



BE THE BODY

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

The Tinkerers

Let's be honest.

Some parts of Scripture are very, very boring.

But then there are those moments.

These are the moments when we are sifting through a passage, and although the passage is admittedly dry, something catches our attention. While sifting through what feels like sand, we discover a priceless diamond. It may take several times through the passage to catch the glimmer. When we see it, we're stunned.

One such passage may initially seem like sand in the midst of more sand. But upon further reflection, we discover an event that must have been remarkable. In the middle of a long description of the measurements of the tabernacle, right in the midst of fabric folds and cubits, we read this...

Then the LORD said to Moses, "See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts—to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship. Moreover, I have appointed Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, to help him. Also I have given skill to all the craftsmen to make everything I have commanded you: the Tent of Meeting, the ark of the Testimony with the atonement cover on it, and all the other furnishings of the tent."

(Exodus 31:1-7)

Pause on this passage. Turn too quickly and miss something profound.

There are these two guys, Bezalel and Oholiab. Somewhere along the way—let's assume it was at a young age—Bezalel and Oholiab received something unique from the Spirit of God. They were given uncommon ability to "*engage in all kinds of craftsmanship.*" They simply had a knack for fixing things, for putting things together, for creating stuff others couldn't create.

As youngsters, Bezalel and Oholiab would have tinkered. They would have fixed things, created things, built things, and torn things apart. This tinkering may have even caused trouble at times.

Bezalel marches off with his mother's earrings, nails them to a piece of wood, and turns them into something that is mildly attractive, but not exactly what Mom had in mind. "What am I to do with this boy?" Mom would ask the heavens.

Oholiab is constantly losing Dad's tools. Every time Dad's looking for the handy blade to fix the family tent, it's nowhere to be seen, and Oholiab is unusually quiet. "What am I going to do with you?" Dad would ask with as much restraint as he could muster.

Nobody suspected the abilities were anything more than children's tinkering. Yes, everybody could see the skills. But it's unlikely that they had uncommon charisma or the ability to lead their peers.

Bezalel and Oholiab were good with their hands. That's all.

That's all?

Not exactly.

Unknown to family and peers, in the unseen world, a plan was unfolding.

The tinkering was not by chance. The abilities given to Bezalel and Oholiab were given by the Spirit of God. These gifts and abilities would be refined over the years for a purpose both specific and profound.

Bezalel and Oholiab, along with others gifted with their hands, would use their skills to create the Tent of Meeting. It was this Tent of Meeting that would represent God's presence with his people. Even more, Bezalel would build the ark of the Testimony. The ark of the Testimony would house the Ten Commandments and be considered so sacred that later people would die for touching it in an unholy manner.

Imagine: one day, Bezalel and Oholiab would stand at a distance from their work and watch as...

*The cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.
(Exodus 40:34-35)*

That's a powerful moment.

God had prepared Bezalel and Oholiab for a date and time when he would need exactly what they had to offer. The work God did in their lives would match the work God was doing in the world. What likely started as the play of children was later revealed to be the very work of God.

Which leads to a question.

Are Bezalel and Oholiab unique?

God's Workmanship

"Of course they're unique!" we think. "That's the very idea. They had competencies from God others did not have. God prepared a unique work for these unique people."

But is unique for God to prepare a unique work for unique people? Does God do for others what he did for Bezalel and Oholiab? Are they unique in finding a way to use their gifts and competencies? Does God do that for others or just a select few?

Consider the following from Paul's letter to Ephesus: "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10).

Two things...



We are God's workmanship.

God prepared work for us to do.

That sounds familiar.

Bezalel and Oholiab were God's workmanship. Through God's Spirit they received the ability to do things others were not able to do. The work God did in them was then matched by a work he had prepared for them. Not only did he give them gifts, but he gave them an opportunity to do something significant with those gifts.

With this work of God through Bezalel and Oholiab in mind, consider the massive work God is currently doing: *"I am making everything new!"* (Revelation 21:5).

God is up to something. He's making all things new. He's doing this through the establishment of the kingdom of God. Christ described his purpose this way: *"I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God...because that is why I was sent"* (Luke 4:43).

So Christ came to establish the kingdom of God. How is he continuing this work today? *"Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it"* (1 Corinthians 12:27).

Christ is working, creating, and building. His "body" is at work. Each of his followers *"is a part of it."*

Imagine the moment when Christ's people will stand back, survey their work, and discover, *"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever"* (Revelation 11:15).

This coming moment will be a resounding echo of the moment Bezalel and Oholiab saw the Spirit of God descend upon their work. This coming moment will be the revealing of a new existence where justice and mercy will prevail and the presence of God will be realized, recognized, and revered.

Like Bezalel and Oholiab, the people of God will see the fullness of their work. They will see that God was orchestrating a good and mighty plan, and by grace, they were allowed to take part in it. What often didn't make sense will then make sense. What at times felt insignificant will then be fully known as profound.

Preparation and work toward this moment is happening right now. Right now, Christ is creating, and we are all invited to take part in his work. Which leads to important questions:

How does this work? What must we do? How do we discover the workmanship of God in our own lives along with the work *"God prepared in advance for us to do"* (Ephesians 2:10)?

Let's go to Scripture for greater clarity.

Diversity in the Body

One of the more important statements about the body of Christ is found in the following passage.

Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be



part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.
(1 Corinthians 12:14-20)

One of the great inhibitors to a fully functioning body of Christ is the common misperception that the kingdom of God is primarily built by people with visible roles in the church. Not only does this deny the countless critical roles played by all God's people, but it also denies Scripture's job description given to pastors and teachers.

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. (Ephesians 4:11-12)

The very purpose of pastors and teachers is "to prepare God's people for works of service." The entire body of Christ is moved to action. Yes, the mouth speaks, but it speaks in order to inspire and equip the hands, legs, and feet. The work of God is not limited to a couple of people, to a once a week event, or to certain physical location. The work of God is done seven days a week, by all God's people, in every sector of society.

Which leads to a second area of thought. What are spiritual gifts?

Spiritual Gifts

Consider two important passages of Scripture where spiritual gifts are mentioned explicitly.

Romans tell us:

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.
(Romans 12:6-8)

1 Corinthians tells us:

To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.
(1 Corinthians 12:8-11)

Each of these passages offers its own listing of gifts. There is overlap, but there are differences. Scripture is not attempting to give a comprehensive list of spiritual gifts but is giving us a concept. The concept is that the Spirit of God crafts and empowers each person uniquely.



Names for the gifts will vary. Even today, one church will define the gifts a little bit differently than another. This doesn't mean we can inject any meaning we want into Scripture's named gifts. But it does mean we should simply be asking, "How has God made and empowered me? What is a unique contribution I can make?" rather than attempting to force ourselves into a mold Scripture did not create.

One such example of unique gifting in Scripture is Daniel and his friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. We read that *"To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds"* (Daniel 1:17). In today's language, we would say they were gifted academically. In addition, Daniel was given the ability to interpret dreams.

The story of Daniel shows the critical nature of these gifts. These men gained influence from the respect they gained for their proficiencies. Even more, Daniel, with his ability to understand dreams, spoke powerful words to powerful people at critical moments in history. These gifts mentioned in Daniel are gifts that may or may not be on the lists given in the New Testament, but they are certainly reflective of the kinds of ways God may choose to empower a person for the unique contribution he is preparing them to make.

In light of the diversity of potential gifts, it's critical to observe that *all* of the gifts find their source in the Spirit. Equally attributed to the Spirit are gifts of healing and encouragement, miraculous powers and leadership, prophesying and teaching. We err when we attribute one kind of gift to a person's natural abilities and another kind of gift to something done by the Spirit of God. All of our abilities find their source in the workmanship of God. *"For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?"* (1 Corinthians 4:7).

As we consider unique contributions we can make, we must not limit ourselves to certain categories or to things traditionally considered natural or supernatural. Ultimately, it's all supernatural as it all finds its source in the Spirit of God.

Which is simultaneously true and also ripe for misapplication.

Spiritual Gifts Are Not Static

Yes, God is at work.

No, this does not mean we are without responsibility to strengthen and enhance our potential impact.

Scripture tells us *"we are God's workmanship."* But this doesn't mean we simply sit back and wait for competencies to appear. At least two passages of Scripture point to our opportunity and our responsibility.

First, the opportunity: *"Eagerly desire the greater gifts"* (1 Corinthians 12:31).

We are told to eagerly desire gifts that will increase our impact in the lives of others. We must guard against categorizing ourselves and limiting our influence by what's true of us today. God may want to use us in ways that will require new workings of the Spirit in our lives. It is a good and noble prayer to request that God would increase our



effectiveness, give us gifts we don't currently have, and equip us to accomplish works we are not currently equipped to accomplish.

And second, the responsibility: *"I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands"* (2 Timothy 1:6).

Just because God has deposited a gift in a person's life, this does not mean the gift is at its maximum potential for effectiveness. Spiritual gifts are given as a spark or a small flame. It is when we use these gifts, train these gifts, and pray over these gifts that we experience the fanning of that initial flame toward the blaze of maximum impact.

This leads to another critical question. How do we discern our spiritual gifts?

Spiritual Gifts Confirmed

Paul was gifted as an apostle. Perspectives vary as to what this means exactly. But at a minimum, the word *apostle* means "one who is sent," which is highly reflective of the work Paul did. He traveled the known world and entered into villages where *"he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ"* (Acts 28:31). Despite what is clear evidence of his gifting to us today, there were some in his day that challenged the validity of his ministry. They questioned if he was truly gifted and called to do the work he was doing.

Paul's response is instructive:

Do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

(2 Corinthians 3:1-3)

The confirmation of Paul's gifting, according to Paul himself, were the results that came from his work. Yes, we gain insight into our gifting through exercises, assessments, and conversations with friends. Ultimately, though, affirmation of our gifts and calling come by discerning if God bears fruit through these actions. To be sure, this is not to say that if we do not see immediate fruit from our service that it means we lack gifts for this area of service. Reaping a harvest takes a great deal of perseverance. It is to say, though, that affirmation of spiritual gifts is most effectively found in their use.

The Spirit of Spiritual Gifts

The following passage is commonly read at weddings. The context, though, is not marriage, but spiritual gifts. Listen carefully to the words.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

(1 Corinthians 13:1-3)



Spiritual gifts can be likened to tools. Tools can be used for good or evil. A hammer can be used to build a shelter for those in need of protection, but it can also be used as a weapon. Most important is not whether people have this or that gift but the spirit in which they use whatever gifts they have. Spiritual gifts are not points of pride. They are given, by grace, for the good of others.

As we increase our service and our participation in the body of Christ, we must be driven by love. If we do it for the applause of others, or for any motivation, not only are we the clanging cymbal mentioned above, but we will ultimately discover it's not worth it.

Service is hard. Yes, there is joy and even a thrill in using our gifts. But we quickly learn that for every person who celebrates our actions there will be another who challenges our work or is offended by our efforts. Hear Christ's warning: *"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first... They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me"* (John 15:18, 21). We deploy our gifts for service because we have been liberated by the love of God in Christ and we want others to experience this freedom.

Engagement

In closing, consider again our friends Bezalel and Oholiab. At some point, and Scripture does not record this interaction, Moses approached them with an opportunity. *"We need your service,"* he might have said. *"God has asked us to build his tabernacle, and you both have uncommon ability to bring this vision into reality."* Their acceptance of this challenge would have been influenced by their recognition that the opportunity matched their abilities. Their knowledge of their gifting helped them embrace the service God had prepared for them.

We, too, must know ourselves. The failure to recognize God's workmanship in our lives could lead to the failure to recognize the work he prepared for us to do.

So now it's time for us to evaluate, pray, reflect, and assess. How are we gifted? What other gifts may God want to empower us with if we would simply ask him to do so? And most importantly, what's motivating us? Are we driven by love?

You are encouraged to engage deeply the Apply exercise associated with this Spiritual Outcome. Why? Because there are works God has prepared for you to do.

