

The Gifts of the Father: The creational gifts

A Study in Spiritual Gifts (part 3)

Since 2017, Columbia Pictures and Marvel Studios have cooperated to bring a new iteration of Spiderman to the screen, with the young and rising British actor Tom Holland in the lead role as Peter Parker.

When we meet the character, Peter Parker is a 15-year-old in high school. He has a friend, who becomes his accomplice, named Ned Leeds. The friends attend Midtown School of Science and Technology. They are both intelligent and nerdy. Peter, however, is given a gift of power and responsibility when he is bitten by a radioactive spider.



Ned could just as easily have been bitten by the spider and become Spiderman —or maybe not. Instead, he offers to help his friend Peter as ‘the guy in the chair’, working behind the scenes to provide technology and research vital to Spiderman’s heroic work.



In the most recent movie in the franchise, *No Way Home* (2021), Ned unexpectedly discovers he has magic power. This power

was latent in his family, it seems. Having procured Dr. Strange’s sling ring, Ned accidentally, but fortuitously, opens a magic portal at a vital moment in the story. With his newfound magic power, Ned is able to serve Spiderman’s work far beyond what he thought possible of himself.

Peter does not have magical abilities but Ned does —or will once he develops them and becomes a wizard. Ned now has an unique gift to give, with its own power and responsibility.

Peter and Ned started out as normal teenagers with gifts to give from their technical and scientific intelligence. Peter was unexpectedly bitten by a spider and given a supernatural gift that he puts to heroic use with Ned’s help. Peter and Ned are a superhero team, a team which later adds MJ. Once Ned gets a supernatural gift, different from Peter’s, they do not cease being an heroic team. Ned now has a different gift to give to serve their greater purpose.

The friends of Jesus are a lot like Ned Leeds. We have ordinary gifts to give and use, in faith, but there may also come a time when we discover we have an extraordinary gift. It is then our responsibility to use this gift of the Holy Spirit for the greater good, in partnership with others for building up the Church.

When we study the spiritual gifts described in the Bible, we tend to focus on the extraordinary and supernatural gifts; as a result, we forget the giver and the greater purpose we are called to serve. The giver is our Creator, the triune God. The purpose is to partner with a people who bear his image to his glory and honour and praise, for the common good of all people. The gift is the Holy Spirit who helps us each to become fully human and to serve the Purpose in our own unique way.

Let us therefore offer to God's glory what we have to give and use it wherever we are and however we can.

Life To The Full

Remember that our Creator had a purpose in mind when he created: the triune God so overflows with love and cooperation that they created a people to partner with him for his honour and glory. The creation mandate to multiply and subdue is a partnership between humankind and the Lord to make this Earth a human and divine dwelling place.

We were created with a purpose for THE PURPOSE! And we have been provided all we need for life and godliness. Let us not squander our lives and gifts for every good and perfect gift comes from our Father above (Jam 1:17).¹ Let us use what we have responsibly.

Since each human person is made with physical, emotional, mental, social and spiritual aspects to our personality, it is only when our whole person is healthy that we thrive. Our stubborn self-centredness has led us to reject our Creator; thus, we do not thrive. Placing our faith in Jesus and living a Christian lifestyle brings us back in touch with our purpose and The Purpose.

The Triune Godhead Is an Unity of Three Persons

Christian doctrine about God declares there is only one true God, but this God is three persons —the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Each person of the godhead is distinct from, yet interrelated with, the others. All three persons are fully, equally and eternally divine.

Each Person Gives Different Gifts

When we look closely at those biblical passages that indicate spiritual gifts, we discover each person of the godhead gives gifts.² Gifts given by God-the-Father seem to coincide with our basic “motivations”, the inherent tendencies of each different person by reason of the Creator's unique workmanship in their creation. These are therefore called *creational gifts*.

Gifts given by God-the-Holy Spirit are specific in purpose for building up the body of the Church. These gifts are available only as the Holy Spirit distributes them (1 Cor. 12:11). They are not to be merely acknowledged in a passive way, which is to neglect them (1 Tim 4:14), but rather are to be actively welcomed and expected (1 Cor 14:1). These are therefore *manifestation gifts*.

Gifts given by God-the-Son are pivotal in assuring the first two categories of gifts are applied in the body of the Church. These *office gifts* are placed in the Church to serve specific functions for the Church to realise the purpose of God.

Let us look now more closely at the gifts of the Father, the creational gifts.

The Purpose of the Gifts of the Father

In our scripture focus from *The Letter to the Romans*, we read,

Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. (Romans 12:1)

Once we become aware of the mercy of God-the-Father, we cannot help but overflow with gratitude and worship him in and with all of our lives. Simply put, if you do not have this inclination, then you really need to get more acquainted with the mercy of God.

Our scripture focus continues:

Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:2)

This verse reminds us that with our turn toward God-the-Father, our minds are renewed so that we come to know his good, pleasing and perfect will, which is far better than anything we can imagine or achieve for ourselves.

Notice that “be conformed” is an active word. It is a choice from the effects of which we need to be “renewed”. I will contend to my dying day that you and I are born okay because God does not make junk! However, we are easily distracted by the fallenness of this world, we conform to its patterns, thus succumbing to sin. We become less than human. Christ Jesus, who is fully human, is the pattern to follow.

For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one. (Romans 12:3)

According to verse 3, God-the-Father gives generously. Thus, to have our minds renewed from an over-inflated view of oneself is to think sensibly, remembering every good and perfect gift is from the Father.

According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the proportion of one's faith (Romans 12:6)

The grace of God intends that whatever gifts we receive from him are to be used in faith, which is to trust his trustworthiness.

The listing of gifts in Romans 12:3-8 then refers to those given by the God-the-Father and they are frequently termed “Creational Gifts.” They have to do with a person's basic inward motivation or perspective on life, both in the Church and in the world.

A proper understanding of this passage and its gifts can truly transform our image of ourselves, for so much of our identity is tied to our understanding of how God has “wired” us, the wiring that was twisted and tangled by sin. Our faith in Jesus frees us from this sin, so that the Holy Spirit can begin to untangle and untwist our motivations and perspectives. This transforming and renewing work returns us to the state of our initial creation that we might rediscover the motivation and perspective we were always intended to have by our Creator.

As you begin to tune into the Spirit, you may wonder,

- “Why do I always just seem to want to give?”
- “Why am I so tuned in with people's emotions?”
- “Why do I always want to see to it that people ‘learn their lessons’ and ‘play by the rules’?”
- “Why aren't I as good an organiser as Brother Tom?” etc.

It is noticing such inclinations in ourselves that helps us begin to understand what the Creational Gifts are all about.

Remember, there is no hierarchy among these gifts! Our sinful tendencies are to seek what we deem to be the more “glamorous” gifts, such as prophecy or teaching, but God knows no such distinction. Each person is vital as is each gift.

A Measure of Faith

For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one. (Romans 12:3)

Getting back to verse 3, you may be wondering what does “distributed a measure of faith” mean exactly?

“Distributed” conveys the idea of being divided out. God-the-Father is the sole arbiter of what and to whom and how much. The verse starts with “for by the grace given to me” because Paul the apostle acknowledged he is only teaching from the gifts given to him because he has himself offered his body and life in worship to God. He also was one to whom gifts were distributed, as are we.

“Measure of faith” does not refer to saving faith or differing amounts of faith exhibited by different people. By “measure” is meant “standard”. Do you believe that Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead (Rom 10:9), and are you then thinking sensibly about yourself and using your gifts in service to the purpose of God? That is the standard, the measure of our faith, and it is the same against which every friend of Jesus is tested, to see whether we use gifts correctly or not.

It matters not what your gift is, but that you use it sensibly, in alignment with the Holy Spirit, for fulfilling your purpose in The Purpose.

Let us now identify what the creational gifts are.

The Creational Gifts

Prophecy

If prophecy, use it according to the proportion of one’s faith (Romans 12:6b)

The first gift in the list of creational gifts is *prophecy*. Prophecy means to speak forth or out.

Despite the trope, the primary use of prophecy is not predicting the future, but interpretation, declaring or speaking out the will and counsel of God. It has to do with becoming aware of God’s undisclosed truths and proclaiming them as they are disclosed to oneself. Prophecy comes then from deep spiritual insight.

A person with the Romans 12 gift of prophecy is a person endowed by God with an exceptional ability to perceive matters, not based on any ministry office or particular manifestation of the Spirit. He or she sees all of life with special prophetic insight.

A Look at Mark Sayers

An example of this level of insight is Mark Sayers, Senior Pastor at Red Church in Melbourne. Sayers is a prolific writer, having written several books on spirituality and culture.



Sayers is a frequent speaker at conferences and churches around the world on topics related to culture, leadership and the Church.

Sayers has a Bachelor's degree in History and Cultural Studies, but it is unclear if he has formal seminary education. Nevertheless, his level of insight into the intersections of Christianity and culture suggest he is an academic or, maybe, he is just a voracious reader. Regardless, his spiritual insight is valued by many across the world and I tune in to his podcast religiously. *He is a prophet*, but I am certain he would eschew this label.

A person with the gift of prophecy views all of life with a desire to see conviction, accountability, repentance, confession and a keen awareness of God brought into focus. He will hardly be able to function around others without these aspects of God's life churning deep within. There is a deep concern that motives are right and that people face up to the truth about themselves, clearly understanding the realities behind what they are doing.

Service

if service, use it in service; if teaching, in teaching (Romans 12:7)

The word "service" here is translated from the Greek word *diakonia*. Its basic meaning is "rendering personal help, aid or assistance to others". In secular Greek it was used for the activity of waiting on tables, caring for household needs or serving in general. It is from the same Greek root as the word for "deacon" (1 Tim. 3:8).

A Look at Martha

The classic biblical example of one with the gift of service is Martha.

So they gave a dinner for him there; Martha was serving them, and Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with him. (John 12:2)

Martha is remembered as one who served.

While they were travelling, he entered a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. (Luke 10:38)

Martha demonstrated her gift through hospitality toward strangers and travellers.

She had a sister named Mary, who also sat at the Lord's feet and was listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks, and she came up and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to serve alone? So tell her to give me a hand." (Luke 10:39–40)

As can be seen in this infamous story, those with the gift of service cannot help themselves but serve, even to their own detriment. This is not a failing, but it is a danger for it distracts.

if service, use it in service; if teaching, in teaching (Romans 12:7)

Those with the gift of service are graced in a special way to show God's love by meeting practical needs and rendering assistance. They find great satisfaction in doing things for others. They are the "hands and feet" of the body of Christ in an extraordinary way, often preferring doing something with their hands over speaking. They see to it the body of Christ has its practical needs met and that jobs within the church get done well and efficiently.

Teaching

The next gift identified in this verse is teaching, which means causing someone to accept something. It can also mean to inform, instruct, demonstrate or prescribe. It has as its aim systematically communicating knowledge and skill so as to develop people. Teachers give themselves to facts and instruction. The focus of teaching in the New Testament is on how to live out God's will.

Exhorting

if exhorting, in exhortation; giving, with generosity; leading, with diligence; showing mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 12:8)

The next verse in our scripture focus identifies the gift of exhortation. This is a calling to come alongside others to help, to comfort, to give consolation or encouragement, to appeal to, to urge or to cheer. An exhorter offers a strengthening presence and upholds those appealing for assistance while urging them to pursue a certain course of conduct. Exhorting is encouragement more so than teaching, for teaching is concerned with truth more so than good feelings on the part of the one taught.

Someone with the gift of exhorting is motivated to see people encouraged toward growth in the Lord. They are equipped with the special grace of stimulating or guiding people (cf. Ac 8:31) to worthy conduct and personal progress; they make doctrine practical. They tend to be very positive people with a basically positive outlook on life. They are always interested in seeing how adversity can be turned into successful living and maturity.

Giving

The next gift is giving, which can be understood as sharing, imparting, distributing, or granting. The word implies generosity. It encourages those with two jackets to give to someone who has none (Lk 3:11), encourages people to be merciful with cheerfulness (Rom 12:8) and urges workers to labour with industry in order to share with those who have a need (Eph 4:28). It also has the idea of supporting or spending yourself for someone else.

Those with the gift of giving are not just financial givers; they are contributors giving material, physical, emotional and psychological support to others. They share of themselves to lend supportive encouragement to people. They stand with and undergird people and projects; their chief desire is to make sure people are supported.

Those who give see to it the Church has access to sufficient assets and receives supportive encouragement to get things done for Christ.

Leading

The next gift identified is that of leading. To lead means to be at the head of, to rule, to direct, to manage or to give leadership aid. It was often used for people in the position of superintendence or those who were leaders in an army, a state or a political party. Another word might be "facilitators".

Leaders are gifted with abilities to coordinate people in carrying out activities and goals. They are particularly gifted at sensing overall problems, surveying needs, enlisting others

to do work, assessing the time needed to complete a goal, organising resources, proceeding under opposition and pressure, and delegating authority. They provide the necessary ingredient for God's people to effectively organize and carry out their goals.

Mercy

The next gift is mercy, which means to feel pity for someone, to be compassionate or to help someone out of pity. In classical Greek it often described the emotions felt by contact with an affliction that came undeservedly on someone.

Those with a gift of mercy are people whom God has endowed with an inordinate capacity to emotionally identify with people so as to show compassion. They are strong "feelers", with a marked ability to perceive where people are emotionally and to identify with what they are feeling or going through. They aim at doing good and helping others through the motivation of empathy. They shun hard-heartedness; they're the "heart" of the Church in a special way.

All of these seven gifts carry with them implicit warnings for how and when to use them. We would do well not just to recognise these in ourselves, but develop them into a strength, avoiding their associated pitfalls, lest they become a distraction or even a danger to ourselves and others.

What Do You Have to Give & Where?

Ordinary vs. Extraordinary

Identifying our spiritual gifts leads us to think of these as extraordinary and supernatural. But what if they are ordinary and natural? What if you were always meant to exhibit insight, service, teaching, exhorting, giving, leading and mercy in some degree, at some time, in some place.

Sin distorts and destroys. It is only when we place our faith in Jesus and begin to turn away from conforming to the fallen patterns of this world that we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit renewing our mind toward discerning the good, pleasing and perfect will of God. Yet that good, pleasing and perfect will is not activated by our repentance; God's will for us was always good, pleasing and perfect. It was us who turned to our own way.

The gifts of the Spirit may seem extraordinary because our fallenness and sin prevented us from exhibiting insight, service, teaching, exhorting, giving, leading and mercy with humility and integrity. It will take the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit to renew us and return us to the state of existence that always should have been natural and ordinary, but far better than anything we could imagine or achieve for ourselves.

A Little or a Lot in Each of Us

While only seven categories of spiritual gifts are listed in Romans 12, observation indicates few people are fully described by only one. More commonly a mix is found, with different traits of each gift present to some degree in every friend of Jesus, while usually one will be the dominant trait of that person.

Indeed, each of us should exhibit insight, service, teaching, exhorting, giving, leading and mercy in some degree, at some time, in some place. The fact is some of us will naturally and supernaturally exhibit one or more more often and to a greater or lesser degree. *Capische?*

In the Church and Out of the Church

These gifts are foundational in God's created order. Therefore, they are, of course, used to build up the Church, but they are just as easily useful and important outside the Church. Our normal occupations require us also to exhibit insight, service, teaching, exhorting, giving, leading and mercy in some degree at some time. It is precisely the supernatural or extraordinary expression of these, accompanied with humility and sensible thinking, that just may catch someone's interest and create in them an openness to the claims of Christ on their own life.

Conclusion

Therefore, in addition to our Romans 12 gift or gifts, each of us will be used in various manifestations of the Spirit as the Spirit chooses (1 Cor 12). Some of us will also have an office gift (Eph 4:11).

Reflection on the gifts of the Spirit help us to recognise and apply our own unique calling and purpose toward fulfilling The Purpose. In other words, God needs YOU to be exactly who he made you to be, so that you can do only what you can do FOR HIM!

To live out of one's spiritual gifts is to become fully human.

Discovering your Romans 12 gift or gifts is vitally important. Pray over this material carefully to see where you might fit. Make the time to join us for our leadership retreat in October, where we will dive deeper into our personalities and gifts to recognise our unique calling from God.

Let us offer to God's glory and honour what we have to give and give it wherever we can.

Endnotes

- 1 Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are taken from *The Christian Standard Bible* (Nashville, TN, USA: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).
- 2 I am indebted in this analysis to Jack W. Hayford and Gary Matsdorf, "People of the Spirit: Gifts, Fruit and Fullness of the Holy Spirit", *Spirit-Filled Life Kingdom Dynamics Study Guides* (Nashville, TN, USA: Thomas Nelson, 1993).