

# Is there a biblical spiritual gifts list?

There are actually three biblical lists of the “gifts of the Spirit,” also known as spiritual gifts. The three main passages describing the spiritual gifts are Romans 12:6–8; 1 Corinthians 12:4–11; and 1 Corinthians 12:28. We could also include Ephesians 4:11, but that is a list of offices within the church, not spiritual gifts, per se. The spiritual gifts identified in Romans 12 are prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leadership, and mercy. The list in 1 Corinthians 12:4–11 includes the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in tongues and interpretation of tongues. The list in 1 Corinthians 12:28 includes healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. A brief description of each gift follows:

**Prophecy** – The Greek word translated “prophecy” in both passages properly means “a speaking forth.” According to Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, the word refers to “discourse emanating from divine inspiration and declaring the purposes of God, whether by reproof and admonishing the wicked, or comforting the afflicted, or revealing things hidden; especially by foretelling future events.” To prophesy is to declare the divine will, to interpret the purposes of God, or to make known in any way the truth of God that is designed to influence people.

**Serving** – Also referred to as “ministering,” this gift involves providing service of any kind; it is the broad application of practical help to those in need. “Serving” is a translation of the Greek word *diakonian*, from which we get the English *deacon*.

**Teaching** – This gift involves the analysis and proclamation of the Word of God, explaining the meaning, context and application to the hearer’s life. The gifted teacher is one who has the unique ability to clearly instruct and communicate knowledge, specifically the doctrines of the faith

**Encouraging** – Also called “exhortation,” this gift is evident in those who consistently call upon others to heed and follow God’s truth, which may involve correction or building others up by strengthening weak faith or comforting in trials.

**Giving** – Gifted givers are those who joyfully share what they have with others, whether it is financial, material, or the giving of personal time and attention. The giver is concerned for the needs of others and seeks opportunities to share goods, money, and time with them as needs arise.

**Leadership** – The gifted leader is one who rules, presides over, or has the management of other people in the church. The word literally means “guide” and carries with it the idea of one who steers a ship. One with the gift of leadership rules with wisdom and grace and exhibits the fruit of the Spirit in his life as he leads by example.

**Mercy** – Closely linked with the gift of encouragement, the gift of mercy is obvious in those who are compassionate toward others who are in distress, showing sympathy and sensitivity coupled with a desire and the resources to lessen their suffering in a kind and cheerful manner.

**Word of wisdom** – The fact that this gift is described as the “word” of wisdom indicates that it is one of the speaking gifts. This gift describes someone who can understand and speak forth biblical truth in such a way as to skilfully apply it to life situations with discernment.

**Word of knowledge** – This is another speaking gift that involves understanding truth with an insight that only comes by revelation from God. Those with the gift of knowledge understand the deep things of God and the mysteries of His Word.

**Faith** – All believers possess faith in some measure because it is one of the gifts of the Spirit bestowed on all who come to Christ in faith (Galatians 5:22-23). The spiritual gift of faith is exhibited by one with a strong and unshakeable confidence in God, His Word, His promises, and the power of prayer to effect miracles.

**Healing** – Although God does still heal today, and while there is no biblical reason that God could not empower an individual with the spiritual gift of healing today, God miraculously healing people directly through the spiritual gifting of an individual seems to have primarily been limited to the ministry of the apostles and their close associates in the very early days of the church (2 Corinthians 2:12; Hebrews 2:4).

**Miraculous powers** – Also known as the working of miracles, this is another temporary sign gift that involved performing supernatural events that could only be attributed to the power of God (Acts 2:22). This gift was exhibited by Paul (Acts 19:11-12), Peter (Acts 3:6), Stephen (Acts 6:8), and Phillip (Acts 8:6-7), among others.

**Distinguishing (discerning) of spirits** – Certain individuals possess the unique

ability to determine the true message of God from that of the deceiver, Satan, whose methods include purveying deceptive and erroneous doctrine. Jesus said many would come in His name and would deceive many (Matthew 24:4-5), but the gift of discerning spirits is given to the church to protect it from such as these.

**Speaking in tongues** – The gift of tongues is one of the temporary sign gifts given to the early church to enable the gospel to be preached throughout the world to all nations and in all known languages. It involved the divine ability to speak in languages previously unknown to the speaker. This gift authenticated the message of the gospel and those who preached it as coming from God. The phrase “diversity of tongues” (KJV) or “different kinds of tongues” (NIV) effectively eliminates the idea of a “personal prayer language” as a spiritual gift.

**Interpretation of tongues** – A person with the gift of interpreting tongues could understand what a tongues-speaker was saying even though he did not know the language that was being spoken. The tongues interpreter would then communicate the message of the tongues-speaker to everyone else, so all could understand.

**Helps** – Closely related to the gift of mercy is the gift of helps. Those with the gift of helps are those who can aid or render assistance to others in the church with compassion and grace. This has a broad range of possibilities for application. Most importantly, this is the unique ability to identify those who are struggling with doubt, fears, and other spiritual battles; to move toward those in spiritual need with a kind word, an understanding and compassionate demeanor; and to speak

scriptural truth that is both convicting and loving.

## What is the spiritual gift of prophecy?

The spiritual gift of **prophecy** is listed among the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:10 and Romans 12:6. The Greek word translated “prophesying” or “prophecy” in both passages properly means to “speak forth” or declare the divine will, to interpret the purposes of God, or to make known in any way the truth of God which is designed to influence people. Many people misunderstand the gift of prophecy to be the ability to predict the future. While knowing something about the future may sometimes have been an aspect of the gift of prophecy, it was primarily a gift of proclamation (“forth-telling”), not prediction (“fore-telling”).

A pastor/preacher who declares the Bible can be considered a “prophet” in that he is speaking forth the counsel of God. **With the completion of the New Testament canon, prophesying changed from declaring new revelation to declaring the completed revelation God has already given.** Jude 3 speaks of “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (emphasis added). In other words, the faith to which we hold has been settled forever, and it does not need the addition or refinement that comes from extra-biblical revelations.

Also, note the transition from prophet to teacher in 2 Peter 2:1: “There were false prophets among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you” (emphasis added). Peter indicates that the Old Testament age had prophets, whereas the church will have teachers. **The spiritual gift of prophecy, in the sense of receiving new revelations from God to be proclaimed to others, ceased with the completion of the Bible.**

During the time that prophecy was a revelatory gift, it was to be used for the edification, exhortation, and comfort of men (1 Corinthians 14:3). The modern gift of prophecy, which is really more akin to teaching, still declares the truth of God. What has changed is that the truth of God today has already been fully revealed in His Word, while, in the early church, it had not yet been fully revealed.

Christians are to be very wary of those who claim to have a “new” message from God. It is one thing to say, “I had an interesting dream last night.” However, it is quite another matter to say, “God gave me a dream last night, and you must obey it.” No utterance of man should be considered equal to or above the written Word. We must hold to the Word that God has already given and commit ourselves to sola scriptura—Scripture alone.