

**EQUIP:** Is there a difference between a “natural ability” and a “spiritual gift”?

**Marshall:** In some cases it is easy to see the difference. If I were able to wake up tomorrow and share the gospel in a foreign language that would be a supernatural thing because I am unilingual. It is the other non-extraordinary gifts like teaching that cause us to wonder if there is a difference. If I was able to teach before I became a follower of Jesus and I am still able to teach after I am a follower of Jesus does this mean I now have the spiritual gift of teaching or just a natural ability to teach? I wonder if it really matters.

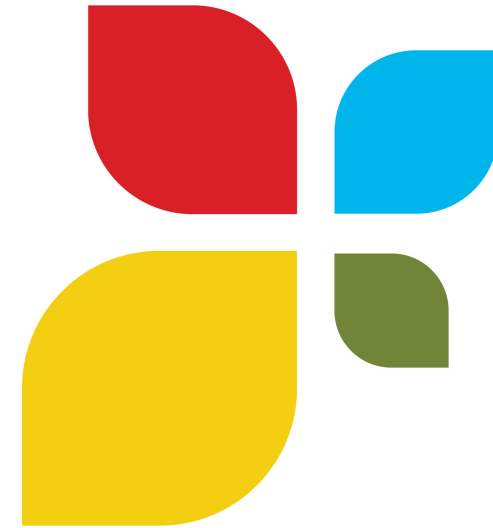
**EQUIP:** Why do you say that?

**Marshall:** I believe that the problem that many have in the whole area of “spiritual gifts” is that they are too immersed in “discovery”. Some people seem obsessed to get it right instead of learning how to celebrate who God has made them to be. I call this the difference between approaching the whole issue from the perspective of an investigative reporter versus an artist. The investigative approach is linear and step by step and has clear category lines. Abilities, personality, experience, and gifts are all distinct categories. The artistic approach is more abstract and is like throwing different colours of paint on a canvas and taking a step back and seeing the whole picture. There is a lot of blurring between the colours. It can be messy at times but the whole picture is celebrated.

**EQUIP:** What does that mean for the process of discovering my spiritual gifts?

**Marshall:** First, we need to recognize that the Bible is silent on the issue of discovery. The Apostle Paul’s emphasis is on celebrating the diversity of gifts within the body of Christ and using our gifts in ministry with one another. Second, the process of discovery falls within the realm of “wisdom” and the witness of Scripture would seem to suggest that it is the community of faith that can help us in that process. It is best to discover by interacting with others, examining Scripture together, serving one another, and discerning together. We help one another examine the canvases of our lives. I have often wondered how someone in the first century would know what their Spirit given gifts were. I am assuming that they would have asked God for wisdom and sought wisdom from the community of faith. It is through our honest relationships with each other that we can discover. Third, perhaps it would be better for us to not get as bogged down in answering the question, “what is my spiritual gift?” as with answering the question, “how can I serve others the way God has made me?”

If you have other questions you would like to hear answers to send them to [earl@orangevillebaptist.com](mailto:earl@orangevillebaptist.com) or visit [www.earlmarshall.ca](http://www.earlmarshall.ca)



**EQUIP**  
**prepared to serve together**

**Sunday, November 15 and 22, 2009**  
**Weeks #4 and #5**  
**“Informed”**



We are shifting our attention from Ephesians 4 to other New Testament passages that speak specifically to the issue of spiritual gifts. We have discovered that we have been called to live in unity on a journey towards maturity. This journey of growing up together is best described as “building up the body”.

The Apostle Paul describes a clear process of how that happens. As we are connected to Christ and to one another, doing our part by serving one another, we are able to experience spiritual growth. Each of us is important in this process. We all have gifts that Jesus has given to us. Some of us serve others by equipping, most of us serve others by using our gifts in relationship with one another.

Our whole life is an opportunity for ministry. Whether we are together or apart we use our gifts in our relationships with one another and those in our community. That is why it is important to begin to focus our attention on our spiritual gifts.

We have grouped together weeks 4 and 5 in the EQUIP series. We hope your discussion with one another will lead to greater spiritual growth in the life of your home group and beyond.

You are loved,



Why is it so important to have clarity in understanding and using my spiritual gifts?

**EQUIP:** Do you see all of the spiritual gifts listed in the passages you mentioned as all for today?

**Marshall:** The not so easy answer and I think the right one is “maybe”. If you are a follower of Jesus the Holy Spirit has equipped you with a spiritual gift(s) that is necessary for the building up of the body of Christ. There is nothing stopping the Holy Spirit from doing this. Some appeal to 1 Corinthians 13:10 and suggest that the “perfect” is the completion of the New Testament and therefore some of the more spectacular gifts like prophecy and tongues are not in existence today. Don Carson (Showing the Spirit” Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14, pages 66-76) and Gordon Fee (First Corinthians in The New International Commentary of the New Testament, pages 644-645 ) summarize the potential interpretations of this verse and both conclude that there is no biblical support for that conclusion. The “perfect” is best understood as a time of completion or maturation. The parousia or the second coming of Jesus best fits the time of the “perfect”. The fundamental principle is established in 1 Corinthians 12:11 when the Apostle Paul says that the Holy Spirit gives gifts to each one as he determines. We can’t know the mind of God and which gifts he gives to whom, where and for what time. All we know is that he does and according to his plan and will.

**EQUIP:** Are you implying that some of the gifts may not be permanent?

**Marshall:** Only God knows. When you examine the lists of spiritual gifts in the New Testament it may be implied that some of the gifts each of us is given are more permanent and some may come and go from us given specific situations. Perhaps gifts like healing or miracles come and go while others like helps or administration may be more permanent. This has led some to conclude that we have primary (a tendency) and secondary gifts (situational). In my case the primary gifts, the ones I carry around with me all the time, are teaching and leadership. These two gifts don’t surprise me. I bring these gifts to all situations in my life. But there are things that happen in my life from time to time that do surprise me. A couple of Sundays ago I really sensed that God wanted me to speak a word of exhortation into a young man’s life. It was sort of a prophetic moment where I really sensed God wanted me to speak specific words of encouragement into this person’s life. So I did. This isn’t with me all the time but it was in that moment and I think it was a Spirit given gift.



Take this opportunity to thank God for the gift of one another.

## *Spiritual Gifts and Growing Up the Church* An Interview with Earl Marshall

**EQUIP:** Why are you so energized about seeing all followers of Jesus using their spiritual gifts to serve one another and their communities?

**Marshall:** Because our spiritual growth is at stake. Most North Americans think of spiritual growth from an individualistic perspective, that is a “me and God” thing. The biblical reality, however, is that it is much more than that. The Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4 reminds us that spiritual maturity is an “us and God” thing. This is the mystery of Christ (Ephesians 3:5-6) that we are members of the same body. As members of that same body we serve one another in a way that builds up the body. The only way we can do that is by using the gifts that God has given to each of us while we are in relationship with one another.

**EQUIP:** What is a spiritual gift?

**Marshall:** The description of a spiritual gift in the Bible is fairly broad. The idea behind the Greek word *charismata* is that it is a grace gift. 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4 indicate that it is God (Spirit and Jesus) that give these grace gifts. Beyond that the word can be used for almost anything.

**EQUIP:** Seriously?

**Marshall:** Look at it this way. Salvation is called a spiritual gift (Romans 5:15-16), and marriage and celibacy are identified as a spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 7:7). Even the biblical lists of spiritual gifts (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, 1 Peter 4) are descriptive and illustrative not prescriptive and exhaustive. There are extraordinary things like miracles and fairly ordinary things like helps and administration included in the lists. Paul uses the conceptual idea of spiritual gifts in parallel with workings and service in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6. The New Testament leaves an immense amount of room for what is included in the idea of a spiritual gift.

Take a look at the definitions of spiritual gifts on pages 6 and 7. Do you see any of these gifts as ones that the Holy Spirit has given to you? Which ones?

Since the lists are not exhaustive or prescriptive what other abilities or traits would you potentially include in the category “spiritual gift”?

According to 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 the Holy Spirit gives

- each of us gifts
- as he determines
- and for the common good

What does that mean to you? What are the implications of this truth?



The New Testament is silent when it comes to the question, “how do I know what my gifts are?” It has been suggested that we consider two things to help in the discovery of our gifts:

- Actually serving one another (the path of ministry)
- Allowing others to speak into our lives (the way of wisdom)

Rehearse the various ways in your life that you have expressed the love of God to others for the common good (building up of the body)?

How has trying different serving opportunities helped you discover your spiritual gifts?

Think of a couple of situations in your life where you were serving others (whether together with other Christians or apart in the community or workplace) and when you were done you just knew, “God made me for that”. Perhaps we would call it your “spiritual serving sweet spot”. As you review those situations, why do you think you felt that way? What does that tell you about who God has made you to be and your spiritual gifting?

The Apostle Paul’s major focus in 1 Corinthians 12 was on celebrating the diversity of the body of Christ. It is like he is asking us to stand back, take a look, and marvel at how the Holy Spirit has put all of these gifts together and in just the right way. You can read about that in 1 Corinthians 12:14-27.

Using a favourite Canadian analogy, it is like your home group and our church is a big salad bowl with a lot of different ingredients. All of them are absolutely essential. None is more important than the other.

As you think about your home group what different gifts do you see represented? What gifts do you bring? What gifts do you see that others bring to your home group?

How does the mixture of gifts produce a home group that is “built up”?

What do you have to celebrate over in your home group?



If you could do anything how would you like to serve other people?

What do you think all of the above means for you? How does this shape your serving others? What do others in your home group think?

How can your home group pray for you in this vital area of your life?

**My next steps:**

We need each other to help clarify the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, to encourage one another, and to assist each other in using our spiritual gifts effectively. Respond to the following questions and be prepared to share your answers with the rest of your home group.

As you look at your life what are the things that you love to do and that you really excel at?

As you consider serving others what are you passionate about? Who do you love serving and interacting with (age groups, etc.)? What needs do you love to meet? What challenges or causes really get your mind and heart going?

What key events or crises have shaped your life? What have you learned through these experiences and situations? How do you think God may want you to share these experiences and what you have learned with others?



## Spiritual Gift Definitions

The following are some potential definitions of the spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4). These terms had a specific meaning to the 1st century church that is sometimes lost on a 21st century audience.

**Administration** – the ability to “steer” or “pilot” in the sense of giving guidance to others. Some see this word to refer to our contemporary idea of administrative skills but that may be imposing our 21<sup>st</sup> century idea on the text.

**Apostleship** – there is a range of meaning in this word. Literally it refers to a “sent one” or an “ambassador”. In this general sense some see this gift as one that launches and leads new ministry ventures. When used specifically it refers to a specific group of divinely appointed individuals who gave overall leadership to the first century church.

**Discernment** (distinguish between spirits) – the ability to recognize truth or error (cp 1 John 4:1-6).

**Encouragement** – helping others through listening, comforting, and counselling.

**Evangelism** – the ability to communicate and live the gospel in a way that brings people to decide about the free gift of life with God through the work of Christ on the cross.

**Faith** – a unique ability to trust God to perform an extraordinary work, like when Jesus speaks of “faith that can move mountains”.

**Giving** – the ability to support others and various kingdom initiatives cheerfully and generously.

**Healing** – the ability to perform miraculous healings like Jesus did

**Helping** – coming alongside and helping others.

**Hospitality** – providing others with a warm and welcoming environment for fellowship and care.

**Interpretation of tongues** – ability to understand and communicate in a known language the message of someone who is speaking in an unknown language.

**Knowledge** (words of knowledge) – the ability to communicate God’s truth (similar to word of wisdom)

**Leadership** – the ability to give oversight and direction to others. As in the term administration care should be given to bring in all of our 21<sup>st</sup> century ideas of what it means to lead.

**Mercy** – the ability to see suffering and express comfort and minister with great empathy

**Miracles** – literally “workings of powers”. The ability to see the power of God worked out in a supernatural way. There is great overlap between this, healings, and gifts of faith.

**Pastor** – the ability to take spiritual responsibility for a group of people, equipping them through the process of shepherding.

**Prophecy** – there is a range of meaning for this word. Generally it refers to the ability to communicate a message from God that strengthens, encourages, and comforts others. It refers to speaking forth the truth and as such includes forth-telling (proclamation) and fore-telling (revelation). The term is also used to refer to specific groups of people like OT prophets or first century people recognized as prophets.

**Teaching** – the ability to teach God’s Word in ways that lead to the application of truth in the lives of others.

**Tongues** – there is much discussion on speaking in tongues. It does refer to the ability to communicate God’s message in a special language unknown to the speaker (and at times the audience, thus the need for interpretation). It may also refer to the ability to speak unintelligibly the message of God or a message to God.

**Wisdom** (words of wisdom) – the difference between words of knowledge and words of wisdom are probably lost on us. It refers to the ability to communicate God’s wisdom (in 1 Corinthians this centers on Christ) to others and their life situations.