

# Spiritual Gifts



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *1 Corinthians 12, Eph. 4:11–13, 1 Corinthians 13, 1 Pet. 4:8–11, 1 Cor. 14:27, Amos 3:7.*

**Memory Text:** “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy” (*1 Corinthians 14:1, ESV*).

Like a human body, the church is one but has many members, each with different roles, functions, and gifts. Practiced with love, these spiritual gifts promote a sense of unity that reflects the character of the triune God.

This week we will survey 1 Corinthians 12–14 and its teaching on spiritual gifts. This section is part of a slightly larger unit, where Paul deals with the expected Christian behavior in religious settings (*1 Corinthians 11–14*). Paul’s primary concern has to do with the problem of disorderly gatherings. His answer to this problem is that the church is a body whose parts have different functions that contribute to “the edifying of the body of Christ” (*Eph. 4:12, NKJV*). In short, God gave the church spiritual gifts in order to promote unity through diversity.

Certainly, Paul still has in mind the factionalism problem addressed in the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians, where the answer to the lack of agreement among church members is unity in Christ. Now, he develops that idea by presenting his understanding of the role of spiritual gifts. According to Paul, unity in Christ and the Spirit is the only means of avoiding schisms.

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 8.

## Varieties of Gifts

In 1 Corinthians 12:1, Paul introduces a new topic with the formula “now concerning.” Scholars discuss whether he is talking about “spiritual gifts” or “spiritual people” because the Greek phrase *tōn pneumatikōn* allows both interpretations. “Spiritual gifts” is preferable in light of 1 Corinthians 12:4, where Paul clearly refers to spiritual gifts. In 1 Corinthians 12:2, 3, Paul points out that the Spirit’s first gift is the bold confession that Jesus is Lord. In New Testament times, to say that Jesus is Lord is to say that Caesar is not (*Acts 17:7; also John 19:12, 15*). This was seen as sedition against the imperial power and, hence, was punishable by death.

Jesus and Paul emphasized that faith in God—even in the face of persecution and the threat of death—is a gift of the Spirit. Actually, faith is the most basic gift. Not surprisingly, faith is first on the list in 1 Corinthians 13:13. That faith is a spiritual gift is clear by Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 12:9. However, there are many other gifts. The fact that the Holy Spirit distributes the different types of gifts “to each one individually as He wills” (*1 Cor. 12:11, NKJV*) proves that all of them are necessary.

### **Read** 1 Corinthians 12:1–6. What is the emphasis of this passage?

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The repetition of “varieties” emphasizes the multiplicity of gifts. What Paul names as “spiritual gifts” in 1 Corinthians 12:1 is developed in verses 4–6, through three different angles: “gifts” (*charisma*), “services” or “ministries” (*diakonia*), and “activities” (*energēma*). Although these words mean different things, it is important not to draw a fine distinction between them because of the parallelism of the passage. One should also notice that the spiritual gifts are designed to promote unity based on the triune character of God (*see also Eph. 4:8–11*). While the Spirit grants gifts to believers, it is God who empowers them to serve Christ in the community of believers (*1 Cor. 12:5, 6*). Each believer is granted gifts individually (*1 Cor. 12:11*), but they all are to benefit the community of believers as a whole.

**Notice again Paul’s emphasis on unity. Why is this so important to the church?**

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## Unity Through Diversity

The language of oneness introduced in 1 Corinthians 12:4–6 (“the same Spirit,” “the same Lord,” and “the same God”) is developed in the rest of 1 Corinthians 12. This is evidenced by Paul’s use of phrases such as “one and the same Spirit” (*1 Cor. 12:11, NKJV*), “the body is one” (*1 Cor. 12:12*), “one body” (*1 Cor. 12:12, 13, 20*), “one Spirit” (*1 Cor. 12:13 [two times]*), and “the same care for one another” (*1 Cor. 12:25, NKJV*).

Alongside the concept of unity, Paul highlights the diversity of members in the body of Christ through such expressions as “many members” (*1 Cor. 12:12, 20*), “we were all baptized” (*1 Cor. 12:13, NKJV*), “not one member but many” (*1 Cor. 12:14, NKJV*), “the whole body” (*1 Cor. 12:17*), “each one of them” (*1 Cor. 12:18, NKJV*), “members of the body” (*1 Cor. 12:22, 23*), and “all the members” (*1 Cor. 12:26*). This emphasis on both unity and diversity indicates that spiritual gifts aim to promote unity *through* diversity.

This unity amid diversity must reflect the character of God. The Father is one person, the Son is another person, and the Holy Spirit another. The three maintain Their individualities while working together to edify the church and empower it for mission (*1 Cor. 12:4–6, Eph. 4:11–13*).

**Read** 1 Corinthians 12:12–31. Why is the analogy of a body with its many parts appropriate to represent the church and its members?

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One central thought in 1 Corinthians 12 is that although the body’s members are individually so different from one another (*1 Cor. 12:15–20*), they are all dependent on each other (*1 Cor. 12:21–26*). The feet depend on the eyes to see where they must walk; in turn, the eyes can’t touch anything—only the hands can. Also, the idea that some members are weaker (*1 Cor. 12:22*) or less honorable (*1 Cor. 12:23*) than others is only an impression, for all are necessary (*1 Cor. 12:22*).

Unfortunately, there was a tendency among the Corinthians to value some gifts to the neglect of others. To rectify the Corinthians from making this mistake, Paul called their attention to love, which is “a more excellent way” (*1 Cor. 12:31, NKJV*). In other words, no matter what the gift is, if practiced wisely and with love, it is pleasant to God.

**See the lists of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10, 28; Romans 12:6–8; and Ephesians 4:11. What is your gift? How can you use it to edify the body of Christ?**

## “A More Excellent Way”

“Love is not one gift among many. It is the means through which all of the gifts reach their ultimate purpose.”—Carl P. Cosaert, “1 Corinthians,” *Andrews Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2022), p. 1643.

**Read 1 Corinthians 13:1–7 and 1 Peter 4:8–11. What is the role of love as far as spiritual gifts are concerned?**

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First Corinthians 13 teaches that only through love can the spiritual gifts be used appropriately. Paul begins 1 Corinthians 13 by alluding to gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12, only to stress their lack of value if not driven by love. Thus, knowledge (*1 Cor. 12:8*) and faith (*1 Cor. 12:9*), even a faith “so as to remove mountains” (*1 Cor. 13:2, ESV*), are nothing without love (*1 Cor. 13:2*). Without love, the ability to speak in tongues (*1 Cor. 12:10, 28, 30*) is reduced merely to “a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal” (*1 Cor. 13:1, NIV*). Likewise, even the important gift of prophecy is nothing without love (*1 Cor. 13:2*).

In 1 Corinthians 13:4–7, Paul focuses on what love is and what it is not; more particularly, what love does and what it does not do. The verbs he chose to characterize love indicate love is not so much something we feel as it is something that we practice. Thus, Paul mentions that love (1) shows patience; (2) shows kindness; (3) rejoices in the truth; (4) bears all things; (5) believes all things; (6) hopes all things; and (7) endures all things. Conversely, love (1) does not envy; (2) does not boast; (3) does not inflate with arrogance; (4) does not behave rudely; (5) does not seek its own [rights]; (6) does not get easily irritated; (7) does not keep record of wrongs; and (8) does not delight in wrongdoing.

This total of 15 verbs provides solid guidance for appropriate behavior in the practice of gifts. Notably, this discussion on the true nature of love lies precisely between 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, where Paul deals with the conflict regarding spiritual gifts. Indeed, love is the key to the wise use of spiritual gifts. Love is also placed side by side with faith and hope, “but the greatest of these is love” (*1 Cor. 13:13, NKJV*).

**Why is love so central to our faith? What better way to experience the reality of God’s love than by prayerfully seeking to reflect that love to others?**

## The Gift of Tongues

What about the gift of tongues? In line with the manifestation of the gift elsewhere in the Bible (*Mark 16:17, Acts 2:1–13, Acts 10:44–48, Acts 19:6*), the gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians is most likely the Spirit-granted ability to speak in foreign languages.

Paul mentions the gift of tongues in the list of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10 (see also *1 Cor. 12:28, 30; 1 Cor. 13:1, 8*). However, he refers to it repeatedly in 1 Corinthians 14. Indeed, the Greek word *glōssa* (“tongue”) appears more than twenty times in 1 Corinthians 12–14, with fifteen occurrences in 1 Corinthians 14 alone. Besides these, the Greek word *heteroglōssos* (“another tongue”) also occurs, in 1 Corinthians 14:21. This high number of references to the gift of tongues suggests that this matter is of particular concern for Paul. The misuse and abuse of this gift by the church in Corinth caused disorder and confusion in public worship (*1 Cor. 14:23, 27, 33, 40*).

**Read 1 Corinthians 14:5, 13, 26, 27 and 1 Corinthians 12:10, 30. What particular instruction did Paul give concerning the gift of tongues?**

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The reason the gift of speaking in tongues must go hand in hand with that of interpreting them is that tongues must be intelligible (*1 Cor. 14:9*); otherwise, there is no benefit in using the gift (*1 Cor. 14:6*). This explains why Paul put so much emphasis on interpretation and understanding. Obviously, he is criticizing not the gift of tongues itself, but, as we will see tomorrow, the excessive prominence the Corinthians attributed to it, which led to the neglect of the gift of prophecy.

At this point, it is important to notice that although Paul desired that all the Corinthians could speak foreign languages (*1 Cor. 14:5*), he did not expect that to happen (*1 Cor. 12:10*). Thus, the thought that “all must speak in tongues before claiming baptism in the Holy Spirit is a perversion of Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14.”—Raoul Dederen, *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, Commentary Reference Series, vol. 12 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2001), p. 620.

**Are there people in your church who speak other languages?  
How can they use this ability to reach other people for Christ?  
How can this fact help us understand the true nature of tongues that Paul is addressing?**

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## The Gift of Prophecy

The gift of prophecy occupies a prominent place in Paul's discussion on spiritual gifts. Interestingly, the gift of prophecy is usually mentioned before the gift of tongues (*1 Cor. 12:10, 28; 1 Cor. 13:8*). When the gift of tongues is mentioned first, this is only to emphasize its relative unimportance compared to the gift of prophecy (*1 Cor. 14:4, 5, 6, 22*).

**Read** Ephesians 4:11–13 and 1 Corinthians 14:3, 4. What do these passages say about the purpose of spiritual gifts in general and the gift of prophecy in particular?

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The gift of prophecy is meant to provide edification, exhortation, and comfort (*1 Cor. 14:3; compare with Acts 15:32*). This suggests that prophecy is not so much about predicting the future as it is about how to live in the present. The Greek verb *prophēteuō* can mean either “to say something in advance” or “to say something *on behalf of* someone else.” For instance, the first sense is seen in Acts 2:29–31 (*compare with Amos 3:7*), where the idea that David is a prophet is explained as “foreseeing.” The second sense is seen in Acts 15:32, where Judas and Silas are identified as prophets. Their “prophecy,” however, consisted in encouraging and strengthening “the brothers with many words” (*ESV*).

From Ephesians 4:11–13, we learn that the spiritual gifts did not cease in the apostolic era. They should remain until the end (*Acts 2:39*). However, if someone claims to be a prophet, he/she must be evaluated based on the Scriptures. Broadly speaking, four rules should be satisfied. First, the unconditional prophecies always come true (*Deut. 18:22; Jer. 28:8, 9*). Second, the message agrees with that of previous prophets (*Deut. 13:1–3, Isa. 8:20*). Third, the daily life demonstrates a commitment to Christ (*1 John 4:1–3*). Fourth, Jesus said false prophets would be known by their fruits (*Matt. 7:15–20*). This is also true concerning true prophets.

The book of Revelation indicates that the gift of prophecy is a distinctive characteristic of the remnant church (*Rev. 12:17, Rev. 19:10*). As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe that the gift of prophecy was bestowed upon Ellen G. White and is reflected in her writings.

**What are all the reasons we have for belief in Ellen G. White's prophetic gift? What questions remain about her role and authority?**

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**Further Thought:** Read Roswell F. Cottrell, “Spiritual Gifts,” pp. 5–16, in Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 1.

“Let men go forth to labor, trusting in the Lord, and He will go with them, convicting and converting souls. One worker may be a ready speaker, another a ready writer, another may have the gift of sincere, earnest, fervent prayer, another the gift of singing. Another may have special power to explain the word of God with clearness. And each gift is to become a power for God because He co-operates with the worker. To one God gives the word of wisdom, to another knowledge, to another faith. But all are to work under the same head. The diversity of gifts leads to a diversity of operations, ‘but it is the same God which worketh all in all’ (1 Cor. 12:6).

“Let no man despise the supposed lesser gifts. Let all go to work. Let no one fold his hands in unbelief because he thinks that he can do no mighty work. Cease looking at self. Look to your Leader. In meekness, sincerity, and love do what you can.”—Ellen G. White, in *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 12, 1906.

“We each need the help we can receive from other minds. God will work in other minds than ours. The various gifts given to different ones are to blend for the ‘perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ’ (Eph. 4:12). . . .

“There will always be obstacles before us, but we are to follow our Leader, and meet our difficulties unitedly, hand in hand.”—Ellen G. White, *The Upward Look*, p. 141.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Think a bit more about the gift of prophecy. Why is prophecy more important than tongues if they are not interpreted? If necessary, read 1 Corinthians 14 again in order to recap Paul’s arguments.
- 2 In class, talk about the life and ministry of Ellen G. White and why we, as a church, believe that she did indeed manifest the gift of prophecy. What great blessings come to the church from this gift? What also are the challenges in knowing how best to use this gift?
- 3 Think of three to five people who genuinely love you. How do you know their love for you is true? What does this tell you about why Paul spoke so much about love in his discussion on spiritual gifts?
- 4 However important love is, why must that not be the only criterion in judging whether or not someone is speaking truth and is worthy of being listened to?

## The Davis Indians: Part 2

By MICHAEL W. CAMPBELL

Unable to write his final diary entry himself, Davis dictated it to the guide who entered it for him: “God has especially blessed in this trip. I had a complete mission at Paruima River, another at Mt. Tulameng, and then we came to Mt. Roraima. Just finished establishing a mission when I was taken sick.” This station officially was established on June 25, 1911, the first Seventh-day Adventist mission in this region. On his deathbed, Davis promised that someone would come and teach the people. He died July 31, 1911, from blackwater fever and was buried by Chief Jeremiah at Mt. Roraima. Carrie would return to her home in the United States.

Following Davis’s death, the Indians gathered every Sabbath by his grave to sing. Despite their numerous “appeals” for another teacher, it was 14 years before Adventist missionaries finally followed up on Davis’s work.

About 1918, an explorer found a group of Indians who were singing “There’s Not a Friend Like the Lowly Jesus” in English. Finding this strange, he discovered that they would bring out the effects of Brother Davis and hold a simple service.

In 1922, after more than a decade of waiting, Chief Jeremiah hiked for four weeks to the Adventist mission office in Georgetown to plead for a teacher. In 1924, the division committee decided they must not wait another year despite budget cuts. W. E. Baxter and C. B. Sutton visited Mt. Roraima the following year. They arrived at the grave of Davis on October 25, 1925, after a lengthy journey to find the Davis Indians. Chief Jeremiah and his son brought them a bundle of papers. In it was a letter from Davis dated July 17, 1911, certifying that 130 persons at Mt. Roraima had “solemnly declared their intentions to live true and loyal” to “the Gospel of Christ and the doctrines and principles of the Seventh-day Adventist church.” The trip up to the mission resulted in both Baxter and Sutton suffering an attack of malaria.

In August 1927, thanks to a special offering, Arthur and Elizabeth Cotts were able to continue the work at Mt. Roraima begun so many years earlier.

The death of Davis “shook Adventists” and served as “a continuing reminder . . . that they were to fulfill the gospel commission even in remote regions.”

Today the 54-bed Adventist hospital in Georgetown, Guyana, is named in Davis’s honor. Also, in 1956, the Davis Indian Training School at Paruima in the Kamarang became part of the Mount Roraima Mission. In the early 1980s, it was reported that there were more than 1,500 Adventists among the “Davis Indians.”

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*This story was adapted from Michael Campbell’s biographical article in the online Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists. We invite you to visit [encyclopedia.adventist.org](http://encyclopedia.adventist.org) to enjoy more stories about Adventist missionaries.*