

UNDERSTANDING AND DEVELOPING YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

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Foreword

This workbook was created as an outgrowth of discussion in the Evangelism Committee at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church on how best to acquaint members of the church with their spiritual gifts. There are a number of gift assessment inventories available to help people discover their spiritual gifts, but it was difficult to find material that would assist in understanding and developing the gift once it was revealed. There was a desire to pull together information from various sources and create a document that would be of value to people who wished to more fully comprehend what is implicit in giftedness and how they might use their gifts. It was also recognized that members of the congregation would benefit from knowledge of all gifts to gain an appreciation for the way God builds up the Body of Christ to equip it for work in the world.

The end product attempts to assist the reader to fully grasp the meaning of the gift, how it might be known, where it may be exercised, and ways in which it can be developed. There is also some “for reflection” narrative provided to aid the gift-bearer in the contemplation process.

Understanding that spiritual giftedness is as much a part of a person’s identity as personality or stature, we offer material that will aid the reader in a personal spiritual growth experience. Simply having the gift is wondrous indeed, but acceptance and use of the gift is a matter of personal choice.

However, when the gift is embraced and employed in the fullness of all its spiritual dimensions, some rather wonderful things will happen.

We hope the reader will find this information enlightening and personally satisfying. The church benefits from having members that know and exercise their spiritual gifts to build up the church, and that will surely be a welcome by-product of this effort. However, our real intent is to help the members of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church make further progress in their personal spiritual pilgrimages.

Evangelism Committee
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Developing and Using Your Spiritual Gift

A spiritual gift is a significant ability given to each believer by the Holy Spirit, who thus equips and moves members of the church to serve in special ways for Christ and his kingdom. This “significant ability” exceeds the normal ability level of others in the church—it has been referred to as a “supernatural ability” vs. the natural talents we and others may have in many different areas. God bestows natural talents to all people, and he also bestows spiritual gifts to believers. Both talents and gifts can be used for the glory of God, but spiritual gifts are somewhat unique by their powerful nature and in their dedication to the service of the Lord. They are used for ministry to others in the church (to help members of the body of Christ) and for building up of the church (to extend the church’s witness and ministry into the world).

Spiritual gifts should be discovered, developed, and used freely and willingly. We were given these gifts by God’s grace, and our use of them should be just as gracious. The object is not to use the gifts to preserve Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, but to further the life of Jesus Christ in this place. Members of the congregation are encouraged to discover, develop, and use their gifts and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to find their ministry and help the church be more intentional in its ministry. Gifts are given to carry out the work of Jesus in the world, they can help us become clearer channels of God’s love, and they can help us find surer steps in our

pilgrimage as followers of Christ.

There are many different gifts identified in scripture. Most of the commonly known spiritual gifts that are mentioned in the Bible are included in the *Spiritual Gifts Inventory*, but there are several that were not included because of the difficulty of inventory assessment for them and/or controversy regarding their employment. Some of the spiritual gifts that were not included are: healing, prophecy, miracles, celibacy, exorcism, martyrdom, and speaking in and interpreting tongues. Anyone desiring to know more about any of those gifts is invited to seek spiritual direction and guidance from the pastor.

Discovery of a spiritual gift is a wonderful beginning upon which to build. However, inventory assessment results may seem improbable or even inconclusive to you—varying interpretations of questions may lead to different responses. Therefore it is important to test any findings you have been given through further study, prayer, evaluation and confirmation. If you wish, you may want to try other more extensive inventories—one free inventory source on the Internet which provides an immediate analysis is located at: www.theseeker.org/gifts/chap9.htm. Follow these eight steps to fully explore each gift that you think you may have:

Learn about the gift: Study scriptural passages on gifts in general as well as specific gifts you feel you may have been given. Gain a full understanding about your gift by reviewing the kinds of things that characterize persons who have this gift and the ways the gift can be employed.

Accept the gift: Believe that you are gifted (see 1 Pet. 4:10), and give thanks to God for your gift.

Pray for guidance: Prayer is essential if you wish to become serious about discovering and using your gift to fulfill God's purposes. This will open passageways for Godly insights and strengthen your faith for use of the gift.

Offer yourself to God: Make a commitment to do whatever God asks of you, and trust in him to give you what you need for the task. Be willing to use your gift for God.

Examine yourself: Look at how God has already been at work in your life. Review past accomplishments and present interests. What excites you? What needs catch your eye?

Seek confirmation: Do other Christians who know you recognize particular giftedness within you? Ask for the counsel of friends and family and especially from people who seem to have the same gift. Do they see this gift in you?

Try out your gift: Test the waters as soon as you can using all the above steps as support, and volunteer in a way that you can use your gift. Always keep in mind that you are using your gift to help other Christians, to bring others to Christ, and to glorify God.

Look for results: If you have accurately identified the spiritual gift, use of it will produce results. You should be able to discern that your initial efforts have been at least modestly fruitful. Continue working to develop your gift, and the blessings will become apparent to all. If evaluation reveals that your service has been ineffective, then seek anew to find your gift(s).

Even though your gift sets you up in a very real way for empowered use of it in ministry, nothing much will happen unless it is used. Through use you are able to develop the gift to a level of effectiveness. Once you know what your gift is, you should be prepared to take advantage of formal learning and training opportunities that may strengthen you for ministry. Study of biblical persons, saints, or more current witnesses who seemed to have a similar gift can be helpful. Expand your knowledge at every opportunity by reading books and articles related to your gift or listen to audio tapes and videos by scholars in the field. Seek out and speak with other Christians who have the same gift, and find out what they have done with it. If there are conferences or workshops that would help you develop your gift, try to attend.

Continually pray for guidance and strength in the use of your gift and ask God to open your eyes to the needs of others that your gift might address. Prioritize around your gift so that you can focus your efforts on ministry for which you are gifted and minimize involvement in areas for which you may not be equipped. The support of a small Christian group can be very helpful

as an instrument for sharing— look for avenues for this kind of sharing in the family, church committees, or Bible study or fellowship groups. Love is evident in all true spirituality, and it must be present for effective use of spiritual gifts. Expect to sacrifice personally in the service of the Lord, and do not be afraid. Having and using a spiritual gift in no way shields you from adversity, but it does give you assurance of God's favor.

Support other members in the church in the use of their gifts by confirming with them that you see good fruit from their efforts. The feedback you give will help them in their pilgrimage to discover and develop their gifts, and it will contribute to an overall communal spirit of congregational ministry, which is important in the building up of the church.

Resources used in the development of this document and individual spiritual gift information sheets:

Identifying and Deploying Your Spiritual Gifts, by Dr. Lindsey Garmon

Discover Your Gifts, Church Development Resources

The Spiritual Gifts, by Rich Schoenert

Understanding Spiritual Gifts, Rev. Dale A. Robbins, M. Div.

Spiritual Gifts, by Neal R. Boese