STUDY GUIDE

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

From the message on spiritual gifts and their purpose

Overview

This message addresses the gifts of the Holy Spirit — what they are, why they exist, and how they should be used. Lists appear in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4. Variation in the number of gifts comes from how the passages are combined and categorized. The biggest area of confusion is tongues. The message carefully distinguishes the public gift (for the church, with interpretation) from private prayer language (personal edification). Every believer has at least one gift. The Spirit decides who receives what. The purpose is always the common good and building up the church, governed by love (1 Corinthians 13). Gifts are not for hierarchy or personal status.

Main Points

- **The biblical lists.** 1 Corinthians 12 (manifestations: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, tongues, interpretation; also apostles, prophets, teachers, helps, administrations). Romans 12 (service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, mercy). Ephesians 4 (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers).
- **Tongues clarified.** 1 Corinthians 14:39 says do not forbid speaking in tongues. Acts 2 involved known languages for gospel proclamation to the nations. 1 Corinthians 14 describes private speech to God that edifies the speaker (a personal prayer language — the private use of the same gift). Public use requires interpretation or silence in the assembly. Not everyone speaks in tongues (1 Corinthians 12:29–30). It is never a test of salvation or maturity.
- **Source and distribution.** All gifts come from the same Spirit, Lord, and God (1 Corinthians 12:4–6). The Spirit decides who receives which gift (12:11). Diversity is intentional, like members of one body.
- **Who receives them.** Every believer has at least one gift (1 Peter 4:10; 1 Corinthians 12).
- **Why they exist.** To build up the church and glorify God — not for personal status. Some gifts speak to the gathered church; others serve practically; a personal prayer language edifies the individual. Love is the highest goal (1 Corinthians 13).
- **Universal truths.** The Spirit decides; gifts differ intentionally; purpose is the common good; every believer has a gift; love governs their use.
- **Core call.** Eagerly desire the gifts and use what the Spirit gives you, always making love the aim. You were given gifts to benefit the body of Christ, not to hide them or rank yourself.

Application

- Identify your gifts. Use tools such as a spiritual gifts assessment as a starting point (not the gospel itself). Ask trusted believers what they see in you.

- Use what you have. Gifts unused do not build the body. Look for practical ways to serve, encourage, teach, give, or lead.
- Keep love as the aim. If a gift is used for status, competition, or contradiction of what God has already said, it is not operating in the Spirit.
- On tongues: Do not forbid them, but do not make them the focus or a test of spirituality. Private prayer language is allowed and practiced by Paul; public use requires interpretation.
- Remember the goal is relationship with God, not any particular manifestation.
- If you do not yet know Christ, salvation is the entry point: “Jesus I confess you as Lord. I believe you died and rose again. I repent of my sin. Save me.”
- Thank the Spirit for the gifts He has given, ask forgiveness for neglect or misuse, and ask for power to use them to build the body.

Reflection Questions

1. Do I know what spiritual gifts the Spirit has given me? Am I using them for the benefit of the church?
2. Have I treated any gift (including tongues) as a test of spirituality or a source of hierarchy? What does 1 Corinthians 12–14 say about that?
3. Where have I seen gifts used to compete or contradict rather than build up? How does that align with the Spirit’s unity?
4. What would it look like for me to eagerly desire the gifts while keeping love as the highest aim?
5. Is my focus on manifestations, or on relationship with the Giver?

Group Discussion Prompts

- How do the three main passages (1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4) complement each other? Why do people count different numbers of gifts?
- What is the difference between the public gift of tongues and a personal prayer language according to 1 Corinthians 14? How should each be handled in the church?
- Why does Paul say not everyone has every gift, yet every believer has at least one? How does that shape the way we value one another?
- Share an example of a gift being used well to build up the body. What made it healthy?
- How can a group encourage people to discover and use their gifts without creating hierarchy or pressure around any single gift?

Eagerly desire the spiritual gifts, but always make love the aim.