

8. The Revelation Gifts: Understanding the Word of Wisdom, Knowledge, and Discerning of Spirits

Be Filled with the Holy Spirit Series

The Promise of the Holy Spirit: Our Helper and Guide

I want to begin by reminding us of a promise Jesus made. Before Jesus departed this earth, He assured His disciples that He would not leave them as orphans but would grant them the Holy Spirit to be with them. One way we sense the Lord's presence with us is through the Gifts of the Spirit He has given us. Through the Gifts of the Spirit and His Word, He not only reminds us of what He has said but also reveals things to us by His Spirit. Jesus said:

He [the Spirit] will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore, I said that He will take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 16:14-15).

What a wonderful promise He has given us. Even though we cannot see Him, He is with us, ministering to us through the Holy Spirit. One way He does this is through spiritual gifts. The Holy Spirit grants spiritual gifts as needed, often called the Situational Gifts or Gifts of the Spirit. These divine empowerments are given to believers for specific everyday situations, such as evangelism and personal, social, family, and work-related challenges. They are unrelated to a person's personality, education, training, or church role, whether as a pastor or a deacon. These gifts are not earned; they are freely given to all believers willing to receive the Spirit's direction—regardless of age, wealth, or gender—whenever the situation requires. The only requirement is genuine faith in Christ. If you believe in Christ, the Spirit of God resides in you and will empower each believer (Romans 8:9).

Understanding Situational Gifts: Divine Empowerments for Every Believer

⁴There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. ⁷Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰to 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. ¹¹All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines (1 Corinthians 12:4-11).

Some people have not been taught to be open to God in this way, while others have been taught that spiritual gifts are no longer given because we now have the Word of God. Still others are taught that spiritual gifts are of the devil, causing them to be fearful of the whole topic.

What do you think holds people back from being used of God in the spiritual gifts? Can you recall a moment when you believe you received a situational gift of the Holy Spirit for a particular incident or time?

Paul the apostle describes God's activity within the church as "the manifestation of the Spirit" (v. 7). This refers to the invisible God demonstrating His power on earth through a believer, perceived in their spirits or through their senses. Typically, this leads to an awareness that God is near and "the secrets of their hearts are laid bare. So they fall down and worship, exclaiming, "God is really among you!" (1 Corinthians 14:25).

The Three Categories of Spiritual Manifestation

The nine spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 are broken up into three categories:

The Revelation Gifts	The Power Gifts	The Speaking Gifts
The Word of Wisdom	Faith	Speaking in Tongues
The Word of Knowledge	Gifts of Healings	Interpretation of Tongues
Discerning of Spirits	Working of Miracles	Prophecy

In our study today, we want to look at the first category, the Revelation Gifts of the Spirit.

The Revelation Gifts of the Spirit

A revelatory gift reveals what is unseen or unclear in the physical world. These are spiritual bracelets of insight provided by the Holy Spirit. What do I mean by a bracelet? C. Peter Wagner, in his book Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow, explains that Russell Spittler was the first to suggest translating the Greek "charismata" not as "spiritual gifts" (1 Corinthians 12:1), but literally as "bracelets." According to this view, spiritual gifts are not merely special qualities but empowering gifts and spiritual impartations from the Holy Spirit meant for specific situations faced by members of the Body of Christ. This impartation is for all believers, not only those perceived as leaders or spiritually gifted. God delights in faith; therefore, those who approach Him with a need and step out in faith can expect Him to move in this way.

Sometimes, revelatory gifts come as a "know-so" feeling within your inner self or spirit. At other times, the Holy Spirit may speak audibly, though this is rare. Dreams and visions also guide individuals in specific directions. For example, during his second missionary journey through the interior of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), the apostle Paul was contemplating a ministry trip south to preach in the cities around Ephesus.

⁶ And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, **having been forbidden** by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷ And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but **the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.** ⁸ So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. ⁹ And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them (Acts 16:6-10, emphasis added).

One might wonder how the Holy Spirit prevented Paul from speaking in Asia (v. 6); was it an impression in his spirit? Was it a prophecy by one of his team? We don't know. Similarly, in verse 7, the Spirit did not permit them to go north into Bithynia to preach the Word. Paul likely struggled

to understand why the Lord restricted his movements north or south. It was only when Paul received a vision during the night of a man in Macedonia calling him to help establish the church there, and to cross into Europe, that the Spirit's guidance became clear. Sometimes, we simply need to follow the Spirit's leading, even when it doesn't seem logical. Paul had to wait for God's timing to plant a church in Ephesus (Acts 19:10). So, let's now look at three of the "bracelets."

The Word of Wisdom: Applying God's Perspective to Life

The Word of Wisdom is the special ability that God gives to certain members of the Body of Christ to know the mind of the Holy Spirit in such a way as to receive insight into how given knowledge may best be applied to specific needs rising in the Body of Christ.¹

Example: Solomon knew his limitations. "I do not know how to go out or come in," he said. "And your servant is in the midst of a people...so numerous they cannot be numbered." Therefore, when God asked Solomon what wish the new king would like granted, Solomon asked for "an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil" (1 Kings 3:9).

Then the king gave his ruling: "Give the living baby to the first woman. By no means should you kill him; she is his mother." When all Israel heard of the judgment the king had given, they stood in awe of him, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice (1 Kings 3:27-28).

What is Wisdom?

Knowledge is the accumulation of facts and information, whereas wisdom is the ability to apply that knowledge with discernment, empathy, and a sense of timing. The spiritual gift of wisdom requires the ability to step back and view a situation from multiple perspectives, with an eternal perspective and an understanding of the spiritual warfare this world is engaged in. The Holy Spirit will impart grace to avoid acting impulsively in a situation and to view it with a spiritual perspective. This gift enables a person to act appropriately in a given situation.

The Word of Knowledge: Revealing the Unseen

The Word of Knowledge is the special ability that God gives to certain members of the Body of Christ to discover, accumulate, analyze, and clarify information and ideas that are pertinent to the growth and well-being of the body.

Example: Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), Nathaniel (John 1:43-51).

Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10).

Peter's Word of Knowledge revealed the lies and deception of Ananias and Sapphira, which brought a holy fear of the Lord to the Church in the early days after the Spirit was poured out (Acts 5:1-13).

How does one recognize that God has given a Word of Knowledge? How is it received or manifested? Unfortunately, the gift doesn't come as a voice from the sky. There are several ways:

- 1) An "Inner Knowing." This gift often shows up when you're praying for someone and feel they are facing a particular struggle.

¹ C. Peter Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow*. Published by Regal Books, 1994, Page 230.

- 2) It can come as a mental image or a vision, similar to what we referenced earlier in the life of Paul, directing him to go into Europe to Macedonia. Sometimes God will show you someone who's hurting in a particular part of their body. When you call out what you are seeing or sensing spiritually, it will resonate with the one hurting.
- 3) Physical Sensations. When the Spirit of God is moving in a room, the evangelist or Christian worker will sense a pain in their own body, indicating that someone in the room is experiencing the same pain.
- 4) Spontaneous Speech. Sometimes, in the middle of preaching, the person receiving input from the Spirit will suddenly start speaking on something completely different, as they are led by the Spirit.

Charles Spurgeon's Words of Knowledge

Charles Spurgeon, the great English Baptist preacher, had this gift manifest in his ministry of preaching on multiple occasions. He writes in his autobiography the following words:

There were many instances of remarkable conversions at the Music Hall; one especially was so singular that I have often related it as a proof that God sometimes guides His servants to say what they would themselves never have thought of uttering, in order that He may bless the hearer for whom the message is personally intended. While preaching in the hall, on one occasion, I deliberately pointed to a man amid the crowd, and said, "There is a man sitting there, who is a shoemaker; he keeps his shop open on Sundays, it was open last Sabbath morning, he took ninepence, and there was fourpence profit out of it. A city missionary, when going his rounds, met with this man, and seeing that he was reading one of my sermons, he asked the question, 'Do you know Mr. Spurgeon?'" "Yes," replied the man, "I have every reason to know him, I have been to hear him; and, under his preaching, by God's grace I have become a new creature in Christ Jesus. Shall I tell you how it happened? I went to the Music Hall, and took my seat in the middle of the place; Mr. Spurgeon looked at me as if he knew me, and in his sermon, he pointed to me and told the congregation that I was a shoemaker and that I kept my shop open on Sundays; and I did, sir. I should not have minded that, but he also said that I took ninepence the Sunday before, and that there was fourpence profit out of it. I did take ninepence that day, and fourpence was just the profit; but how he should know that, I could not tell. Then it struck me that God had spoken to my soul through him, so I shut up my shop the next Sunday. At first, I was afraid to go again to hear him, lest he should tell the people more about me; but afterwards I went, and the Lord met with me, and saved my soul."

Spurgeon elaborates that his experience of the word of knowledge (not his term) was not uncommon in his ministry:

I could tell as many as a dozen similar cases in which I pointed at somebody in the hall without having the slightest knowledge of the person, or any idea that what I said was right, except that I believed I was moved by the Spirit to say it; and so striking has been my description, that the persons have gone away, and said to their friends, "Come, see a man

that told me all things that ever I did; beyond a doubt, he must have been sent of God to my soul, or else he could not have described me so exactly.²

The prophet Elisha had what we now call a word of knowledge, as he heard the plans of the king of Syria while the king spoke in his bedroom:

⁸Now the king of Aram was at war with Israel. After conferring with his officers, he said, “I will set up my camp in such and such a place.” ⁹The man of God sent word to the king of Israel: “Beware of passing that place, because the Arameans are going down there.” ¹⁰So the king of Israel checked on the place indicated by the man of God. Time and again Elisha warned the king, so that he was on his guard in such places. ¹¹This enraged the king of Aram. He summoned his officers and demanded of them, “Tell me! Which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?” ¹²“None of us, my lord the king,” said one of his officers, “but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom” (2 Kings 6:8-12).

Miracles in Action: How the Word of Knowledge Saves Lives

This gift of the Spirit is sorely needed in the days we live in, for it can save lives, for instance, in the early 1950s, as persecution swept through the Chinese church, a pastor named Li lived in Guangdong Province in southern China. Li had a wife and five children, ranging in age from a newborn to twelve. The authorities arrested Pastor Li for “counterrevolutionary” activities and sentenced him to prison with hard labor in an iron mine in remote northeast China. So that she could be near her husband, Pastor Li’s wife took a simple job at the Iron mine where the prisoners worked. The prison director took her outside to an area above where 3,000 prisoners worked underground in an iron mine. He said, “Do you see this red button? Your job is to stand next to this pole all day, every day, and when someone tells you to push it, you must push it straight away. This is the emergency button; when it is pushed, a siren is triggered deep underground, prompting the men to evacuate as quickly as possible. This button should never be pushed by accident, or without us telling you to push it.” For day after day, week after week, young Sister Li stood next to the pole with the red button.

One afternoon, as she was standing next to the pole, she suddenly heard a voice say, “Push the button!” She spun around to find no one near her, and she was confused. A few moments later she heard the same voice again, this time louder: “Quick! Push the button now!” Sister Li again turned but saw no one. She thought she was losing her mind and just stood there confused. She couldn’t push the button unless there was a major emergency, and nothing looked any different from normal. A few seconds later, she heard the voice for the third time, this time with great authority: “Sister Li, push the button now!” This time, she realized it was no less than the voice of the Lord that had been speaking to her. She didn’t understand why He was telling her to push the button, but she knew she had to obey. She immediately pushed the red button, and the emergency alarm sounded deep underground.

² Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Autobiography of Charles H. Spurgeon, Vol. 2: 1854-1860* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1899), 226-227.

Three thousand men emerged to the surface as quickly as they could. They were confused and eager to learn what emergency had taken place. The prison director ran from his office and demanded to know why Sister Li had pushed the button, halting production. Then, just moments after the last man had evacuated from the mine, the ground started to shake violently. A strong earthquake struck, lasting about 20 seconds, completely collapsing the mine, leaving it inaccessible to this day. When the shaking stopped, an eerie silence came upon the gathered mass. Every eye was fixed upon the tiny, frail figure, still standing next to the pole and the red button that she had guarded. The terrified prison director asked, "Comrade Li, how...how did you know that you should push the button when you did?" She was given a fruit-box to stand on so that she could be seen just above the heads of the gathered men. In the loudest voice she could muster, she said, "It is the Lord Jesus Christ who told me to push the red button. He told me to do it three times, and finally, I did. Jesus Christ is the only way for you to know the true and living God. He loves you, as evidenced by the fact that he saved all your lives today. You need to repent of your sins and give your lives to him!" Immediately, all three thousand men, including the prison director, knelt and prayed with great sobs, asking Jesus to come and forgive them and live in their hearts.

The Biblical Purpose of the Word of Knowledge-

The Word of Knowledge is rarely given just for the sake of "knowing a secret." In a Christian context, it serves specific purposes:

- **To Build Faith:** When a stranger tells you something only God could know, it confirms to you that God knows you. He sees you!
- **To Bridge a Gap:** It can bypass a person's skepticism or "walls," making them more open to prayer or the Gospel.
- **For Healing:** It often points out exactly what needs to be prayed for, opening the door to ministry. Healing can be the starting point for a person opening up to the Lord.

How to Operate in this Gift

To model ourselves after Jesus, this gift—like all the gifts—must be exercised with humility. We should remain natural and genuine with people. If you sense that God has given you a word of knowledge about a situation or an individual, you might begin simply by saying, "I'm sensing a thought or impression about X—does that resonate with you?" This approach allows the word to be tested (1 Thessalonians 5:21) without being intrusive or overbearing. When God is truly speaking, it will bear witness with the person's spirit. Remembering that it is God who reveals and God who imparts truth relieves us of unnecessary pressure. When a word is shared in love and humility, and with openness to testing, the individual is likely to experience the love of God—even if the word is not expressed perfectly. A genuine word of knowledge will never contradict Scripture. If you are uncertain about a word, it is wise to seek confirmation from a pastor or trusted church leader before sharing it. Motivation for using this gift is to be a blessing to others and to be obedient to the Lord. If this is your motivation, God will surely use you and make you a blessing. Be attentive in times of worship and prayer. It can help to keep a journal.

Discerning of Spirits: Identifying the Source of Inspiration

The Gift of Discerning of Spirits, or "distinguishing spirits," is the special ability that God gives to certain members of the Body of Christ to know with assurance whether certain behavior

purported to be of God is genuinely divine, human, or satanic. All born-again believers who have gone beyond young faith come to discern what's of God and what's of Satan by constant practice of spiritual warfare:

¹³Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴But solid food is for the mature, who by **constant use** have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil (Hebrews 5:13-14).

Let's think some more about what the writer of the letter to the Hebrews is saying. He's saying that those who are able to discern what's not of the Spirit of God have "acquired" that ability due to their constant use of partaking of solid food—teaching not just by learning head knowledge but experiential knowledge picked up by putting themselves into situations where they have had to depend on the Holy Spirit.

Some believers, unfortunately, are not discipled beyond feeding on milk:

¹And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. ²I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able (1 Corinthians 3:1-2).

The gift of discerning of spirits, though, is knowledge imparted by the Holy Spirit that makes one aware that involvement with a person or a practice would be counter to the Spirit of Grace. When a believer walks in step with the Holy Spirit, this grace gift enables the believer to spot the forgeries of the Christian faith. It could be an awareness of a demonic spirit manifesting itself near the believer. It could also be that the believer picks up on someone operating in the flesh rather than in what God is doing. I feel sure that if the Holy Spirit were to depart from many churches today, most of what goes on would not stop. How does a believer spot that which is demonic or of the flesh? Bank tellers are trained to discern forged banknotes by constantly handling genuine ones. The best way to discern what is of the flesh is through interaction with the Holy Spirit in prayer, biblical meditation, and solitude, by simply spending time with the Lord. When we know what the genuine feels like and know the word of God, the counterfeit will become obvious.

We are not talking about anything mystical here. This gift comes from within, as a deep knowing or awareness in your spirit that something is off about another person. For example, when I was very young in my faith, right after I converted to Christ, I visited a town in England to distribute tracts in a busy shopping area. Some church members invited me to join them at a meeting spot. I accompanied them and soon noticed they lacked joy, and that something felt missing—though at the time my limited understanding of faith prevented me from pinpointing what it was. I sensed no happiness or camaraderie, but instead felt a dull, joyless presence indicating something was wrong with them. Later, I learned they were Jehovah's Witnesses—zealous but lacking the joy of the Lord. As a new Christian, I didn't know how to approach them, and my spirit felt uneasy. The apostle John wanted those in the Body of Christ to "test the spirits:"

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4:1).

How does a person “test the spirits?” Have you ever been aware of something you could describe as a “check in your spirit?” Have you ever sensed a warning from the Lord and been aware that He was giving you insight for your safety or that of another?

Paul wrote, “Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21). Apostles John and Paul warned that the enemy would send false prophets who appear as sheep but are wolves, aiming to divide the flock of God. These deceitful leaders often undermine true leadership and cause disunity. Although they claim to speak for God, their true nature can be identified by their fruit. Do they demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit in their lives?

Step Out in Faith: Operating in the Gracelets of God

I encourage all of us to step out in faith, as Peter did, stepping out of the boat to walk on water. It’s always safer to stay where we are and doubt whether God is granting us the Spirit’s gifts. However, as a wise leader said, faith is spelled R.I.S.K. When a Spirit-inspired thought comes to mind, consider whether acting on it might bring glory to God. Acting on it and finding out it’s not God might bring humiliation, but what’s wrong with some humility coming to your soul? Motivation is crucial. Our relationship with the Lord should be the foundation, with works following from that. The gifts are meant for a purpose, but seeking the Lord comes first. The gifts will naturally flow from a life dedicated to God when we pursue Him. He will reveal to us what is His, as part of a personal relationship.

Prayer: Help us, Holy Father, to be open and spiritually aware of your promptings to be your hand extended to a needy world. 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: <https://youtu.be/7GJRWNBvsYk>

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