

The Gifts of the Spirit: The manifestation gifts

A Study in Spiritual Gifts (part 3)

Summary: The manifestation gifts of the Holy Spirit equip us to proclaim and empower us to demonstrate the free, full and forever life promised by Jesus. Let us “desire the greater gifts” (1 Cor 12:31) that we might proclaim and demonstrate the love of God for building up the Church and for the common good.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:4–11; John 14:12–17

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Epic Saves

Do you have a story of an epic save you executed, one you bring out for mates when you're all sharing yarns around the campfire?

While one could easily lose herself while doom scrolling on TikTok, Youtube shorts, or Instagram reels, but every once in a while you find something to make you smile, like this video of epic saves:



The men and women in these clips responded in their situations with quick insight, lightning-fast reflexes, and even super-strength they likely did not know they had. The situations required extraordinary interventions and they were the persons and parents for it.

Of course, we know you cannot believe everything you read, hear or see on the Internet. Yet, emergency services and first responder personnel will regale you with stories of their own encounters having seen people able to respond with quick reflexes and strength and skills they did not know they had before the moment required it.

Throughout the history of the Church, extraordinary times have required extraordinary people of faith to step up and into the moment. What made such people extraordinary was not their native insight, skills, or strength, but that they were so in tune with the Holy Spirit in the moment that power overflowed and they were enabled to intervene to the glory, honour and praise of our God. And people were saved!

The great commandment of Christ Jesus, the primary call upon the Church, is to proclaim the good news about him AND to demonstrate the good news, so that the last, the least, the lost and the lonely place their faith in him and live a Christian lifestyle. His promise is to provide the Holy Spirit to encourage and to equip us to fulfil our purpose that The Purpose might be fulfilled.

The manifestation gifts of the Holy Spirit equip us to proclaim and empower us to demonstrate the free, full and forever life promised by Jesus. Let us “desire the greater gifts” (1 Cor 12:31)¹ that we might proclaim and demonstrate the love of God for the common good of building up the Church.

Proclamation and Demonstration

While we tend not to think of it this way, Jesus both proclaimed and demonstrated the gospel, for Matthew noted,

Now Jesus began to go all over Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. (Matthew 4:23)

Jesus both *proclaimed* the good news of the Kingdom through teaching and preaching, and *demonstrated* the good news through healing and powerful interventions. His stated hope was that his Church would continue his ministry in the same way, for he told his disciples,

As you go, proclaim, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you received, freely give. (Matthew 10:7–8)

It is in the demonstration of our proclamation that the manifestation gifts of the Holy Spirit play a significant role. And sometimes moments require extraordinary interventions to rescue people from sin and the curse of death. The manifestation gifts are also vital to bringing believers wholeness and thriving in life, as well as to enhance worship and preaching.

The Manifestation Gifts

In this series we are following a sequence evident in the gifts described in the Bible. Romans 12:3–8 describes gifts given by God as Father. They seem to characterise our basic “motivations”, inherent tendencies characterising each unique person by virtue of the Creator’s unique workmanship in their life.²

In 1 Corinthians 12:7–11, nine gifts of the Holy Spirit are listed. Their purpose is specific: they are for the common good, for building up the Church. Different persons have different life circumstances, different callings, and thus different gifts. All of the differences are appropriate, and God uses them for the common good; thus, Paul wrote,

One and the same Spirit is active in all these, distributing to each person as he wills. (1 Corinthians 12:11)

Pastor and author Jack W. Hayford wrote,

The three categories [of gifts] named in [1 Cor 12:4–6] coupled with the Trinity show the broad diversity, yet essential unity, in the manifestation of the Spirit. Unity does not make the Spirit uniform. The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal power, and His gifts do not spring from a human source; it is the work of God. Gifts are from the great gift, the Holy Spirit; ministries are modelled by the main minister, Christ (the Lord); and the works of the Spirit come from the chief worker, God the Father.”³

When we investigate the manifestation gifts, we need to understand what exactly is a *manifestation*.

“Manifestation” means disclosure or announcement. In *The First Letter to the Corinthians* they represent visible evidence of the Holy Spirit’s activity. They are a demonstration of the good news about Jesus.

The root of the Greek word behind “manifestation” is the same as that for an apparition or ghost. Hence, a manifestation can have overtones of a disclosure that “flashes forth”. Hence, these gifts are not inherent, yet heightened, abilities present in the believer, as the basic Romans 12 gifts are. They are indicators of an openness to the Holy Spirit’s full resources and power for service and ministry.

The Message Of Wisdom

While we do not have time here to describe these nine gifts in exhaustive detail, let me provide at least the basics of each.

to one is given a message of wisdom through the Spirit, to another, a message of knowledge by the same Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:8)

The first is **a message of wisdom**. Wisdom in the Bible is practical; it is prudence, skill, comprehensive insight. Christian enlightenment is the correct application of knowledge, insight into the true nature of things.⁴ In anticipation of our needing guidance, direction, and knowing, God tells us to ask for wisdom, assuring us of generous provision (Jam 1:5; cf. 1 Kgs 3:7–14).

The “message of wisdom” gift is a spiritual insight provided by the Holy Spirit to a believer when a given moment requires it. It is an extraordinary revelation of the mind, purpose, and way of God as applied to a specific situation.

The Message Of Knowledge

The next gift indicated is **a message of knowledge**. Knowledge is the recognition of truth by personal experience. It is to perceive, understand, recognise. We gain knowledge, realise, come to know. Knowledge has an inception, a progress, and an attainment.

The precise difference between wisdom and knowledge is not always crystal clear in the Bible. In a general sense, wisdom is the way facts are used or the decisions one makes with information, while knowledge would be the more concrete and specific facts themselves. While wisdom and knowledge are related, there is a difference.

Faith

to another, faith by the same Spirit, to another, gifts of healing by the one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:9)

The third manifestation gift is **faith**. We already know faith is conviction, confidence, trust, belief, reliance, trustworthiness, and persuasion. In the New Testament setting, faith is the principle of inward confidence, assurance, trust, and reliance in God and all that He says. Faith can refer to the body of truth we believe (1 Tim. 1:19), to the basic trust we have in God for salvation (Eph. 2:8), or to the dynamic power which realises the energy contained in the promises of God.

As a dynamic power, faith is an agency for action; it is this aspect which best describes the manifestation gift. As such it is best translated “faithfulness”, and is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22).

The manifestation of faith is the spontaneously granted spiritual ability to release the energy of God for any given action or need. It is distinct from faith that leads to salvation or

from general Christian faith developed through a daily walk with the Spirit. It is one thing to trust God, another to act on that trust, and another thing again when that trust is challenged and one must act with an extraordinary demonstration of trust.

Gifts Of Healing

Next we come to **the gifts of healing**.

It should go without saying, the physical body is just as important to God as is the spirit and soul, as it is written,

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. And may your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 5:23)

It should also go without saying, the physical body needs his healing touch on occasion.

The origin of the early Church's expectation of miraculous physical healing is the ministry of Jesus himself, a ministry anchored in the Old Testament:

When evening came, they brought to him many who were demon-possessed. He drove out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick, so that what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: He himself took our weaknesses and carried our diseases. (Matthew 8:16–17)

It is only relatively recently in history we have lost a sense of the enchantment of the world, of the presence of God as an active force in human life and society. On this theologian Gordon Fee wrote,

Only among the intellectuals and in a 'scientific age' is it thought to be too hard for God to heal the sick ... this is also unfortunately true of many contemporary Christians, whose theology has made a severe disjunction between the 'then' and 'now' of God's working. This seems to be a seriously flawed understanding of the kingdom, which according to the NT was inaugurated by Christ in the power of the Spirit, who continues the work of the kingdom until the consummation.⁵

The scriptures reveal God is a healing god and has put within humankind an impulse to fight against disease and sickness. It is no surprise there is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit when healing occurs.

The Performing of Miracles

to another, the performing of miracles, to another, prophecy, to another, distinguishing between spirits, to another, different kinds of tongues, to another, interpretation of tongues. (1 Corinthians 12:10)

Verse ten of our scripture focus indicates a number of gifts, one of which is **the performing of miracles**.

There are four Greek words for "power" and the one translated here as "miracles", *dúnamis*, is also one of three Greek words used to describe supernatural events. *Sēmeíon* (signs) and *téras* (wonders) are the other two (see Acts 2:22).

Dúnamis means energy, power, might, great force, great ability, strength, or miracle. When translated “miracle”, it describes the power at work beyond the ordinary course of natural law.

The manifestation of the performing of miracles, then, is God working to do what could not be done naturally. The working of miracles transcends the natural laws of the Earth. They are a result of the Holy Spirit’s fullness in the life of earnestly seeking believers. They are a display of power flowing out from the Spirit within each friend of Jesus (cf. Luke 4:14).

Prophecy

The manifestation gift of prophecy is different than the creational gift of prophecy. To understand the difference we need only recall Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14–36).

While naturally bold, Peter did not generally display the depth of knowledge and rhetorical persuasion evident on that day. According to Acts 2:4, 4:31, all the disciples present were filled with the Holy Spirit, but Peter alone was empowered to speak to that large crowd and bring them to repentance.

The manifestation of prophecy, then, consists of spontaneous, Spirit-inspired, intelligible messages, orally delivered in the gathered assembly, intended for the edification or encouragement of the people (cf. Mk 13:11). It is not the delivery of a previously prepared sermon and the implication of 1 Cor 14:24 is that it is a gift available, at least potentially, to all the friends of Jesus.

Where the manifestation of prophecy differs from wisdom and knowledge is that prophecy seems primarily directed to the congregation as a whole, while the other two are more to individuals. Further, the manifestation of prophecy arises in specific situations and through varied believers, where the office of Prophet (Eph 4:11) —to be discussed in two weeks— does so on a more ongoing basis.

Distinguishing Between Spirits

The seventh gift is **distinguishing between spirits**.

The Greek word translated “distinguishing” (*diákrisis*) is related to the verb translated “evaluate” in 1 Corinthians 14:29:

Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should evaluate.
(1 Corinthians 14:29)

Distinguishing between spirits has to do with discerning, identifying and properly judging when a spirit or spirits are influencing a person or situation.

Of course, there is disagreement on what Paul meant by “spirits”. But even a cursory reading of the scriptures will reveal a worldview that acknowledges there are various spirits around us, for we dwell in a vast spiritual realm, not just a natural one. Therefore, distinguishing between spirits is properly judging what is of the Spirit of God and what is of other spirits. It is a divine aid in fulfilling the command of 1 John 4:1,

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.
(1 John 4:1)

The source of evil is often difficult to discern, so God has given the manifestation of distinguishing between spirits to help us ‘see’ behind the scenes of the spirit realm.

“Different Kinds Of Tongues” and “The Interpretation Of Tongues”

to another, the performing of miracles, to another, prophecy, to another, distinguishing between spirits, to another, different kinds of tongues, to another, interpretation of tongues. (1 Corinthians 12:10)

The most controversial of all the gifts, the most unusual to our modern rational and naturalistic sensibilities, is that of the manifestation of **tongues**.

From the writings of Paul the apostle, we can discern speaking in tongues was a special problem in the church at Corinth.⁶ In every list of spiritual gifts,⁷ tongues and the interpretation of tongues are mentioned last. This was Paul’s way to invert the priority of the gifts and the elevated status claimed by some of the Corinthians. In chapter 14, the gift of tongues is mentioned 17 times. The apostle felt compelled to deal with it specifically, due to the confusion caused by the gift.

Speaking in tongues was not an uniquely Christian phenomenon. Evidence of its practice is found in other religious movements of Jesus’ time; therefore, it was culturally relevant. Nevertheless, the gift WAS a feature of Christianity from its earliest days. In the New Testament we find tongues mentioned only in *The Book of Acts* and in *The First Letter to the Corinthians*.

Paul’s understanding of the gift is that it is Spirit-inspired utterance —“talking with God” (1 Cor 14:2; cf. Rom 8:26), in other words. It builds up the individual (1 Cor 14:4), whether he or she can understand what they are speaking or not.

Without interpretation from the one speaking or by another with the related gift, tongues are not understandable and do not edify others (1 Cor 14:5, 19), which calls into question whether the individualised expression of the gift satisfies the purpose of being “for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7).

The apostle’s understanding presented in this letter contrasts with that found in Acts 2, where the Spirit used the gift of tongues as a way of crossing language barriers. This expression of the gift thus advanced the spread of the good news of Jesus by overcoming language barriers.

To summarise: the manifestation gift of different kinds of tongues is Spirit-inspired speech that benefits an individual by affirming his or her faith, which is most needed when prayer is difficult and times are tough. What is said through the gift is not understood by anyone unless the related gift of interpretation of tongues is given to the individual, or to another, or if a native speaker of that language is present.

What Does It Mean to “Desire the Greater Gifts”?

Let us be honest: The creational gifts of God the Father are good, but the manifestation gifts of God the Holy Spirit are sexy! They are glamorous! They are truly extraordinary! Surely, they are what Paul the apostle meant when he wrote,

But desire the greater gifts. And I will show you an even better way.
(1 Corinthians 12:31)

What does it mean to “desire the greater gifts”? What gifts are greater?

From this letter, we can discern there were some in Corinth who spoke in different tongues. Because this gift is so esoteric and extraordinary, they took this as a sign of their exalted status. “Surely, then, tongues is the greatest gift?” they argued.

What Paul did in this letter, though, was to explain there are diverse gifts, but they are all given as the Holy Spirit chooses and for the common good of the community. How can they possibly be taken as exalting the recipient? No one can boast of having any particular gift because the Spirit has distributed it according to some logic unknown to us.

The apostle struggled to alter the Corinthians’ tendencies to individualism and boasting. He sought to integrate the friends of Jesus more fully into community by encouraging a sense of belonging to and serving one another in Christ.

We would do well to learn this lesson, that whatever gifts we think we have or think we deserve is only ever and always for the purpose of serving others. Let us serve each other in whatever ways we can, however we can, whether our service is glamorous or not.

Paul encouraged this sense of belonging by highlighting how the gift of tongues may be a gift for private, personalised prayer and worship that can be exercised at any time, even publicly without interpretation, so long as the person speaks quietly and privately “to himself and to God” (1 Cor 14:28). This is a legitimate use of the gift (1 Cor 14:14–18), yet this is precisely the aspect of the gift that disqualifies it as the greatest gift, for according to the apostle,

yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, in order to teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.
(1 Corinthians 14:19)

Speak in tongues for yourself, sure, but you should really want to help others with your gift, whether it be tongues or any of the other eight.

Truly, there is no gift greater than the others. What makes them all great is when they benefit others by leading them into a saving relationship with God the Father (see 1 Cor 14:22–25) or a deeper experience of the Holy Spirit. This is the “better way”, that the use of our gifts be motivated by love for others, for as Paul wrote,

Pursue love and desire spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy.
(1 Corinthians 14:1; cf. Mt 22:36–40)

Conclusion

To recap: The gifts of the Father are creational gifts, built into us at our creation as inherent motivations and tendencies that makes us each unique. Due to our fallenness and sin, our inner being becomes squashed, distorted, tangled and twisted. With salvation, the Holy Spirit releases us by untangling and untwisting our inner motivations and tendencies so that we might thrive and flourish as our Creator intended.

The creational gifts then rise to the surface and blossom as we fulfil our purpose by participate in The Purpose of God.

The gifts of the Spirit are manifestation gifts. Power overflows our communion with the Holy Spirit when extraordinary moments require extraordinary interventions. They are demonstrations that bolster the proclamation of the good news about Christ Jesus. Thus, they rescue the lost from sin and the curse of death, they bring believers into wholeness and thriving in life, as well as enhance worship and preaching.

Placing your faith in Jesus and living a Christian lifestyle is not merely an academic endeavour! To realise the free, full and forever life Jesus promised to his friends is to walk through your life, with its demands, with the presence of the Spirit and in the power of the Spirit. When you do this, you will not be surprised at the person you become because you will simply realise you are now free to be the person you were always meant to be. And you will not be surprised at the miracles you see around you and that which you perform because this world is more full and spiritual than we could ever have imagined or achieved on our own.

Remember “every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights” (Jam 1:17). So may your lifelong ambition be to “Pursue love and desire spiritual gifts” (1 Cor 14:1).

Endnotes

- 1 Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are taken from *The Christian Standard Bible* (Nashville, TN, USA: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).
- 2 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).
- 3 “Kingdom Dynamics: One Should Not Think Too Highly of Himself”, *Spirit Filled Life Study Bible*, ed. Jack W. Hayford (Nashville, TN, USA: Thomas Nelson, 1997), pg 1736.
- 4 See Rom. 11:33; Col. 2:3.
- 5 Gordon D. Fee, “The First Epistle to the Corinthians”, *The International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), pg 594.
- 6 J. Paul Sampley, “The First Letter to the Corinthians”, *New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 10 (Nashville, TN, USA: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), pg 944.
- 7 1 Cor 12:10, 28, 30; 14:26; cf. 1 Cor 13:1, 8.