiculous and perverted doctrines that so many of the masses seem over anxious to accept without the slightest challenge. Those with discernment can spot these phonies a mile away. Have you ever found yourself in front of the television watching some "snake oil salesman" televangelist and hear them say something that just makes your inner "creep-o-meter" go off the charts? That is discernment! When you hear false doctrine and the alarm bell rings loudly inside your head, that is the Holy Spirit telling you to watch out. So how do discerners know how to recognize truth? By hiding the word of God in their hearts (***Psalm 119:11***).

Before I was in the ministry, I was a banker. One of the most dangerous challenges faced by the banking industry is counterfeit money. As a banker, I was required to regularly attend seminars on how to spot counterfeit bills. Oddly enough, we NEVER examined any counterfeit money during the seminars. Instead, we were required to study the real thing. We would carefully examine genuine U.S. Treasury

printed Bills. We would look at the ink, the fibers in the paper, the detail of the faces on the bills, and note the feel and weight of the paper itself. In short, we became experts on U.S. Currency. After that, we could spot a phony a mile away! It is the same with God's Word. If we study the Word with our every fiber, and hide its truth in our hearts, then nothing false will be able to deceive us.

The Hebrew word for truth is *Dabar* (pronounced dah-bar). It actually means "word." In the Jewish way of reasoning, every word that comes from God is truth. The Hebrew word for a lie is *Lo Dabar*, which literally means *Not Word!* We as Christians should take a lesson from this. If something doesn't line up with the Word of God, then it is a lie! Period. Example: The Bible teaches us that God made the heavens and the earth in six days, and on the seventh day He rested. Conversely the theory of evolution says the world was formed over a period of millions of years and was set in motion by a cosmic accident. I believe the word of God. So, I am therefore convinced that the theory of evolution is *Lo Dabar* (Not Word) and as a result I refuse to allow that which is "not word" enter into my world view. If that makes me a laughing stock to the so called enlightened ones in the ivy league circles, I can live with that. I never looked up to those types anyway. At least I know truth when I hear it!

Discernment allows us to see what is real and what is not. Those with the spiritual gift of discernment are the moral compass of the church. We would do well to heed their wisdom when they speak. Do you have a powerful sense of separating truth and falsehood when you hear them? Do you feel a strong sense of urgency to warn others when you see dangerous false doctrines being spread? Can you easily spot someone who is disingenuous? Then you may have the spiritual gift of discernment.

### **The Gift of Faith**

The last of the serving gifts that we will examine is the spiritual gift of faith. As we have previously discussed, all Christians possess some measure of faith. Without faith it is impossible to become a Christian in the first place. With that being said, not everyone has been given the same measure of faith (**Romans 12: 3-8**). Bearing that in mind, have you ever noticed that some Christians just seem to have a lot more faith than others? Faith grows with spiritual maturity, and just like muscle, it is increased with exercise. The more a Christian walks by faith, the more faith they will have. Here is a simple truth. If you have never been in a position where if God doesn't come through and deliver you then you are "toast", then you have never walked by faith! The Bible says that the "**just shall live by faith**" (**Hebrews 10:38**), and "**Without faith it is impossible to please God**" (**Hebrews 11:6**). So then, it goes without saying that all Christians are to walk by faith!

However, there are some Christians that have been endowed with a greater portion of faith than the rest of us. They have the spiritual gift of faith. These special believers are the ones who are able to remain calm while the rest of us are in panic mode! Remember the story of Jesus on the boat sleeping through a vicious storm while His disciples were coming unglued (**Mark 4:35-41**)? They woke Him up and screamed above the noise of the rain and thunder, "**don't you care. that we are about to drown?!**". "Don't You care?" What a foolish thing to say to God! Of Course He cares! He just doesn't panic. Why? Because He knows what He's doing. The disciples lost control because they forgot that He is in control! Upon being rudely awakened, The Lord simply raised Himself up and said the equivalent of "Shhhh" and the storm just ended. I'll bet the silence was deafening! I often wonder what kind of face the Lord made when the disciples woke Him up from His nap. I'll bet it wasn't pleasant!

I remember once when I was in college, I had an early class, and my roommate had decided to sleep in. It drove me so insane that he was lying there sleeping peacefully and I had to be up at the crack of dawn. I actually took a hair dryer (I had hair back then) and blew hot air in my roommate's face to wake him up. It goes without saying, he didn't see the humor in it. I, on the other hand, found it both satisfying and hilarious! I'll bet Jesus was none too thrilled to be awakened from his slumber by a bunch of grown smelly fishermen screaming like little girls. I'm also willing to bet that he didn't use His "inside voice" when He asked them, "**Do you STILL have no faith ?!**" (**vs.40**).

When we doubt, it says more about what we believe about God than it says about ourselves. Doubt is, simply put, a lack of trust. We can recite all the verses we like, and sing all the great hymns of

the faith, but we find out what we really believe when the storm comes. Thank God for the believer who has been given by grace a greater measure of faith. For it is that believer, who reminds us of God's great love and mighty power when the storms of life come our way.

Those who have the gift of faith are often called "prayer warriors" by others in the church. This is because they spend large amounts of time before the throne of God in prayer, which in turn allows them to properly exercise their gift of faith. Although, as I have stated earlier, I do not believe in a spiritual gift of "prayer", because the Father doesn't play favorites. He wants to hear from all of His children often. However, it does seem that those among us with the most faith tend to pray more earnestly than the rest. It can be argued that great faith has a direct correlation with great prayer.

If ever a man had the spiritual gift of faith, it would be the great George Mueller who lived and ministered in the late 1800's in England. He embodied the spiritual gift of faith. He established several orphanages in England although he himself was very poor. There are many stories of times when there was no food to feed the hundreds of children under his care, and Mueller would have the children sit at the table and give thanks over their empty plates, only to hear a knock at the door with some merchant bringing baskets of food to the orphanage.

Mueller lived by faith and at the end of his life he died penniless but had saved the lives of over ten thousand of England's orphans. His critics actually criticized him for raising many of the poor "above their natural station in life", because Mueller saw to it that these poor unwanted children were given a quality education by building schools for them. He trusted in God for his every need, and God saw to it that every need was met, time and time again.

The church of Jesus Christ desperately needs great men and women of faith for they help to remind us that our God is ever faithful. He cares! The Bible commands us to **"cast our cares upon Him, for He cares for us."** (1 Peter 5:7). Do you have a deep and abiding trust in God? Do you have the God-given ability to remain steadfast in faith while those around you are in disarray? Do you feel compelled to calm others "storms" by gently reminding them of God's unending presence? Then you may indeed have the spiritual gift of faith. Don't be afraid to speak up, for the church desperately needs your clarity.

This concludes our study of the serving gifts, and as you can well discern, they each play a vital role within the Body of Christ. Let us now move on to explore the dramatic and often controversial "Sign Gifts", so we can fully understand all of the spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit has given the church, for the common good.

**...Truth!**