

7 Motivational Gifts of the Holy Spirit: Discover Your Divine Purpose (Romans 12)

Be Filled with the Spirit Series
Romans 12:3-8

Eric Liddell: When I Run, I Feel His Pleasure.

As we continue our exploration of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, we now turn to the Gifts of the Spirit and the motivational gifts described by the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 12. It is my prayer and intention that, as we study these gifts, each of us will thoughtfully examine our lives and recognize the unique role God has entrusted to us in building up the Body of Christ. How wonderful it would be if this teaching stirred believers to seek the Lord about their divine purpose and awakened a deeper passion for His calling. In many cases, people discover that the very passions God has placed within them are not accidental at all but clear indicators of the work He has lovingly prepared for them to do.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10. ESV)

God's work in us is carried out through His Great Grace, including the gifts He gives for the benefit and growth of His One Body, the Church. I pray this thought inspires you and sparks a desire to thrive in the gift God has already placed within you!

I remember being inspired by the film Chariots of Fire, which tells the story of two English Olympic runners, Eric Liddell of Scotland and Harold Abrahams of Cambridge, who competed in the 1924 Paris Olympics. Eric Liddell became widely known for refusing to run on the Sabbath; instead, he entered a different event than the one he had trained for and went on to win the 400-meter race, earning a gold medal and setting a world record. What has always stayed with me most, however, is Liddell's profound statement: "I believe God made me for a purpose, but He also made me fast, and when I run, I feel His pleasure." That sentence beautifully captures what it means to discover a God-given calling—to recognize the gifts He has placed within us and use them joyfully for His purpose. We were all made with a purpose.

My Personal Realization of the Motivational Gift

My father was a commercial fisherman on England's east coast, near the Dover Straits—a twenty-two-mile-wide channel separating England from France. Having witnessed the hardships of that life firsthand, I had no intention of following him into the fishing trade. We grew up in the small coastal town of Harwich, which, despite its size, holds an important place in history as the home port of Christopher Jones, captain of the Mayflower. Today, Harwich is a major seaport and the second-busiest ferry port in the region.

Growing up, most of my job opportunities were connected to the sea. After finishing school, I worked on large passenger ferries traveling to ports in Belgium and the Netherlands. Eventually, my father offered me a job alongside him. Although the pay was four times higher than on the ferries, I was only in it for the money; deep inside, I knew it was temporary, always aware that God had a different plan for my future.

After coming to faith in Christ at twenty-three, I began to discern God's calling on my life more clearly. To my surprise, I realized the Lord had already been shaping me through those early years—teaching lessons He would later use as He called me to become a different kind of fisherman. I often say I once worked with my father catching soles (we caught Dover soles in the North Sea), but now I work with my Father catching souls. God wastes nothing. He uses every experience in our lives to develop and exercise the gifts and calling He has already placed within us. The skills I learned in a natural occupation were later redeemed and repurposed for spiritual work in His kingdom. After walking with Christ for forty-eight years, I can now look back and recognize that what God was stirring in my heart all along were the motivational gifts described in Scripture.

What are the Seven Motivational Gifts?

Frederick W. Taylor, often considered one of the earliest management consultants, was known for creating innovative approaches to improve business practices. He believed that “every worker was a first-class worker at something, and a good leader or manager will find that innate characteristic gifting that motivates each person.” Similarly, a capable church leader or pastor will recognize the gifts within the Body of Christ. Paul understood well how the whole Body should work together in love to fulfill God’s purposes. He traveled with a group of believers specifically to build up the Church wherever they went and frequently observed the Holy Spirit’s work within his team. Paul the apostle mentions seven giftings that God has placed within each person. The diverse members of the Body of Christ are naturally endowed from birth with dispositions given by God. I don’t believe Paul intended this as an exhaustive list. There are additional giftings within the Body of Christ. In his letter to the Romans, he highlights just these seven.

³For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith **God has distributed to each of you.** ⁴For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵**so in Christ we, though many, form one body**, and **each member belongs to all the others.** ⁶**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; ⁷if it is **serving**, then serve; if it is **teaching**, then teach; ⁸if 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 12:3-8).

Were these gifts always resident in the one who becomes a believer? Or were they imparted when they were born-again of the Spirit? What do you think?

It is possible that the gifts were latent in the person, hard-wired into us, and actualized when they came to Christ. What do we mean by the term actualize a gift? It means to realize it in action, turn it into action, or make it real. Some people find that their gifts are actualized only when they are placed in situations where they feel at ease doing whatever is asked of them. Often, a joy arises in one’s soul when they are used by God in a particular area. People are like elastic bands; they become effective when stretched by God, and their innate gifts surface when the need arises.

I recall asking someone to lead a small group for the first time. He was initially hesitant to lead others in their spiritual walk, but his natural ability quickly became evident. Within several months, I asked him to coach others in leading small groups. He didn't realize the gift he had until I asked him to step out in faith and see what God would do within and through him. We often fail to recognize in ourselves what is evident to others, particularly other leaders. When a person is stretched to exercise their motivational gift profile, they become self-motivated and energized by the Holy Spirit. Often, the ministry they are called to seems as natural to them as walking.

It is also possible to have a crossover of giftings. This applies to both motivational and leadership gifts. Individuals gifted to equip others, such as the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher, may be gifted with two or even all of the giftings. It seems that the apostles Paul and Peter had a crossover of several gifts.

In his letter to the Roman Christians, the Apostle Paul challenges them to use their gifts and talents to build one another up in the faith. We are often tempted to dismiss the Spirit's promptings to exercise our gifts, believing it is up to the pastor, but we are all called to be part of the Body of Christ's functioning in a particular area. Paul writes:

For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Romans 12:4).

Everyone is on their own path, and each of us has at least one gift. How might comparing ourselves to others prevent us from fully embracing and using our spiritual gifts?

The gifts listed below, as outlined in Romans 12, differ from the manifestation gifts (discussed in 1 Corinthians chapter 12) and the ministry offices (often called the five-fold ministry gifts in Ephesians chapter 4). These are the specific roles and gifts given to the Church. It's crucial to remember that all gifts are vital to the Body of Christ. We should not compare ourselves to others. Each person is responsible to God for using the unique gift He has bestowed upon them. Every believer in the Body of Christ has been given a gift, and some may fulfill more than one. Think of these gifts as how God has wired us for purpose within His divine plan. Below is a list and description of the Motivational Gifts mentioned in Romans Chapter 12.

1. Prophecy

In Old Testament times, a person with prophetic gifting was called a seer (1 Samuel 9:9). A seer perceives spiritual truths and knows how to interpret and clarify God's Word in specific situations. This gift is sometimes also called a perceiver.

The key motivation of the one with a gift for perception and a prophetic spirit is to speak the truth in alignment with God's will. He or she may have knowledge of the future, but this gift, as described in Romans 12, is more about proclaiming God's word than predicting the future. This individual often challenges compromise and lukewarmness in the Church. The prophetic gift calls people into a closer, more faithful relationship with God.

Function: The function of the Prophetic Gift is to boldly declare God's word and call people back to obedience and faithfulness by clearly showing God's ways.

Focus: For those with a prophetic spiritual gift, the focus is always to take a stand for God's ways, and the strength of this gifting is discernment and clarity. They provide a "Clarion Call" to the Church and help keep things on track, like a ship's rudder. If you feel you have a prophetic gifting, it is important to work within a team to avoid the enemy's temptations, which can include pride or independence stemming from the loneliness often associated with this role. If you have this gift, it is wise to share what you perceive with the leader/pastor of the flock. Often, a pastor knows things in the Church that a person with prophetic gifting is unaware of. It is important for those with this gift to have friends with whom they can be accountable. A person with this gift must also be open to others speaking truth into their lives.

2. Serving

A person equipped by God with the motivational gift of service finds fulfillment by actively loving others and demonstrating God's kindness through practical actions. This gift is often used evangelistically to connect with those in need. When someone is loved in a tangible way, it can be so impactful that it motivates them to emulate that behavior. Paul describes this gift of service, saying: **"Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor"** (Romans 12:10).

We have a friend in Jerusalem, Israel, who has the gift of service. Several years ago, during the war between Lebanon and Israel, many refugees crossed the border into Israel. She went to as many Israeli people as she could and asked if they could contribute anything to the refugees, children huddled together in the cold. She took out all the seats except the driver's seat and drove 230 miles with warm clothing, baby diapers, toothbrushes, food, and other essentials. This went on for days until the emergency services kicked in. She was awarded the honorary title of Mother in Israel, even though she is a Gentile. Today, she still serves Arabs and Jews in Jerusalem and is well known as a servant to all. I aspire to be like her as she continues to serve the Body of Christ in that beautiful land. People with this gift are very inspiring. Serving is also a ministry of Encouragement, and those two gifts often overlap.

The Key Motivation: Meeting Practical Needs.

The Function of this gift is: Joyfully supporting others through tangible acts of assistance and kindness.

The Focus of this gift is simply the ability to recognize a need and meet it. It is about doing what needs to be done. The strength of this gift is reliability and humility. The person with this gift will remind you of Christ, for this is what He demonstrated in His ministry. For those blessed with this motivational gift, a common challenge is the inability to say no. Often, this person needs to learn to set boundaries. Even Jesus, at times, needed to retreat and prioritize time with the Father to be ready for ministry and to enjoy communion with Him.

3. Teaching

The person equipped by God with the gift of teaching feels fulfilled when those being taught grasp a truth that is relevant to the growth of individuals or the church. The teacher feels God's pleasure when people discover the truths of God.

The gift of teaching manifests in various ways. Some excel in one-on-one teaching, such as sitting with a disciple in a casual setting like a coffee bar, while others are gifted to teach before large groups. Some enjoy answering questions in front of crowds, whereas others might find this intimidating, fearing they won't know the answers. There are many ways to develop this gift—start wherever opportunities arise. When I was young, I struggled to speak with older people. Once, I visited a pastor to share my testimony with young people. The pastor, meeting me for the first time, exclaimed, "You are so young!" I replied, "Well, I am trying to get old, but it takes time!" We still had a great time. To begin, take the first step. God will provide opportunities—stay attentive. A teacher delights in studying God's word, finding new treasures in it. Those with this gift enjoy storing up God's word in their hearts. Be faithful, and God will open doors for you. Embrace the learning process as God teaches you and remember that a true teacher is also willing to learn.

Key Motivation – Understanding the Truth of God's Word and Explaining it to Others.

The Function of the Teacher is to clearly and systematically communicate to develop disciples, bringing maturity to the Body of Christ.

Focus: The teacher's focus is on learning, accuracy, and comprehension. The teacher's strength is clarity and structure. If someone is given this gift, it is a solemn responsibility. This person will need to understand that God will hold them accountable not only for what they teach with their words but also for what they teach through their lives. Teachers need to remember that a personal devotional life of prayer and sensitivity to the Spirit of God are also vital. If a teacher does not live the truth, their words will be hollow.

The Gospel writer Luke provides an excellent example for teachers, having exercised careful diligence to investigate the facts and to present an orderly account of the life of Christ, supported by historical detail that substantiates his record:

It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theopolis, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught (Luke 1:3-4).

4. Encouragement (Exhortation).

The motivation of a person with the gift of encouragement is to come alongside believers, strengthening and comforting them and helping them grow toward spiritual maturity. This gift manifests in people who feel what others are going through and delight in encouraging them. Often, it is because the encourager sees someone in a similar situation to what they themselves have gone through on their spiritual journey. The prime example in the Scriptures is Barnabas, whose name means "son of encouragement," who came alongside the apostle Paul and encouraged

him to go with him to Antioch to disciple and strengthen the believers who were in a time of revival.

Key Motivation – Strengthening others.

The Function of the Encourager is to urge believers to persevere, grow, and apply God's word, especially in difficult times.

Focus- The Encourager's focus is spiritual progress. This person lifts up the weary and offers hope, especially in difficult times. The Encourager's strength is inspiration and reassurance. While providing encouragement, it is important to avoid oversimplifying another's problems and to seek to understand what a person is going through before speaking. An Encourager is often quick to speak because they do not want to see others experience difficulty or pain. Sometimes, however, difficulty is necessary for learning and growth. An Encourager needs to remember the importance of being grounded in the truth and speaking the truth in love when seeking to build others up. An Encourager needs to understand and accept the sovereignty of God, which is a key to this ministry.

5. Giving

As in serving, this gift reflects and imitates the life of Christ. Giving does not come naturally to many people. Givers have learned the joy of giving and are usually good with finances. They are often skilled at finding the best deals, noticing overlooked needs, and managing resources. Givers often avoid the limelight; they do not mind doing their work in secret.

Key Motivation – Providing for God's work. Blessing others in a practical way. This gift often overlaps with the gift of serving.

Function- Shares effortlessly, providing material possessions generously and joyfully.

Focus: Stewardship and Generosity. The strength of this gift lies in faith and trust in God's provision. Those who operate in this gift are often called to give sacrificially and are granted the grace to step out in faith when others hesitate. Because givers are typically practical and skilled in administration, they may feel a strong desire to control the outcome of a situation. However, they must learn to entrust the results to God and trust Him with the outcome of every gift they give. At times, givers may also feel overlooked or neglected. In those moments, they need to continually look to God as their provider and not hesitate to ask for help when they have a genuine need.

6. Leadership – (Administration)

Without church leadership, it can be aimless, with individuals and groups moving in different directions, lacking unity and a sense of mission and purpose. Each church has a role to play, and God has plans for His church, as He does for each of His children.

Key Motivation- Direction and Order. Guidance for the local church.

Function- Organizes, Guides, and Oversees the work of the Church, both local and beyond. Provides oversight with vision and accountability.

Focus- The focus of this gift is effectiveness—advancing movement and spiritual maturity in the church. The strength of this gift is often shown through initiative and decisiveness. Without this gift in operation, the effectiveness of other ministries within the Body is limited. Healthy leadership inspires confidence and motivates others to follow. As Jesus taught, His yoke is easy and His burden is light; in the same way, it is not difficult to follow a true leader because there is a clear sense that they know where they are going.

Jesus demonstrated this perfectly to His disciples. He showed them the Way through His life and teaching. When He prepared to leave them, He could say with confidence, “You know the way to where I am going... I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” He had fully prepared them for what lay ahead. Likewise, a spiritual leader must be able to see the road ahead and anticipate what is needed for continued progress on the journey of faith.

At the same time, a leader must be willing to be led. Just as a teacher must remain teachable, a leader must remain submitted to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. When humility is lacking, leadership can become overly independent or authoritarian. If a leadership role is given too early—before character and spiritual maturity are formed—the weight of responsibility may be too heavy, often leading to impulsive or unwise decisions. For this reason, character development should always precede appointment to leadership.

The Lord has given us a perfect model in Jesus, the Good Shepherd. When we recognize the Shepherd’s voice, we trust that He leads us into good pasture. A good leader never loses sight of the need to follow the Good Shepherd and always depends on the Lord for the ministry’s direction, success, and outcomes.

7. Mercy

Key Motivation- Compassion for those who are suffering.

Function- Comes alongside others to minister to those who are suffering or in pain, whether physical, mental, or emotional. This person will demonstrate the Lord’s kindness. The message and work of mercy are simple, direct actions that require being with the suffering person. Words may or may not be needed. There can be an overlap with other gifts here, such as mercy and giving.

Focus- Healing and Restoration. The strength of this gift lies in empathy and in demonstrating the character of God, sharing His mercy and tender kindness, and bringing relief to those who suffer. This person will also have a generous measure of patience and sensitivity. The individual blessed with this gift can sometimes feel overwhelmed by others’ suffering, as they genuinely share in their pain. They might be tempted to question God’s ways or to perceive suffering as an injustice. Without mercy, the world is a cold place, but God’s great mercy brings us into His family. Those with this gift must trust in God’s goodness and sovereignty, as well as His promise to reward those who endure suffering. It is essential for empathetic individuals to trust in God’s plan for their own lives and for others.

After hearing about the Motivational Gifts, can you see yourself in one or more of these gifts? Can you identify with any of the strengths or issues associated with one or more of these gifts?

One thing to hold as a constant reminder is that it is important to exercise all of these spiritual gifts with the motivation of love and demonstrated with humility. This is why Paul starts out talking about humility “**For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you**” (Romans 12:3), and ends the passage talking about love: “**Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor**” (Romans 12:9-10).

We can be confident that God has distributed gifts to each of His children. As you review these motivational gifts, I hope you can identify which ones God has given you. I believe everyone can operate in any of these gifts, but each person is likely to have specific gifts from God. I encourage you to ask the Father how best to use the gifts He has provided. In eternity, we will receive rewards from the Lord and will be accountable for how we used these gifts. While this is a serious thought, it is also a wonderful one. For we are told: “**What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived- the things God has prepared for those who love Him**” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

I am again reminded of how the Scottish runner Eric Liddell lived his life, using the talents God gave him. Although we know him as a famous sprinter, he was also a Christian missionary. Born in Tianjin, China, to Scottish missionaries, he returned to China in 1925 and served as a missionary teacher. Aside from two trips home on furlough to Scotland, he remained in China until his death in a Japanese civilian internment camp in 1945. Eric Liddell’s last words, spoken to a fellow missionary, were, “It’s complete surrender.” These words reflected his lifelong journey and commitment to serving God. He was a good example of submission to God’s will. Although he may be best remembered by the world for his running, the Lord has remembered His Big Race, the race he ran with patience his whole life. It is this crown and reward he ultimately ran toward. Let us run with patience this race that is set before us.

Prayer: Father, You have called each of us to run this spiritual race and to compete for the prize of knowing Christ Jesus. May each of us, at the end of this grand race, say with the apostle Paul: “**I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith**” (2 Timothy 4:7). Amen!

Continue Your Journey...

This devotional is part of our [Be Filled With the Spirit](#) series. Here’s the link to the YouTube video of the study: [7. The 7 Motivational Gifts of the Spirit](#)

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