

Spiritual Gifts Position Paper

A spiritual gift is any Spirit empowered ability that is used in the service of God's Kingdom. There is often discussion about the difference between a natural gift or ability and a "spiritual gift." All gifts and abilities come from the Lord and are therefore God's gifts to us (Psalm 139:13; Deuteronomy 8:18). When we talk about "spiritual gifts" we are talking about unique potentials given by the Holy Spirit to Believers at the time of their conversion for the purpose of serving the Kingdom.

As followers of Christ we are called to "not be ignorant" about our gifts but to use them for the good of God's church (1 Corinthians 12:1-11). Spiritual gifts are given by God by the Holy Spirit to be exercised in love (1 Corinthians 13-14). Everyone who has accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior has at least one gift and most followers of Christ have several. No person has all the gifts. Gifts are given by the Holy Spirit at His discretion; they are not earned. While there are different kinds of gifts ranging from the supernatural (e.g. working of miracles) to the natural (e.g. administration) all are Spirit empowered. Some examples of spiritual gifts can be found in 1 Corinthians 12:8-11, Romans 12:6-8, Ephesians 4:11, 1 Peter 4:9-11, 2 Timothy 4:5.

Definitions of Gifts Listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-11; Romans 12:6-8; 1 Peter 4:9-11; Ephesians 4:11; 2 Timothy 4:5:

Administration: The Spirit given ability of working with and through followers toward achieving Biblical goals and organizational objectives.

Apostleship/Missionary: The Spirit given ability to minister cross-culturally.

Discernment: The Spirit given ability to distinguish between truth and error, good and evil.

Evangelism: The Spirit given ability to be an effective follower of God in bringing others to a saving knowledge of Jesus.

Exhortation: The Spirit given ability to come alongside another person who needs encouragement, admonition, challenge, or earnest advice with the discernment to distinguish which facet or combination of facets will most help them.

Faith: The Spirit given ability to trust and act on God's revelation or character, especially when it helps others to do the same.

Giving: The Spirit given ability to earn money, manage it well, and generously and wisely give to the Lord's work.

Healing: The Spirit given ability to reverse the destructive impact of sin through physical, emotional, or spiritual healing to bring both comfort and/or health to those who are suffering as it matches up to the sovereign will of God

Helps: The Spirit given ability to provide help to others in their ministry.

Hospitality: The Spirit given ability to provide an open home graciously and willingly to minister to others.

Interpreting Tongues: The Spirit given ability to interpret known languages unknown to the user of the tongue.

Knowledge: The Spirit given ability to research, remember and make effective use of biblical information on a many different subjects. The Spirit given ability to attain significant competence in using God's revealed truths from Scripture.

Leadership: The Spirit given ability to lead by example, motivate others, and equip followers to be effective in the Body of Christ.

Mercy: The Spirit given ability to minister to the suffering or undeserving in ways that encourage those who are hurting and help them to sense the mercy and grace of God.

Miracles: The Spirit given ability to call upon God to do supernatural acts that reveal His power as they line up with His sovereign will and good pleasure.

However, note that sometimes what people see as miracles may not be of the LORD. Every act must be tested because, Satan is a great counterfeiter (Matthew 24:24). It is wise to consider the following questions when considering the possibility of a miracle:

1. Does it promote Jesus as God in the flesh? 1 John 4:1-4
2. Does it follow scriptural principles? Deuteronomy 13:1-5
3. Does it encourage submission or rebellion? 1 Peter 4:10-11
4. Does it build others up? 1 Corinthians 12:7
5. Is it exercised with love as its root motivation? 1 Corinthians 13
6. Is it being used in ways that bring glory or fame to the person rather than to God? Philippians 2:1-4

Prophecy: The Spirit given ability to proclaim the Word of God clearly. The message may be directly from God or from Scripture. It may predict the future or be God's perspective on present events or persons. In any case, it is God's message proclaimed in the power of the Spirit. It may not supplant or contradict established scripture or biblical principles in any way.

We must test any revelation or prophecy (1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 John 4:1):

1. Are the speaker and the message loyal to the LORD? (Deuteronomy 13:1-11; 18:20)
2. Is it consistent with Scripture? (Deuteronomy 13:1-11; 1 Kings 13:15-18)
3. Is what they describe or predict accurate in every detail, without fail? (Deuteronomy 18:22)
4. Is their character Christ-like (Jeremiah 23:9-40; Micah 3:5-10)
5. Does their word lead to up-building and encouragement? (1 Corinthians 14:3)
6. Do the elders of the church affirm their word? (1 Corinthians 14:29)

Shepherding/Pastoring: The Spirit given ability to effectively guide, feed, and protect followers in Christ so that that are in the process of becoming more like Jesus.

Speaking in Tongues: The Spirit given ability to proclaim the things of God to unbelievers who do not speak the indigenous language (1 Corinthians 14:20-22). It can also be used to praise God or pray to God in languages unknown to the user. This gift is not to be exercised publicly apart from the Spirit given gift of interpretation.

Teaching: The Spirit given ability to give an understanding of Biblical truths to those willing to learn in ways that are relevant and understandable to the learners. The teaching should result in their spiritual growth, faith, and knowledge of God.

Wisdom: The Spirit given ability to use biblical knowledge effectively in ways that help others to apply the knowledge to life's situations and problems.

Frequently Asked Questions:

What is the purpose of gifts?

To accomplish the purpose Jesus has for the church. At MVCC it is to "Grow a community of Christ-followers who live and love like Jesus."

When are gifts given?

Most often we receive Spirit given gifts at our acceptance of Christ as savior. However, there appear to be other times when the Spirit wills the giving of additional gifts because it suits the purposes and plans of the Kingdom (1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6).

How many gifts are there?

The biblical gift lists in the Bible contain approximately 20 different gifts. These scriptural lists are representative rather than exhaustive. The variety of biblical gifts shows us some of the range of workings of the Spirit in the people of God. The biblical lists are examples of Spirit given gifts. The lists have definite variety and the fact that no gift other than prophecy appears in more than one makes it very likely that Paul is selecting examples rather than giving a definitive list. Furthermore, two Old Testament gifts, craftsmanship (Exodus 31:5) and worship (1 Samuel 16:16-18), don't appear in the New Testament lists.

Has the Spirit stopped giving some of the gifts?

They are all still active as the Spirit wills to give them. The Bible, our complete and our final authority, does not conclusively indicate that the gifts have stopped.

How do you discover your gift?

Ask yourself "What am I good at?" "What am I passionate about?" "What do others confirm in me?" Remember that not all gifts are listed in Scripture so don't limit your search to those lists. Many spiritual gift inventories can be misleading since they are often built on a specific list of gifts.

Are any gifts to be sought?

We can ask freely, but it is the Spirit who decides and distributes.

Are any gifts for all people?

Yes. In 1 Corinthians 14:1 Paul exhorts all to prophesy, that is, to speak God's Word with transforming power.

What does Paul mean by “greater gifts (1 Corinthians 12:31; 14:5)?”

They are gifts that edify the church more and bring more benefit to others. That some gifts are greater does not mean others are unimportant or that those having greater gifts are better Christians.

Are all Spirit empowered gifts miraculous?

Gifts such as encouragement or administration listed in Romans 12 and 1 Peter 4 do not appear to be miraculous or supernatural.

Have certain gifts ceased?

When certain individuals purport that certain gifts are no longer active in this day and age it is often referred to as “Cessationism”. Cessationism is the belief that the miraculous gifts such as healing, tongues, prophetic revelation, and supernatural knowledge pertained to the apostolic era only, served a purpose that was unique to the era before the New Testament was complete, and passed from use before the canon of Scripture was closed.

There is no reason to connect the fact that since the Bible is completed there has been a cessation of any of the gifts. We could receive revelation without adding to Scripture. We must be careful to realize that the only inspired, inerrant, trustworthy revelation is in Scripture. All other revelation must be tested.

What is the big deal about tongues?

The Gift of Tongues has probably caused greater division in God's church than any other single issue. There are those who hold that any believer who is truly saved must speak in a tongue in order to confirm the saving work of Jesus in their life. Others believe that tongues are alive and active in churches today and that they are to be used freely in open exaltation of God in both human and unknown angelic languages. Some hold a position that may be called “open, but cautious.” This position holds that God may empower believers to use tongues as He deigns, but that they are used in ways that are aligned with biblical principles set forth in 1 Corinthians 12-14. Finally, there are those who hold the position that tongues as a gift of the Spirit no longer exists today as the Bible is complete and available.

Here is a summary of various views regarding what kinds of tongues are spoken:

1. Human languages unknown to the speaker
 - a. Acts 2 tongues are clearly human languages
 - b. “dialect” is always human languages

2. Something like an angelic language
 - a. 1 Corinthians 13:1 "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal."
 - b. Is Paul speaking of humans "speaking angel" or the most exalted speech is useless apart from love?
 - c. There is no record of angels speaking anything other than human languages
 - d. It is ironic that according to 1 Corinthians 13:8, humans stop speaking tongues
 - e. 1 Corinthians 14:2 People speaking in tongues speak only to God
The point here is the uselessness of tongues when they are not interpreted, not their value in speaking to God.

What are biblical guidelines for speaking in tongues in a church assembly?

1 Corinthians 14:26-28, 39-40 establishes clear guidelines for speaking in tongues. Paul asserts that only two or three should speak and one at a time (v.27), there must be interpretation or the speaker should refrain from speaking out loud (v.28) and there must be control, not confusion (v.33, 40).

Does 1 Corinthians 14:20-23 indicate that tongues are given as a sign to Jewish Unbelievers?

Nothing in the context is about Jewish folk. The appeal to Isaiah 28:11-12 isn't about evangelism, but judgment. The tongues in the streets of Jerusalem is a sign of God's displeasure on foolish Israel (Isaiah 28:11-12).

What is position of Mountain View Community Church?

At MVCC we hold the "open but cautious" view described in the section regarding tongues. We hold this view for all gifts. As such there are a number of considerations that will be made regarding the practice of spiritual gifts at MVCC:

- All gifts will be used to build up the body.
- Should the exercise of any gift become disruptive or divisive, the leadership of MVCC will ask those expressing those gifts to do so in a way that is consistent with scripture and honoring to all without being disruptive to worship or events.
- Those exercising any spiritual gift will be expected to submit to the leadership of the church.