

LESSON ESSENTIALS

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

LESSON 4: THE STRENGTHENING GIFTS

While all the spiritual gifts reflect some aspect of the character of God, the strengthening gifts are in many ways the ones that most seem to speak for God or to act on His behalf. When used wrongly, or when imitated, these gifts can cause confusion in the church. But when used appropriately and lovingly, the strengthening gifts can build up the church in powerful ways.

The Word teaches us that there will be times when the Lord makes His people weak in order for them to see His power perfected in their weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). Sometimes He demonstrates His power by strengthening His people through the use of spiritual gifts in individuals, or in the church.

As church members, we know that there are times when an individual in our congregation, or the church as a whole, are going through a very difficult time – a weak time – when they need strengthening. While it is expected that all the members in the fellowship will do their part to upbuild and to lend strength where they can, there are some people in the church who are specifically gifted with the strengthening gifts.

Romans 14:19 encourages us to pursue what makes for peace and mutual upbuilding. In the same way, the prophet Isaiah implores the reader to “Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, ‘Be strong; fear not!’” (Isaiah 35: 3-4). As church members, we know that there are times when an individual in our congregation, or the church as a whole, are going through a very difficult time – a weak time – when they need strengthening. While it is expected that all the members in the fellowship will do their part to upbuild and to lend strength where they can, there are some people in the church who are specifically gifted with the strengthening gifts.

Strengthening gifts build faith, enhance our love for God, and are reminders of God’s constant grace to us. When the God of the Universe seems distant, untouchable, and incomprehensible, the strengthening gifts reveal the character of God in a more visible, immediate, and tangible way. These gifts often display God’s extraordinary power and ability to do supernatural things through the lives of ordinary people.

Breaking down the category of strengthening gifts into the specific manifestations helps us to identify them in our church and in ourselves, and to see the various uses of the gifts.

Encouragement -- The people with this gift can sense the hurts and pains in others and are able to speak a word of hope to their wounded hearts. They have the ability to ‘speak life’ to the downcast and to spur them on to joy. You will find people with the gift of encouragement drawn to hospital visitation ministries, or may be continually sending a note to cheer someone. One thing to watch for with this gift is the fear of confrontation. Someone who can encourage with the Lord’s words and the Lord’s compassion may struggle with being able to also speak truth in love, or to rebuke a brother or sister in Christ. When done properly the recipient of the encouragement can tell that the words were not merely flattery or ‘nice words’ but they were Biblical truths applied to their specific circumstance in a way that renews hope.

Healing – During His ministry on earth, Jesus instantaneously healed the physical ailments of many people. But healing ministry did not begin in the New Testament times. Several of the Old Testament prophets also were able to physically heal people. Several of Jesus’ disciples also had this gift. The ability to pray for someone and to see them immediately healed is unique and uncommon. However, there are people who claim to have

participated in the healing of illnesses or physical impairments. The caution with this gift is that the person remember that it is the Lord Jesus who is the Great Physician and it is the Lord alone who heals. We also need to remember that even Jesus did not heal every person he was in contact with, so we ought not to lose heart if healing does not occur when we pray.

Discernment – The spiritual gift of discernment can have two manifestations. Some people with the gift of discernment have such a vast understanding of Biblical truths that they are quickly able to recognize and to refute false teaching when it tries to infiltrate the church. However, some people with the gift of discernment are also able to recognize and sense false spirits in a person, place, or circumstance and can sound the alarm to the other believers present. They have the ability to perceive evil spirits and are willing to name them and to cast them out. People with this gift need to remain humble, remembering that it is God alone who truly understands good and evil, and it is God alone who gives wisdom. People with this gift also need to remember, and to cling to, the truth that Christ has prevailed over the darkness, and that no matter how much falsehood they perceive, Christ has overcome.

Knowledge – The spiritual gift of knowledge sounds like the gift of discernment at first, but it is not as concerned about refuting the falsehood as it is about proclaiming the truth. Individuals with the gift of knowledge have a thorough understanding of the truths of scripture, a keen memory for the Word, and an ability to relate and to communicate the Biblical narrative to listening ears. Their greatest desire is to speak truth and to have the Word of God heard and proclaimed. A caution with this gift is that it not be used to elevate oneself as the source of all knowledge and wisdom. Additionally, individuals with this gift must be sensitive to the listener, ensuring that they share knowledge at a level that is understandable to their audience.

Prophecy – The gift of prophecy can take two forms: there is the ‘forth-telling’ side of prophecy which announces that which the Lord has revealed in His Word. There is also the ‘foretelling’ side of prophecy which announces a new word or specific directions from the Lord to people. Prophecy seems like a very exciting gift. The ‘foretelling’ side of prophecy is especially thrilling as mankind always wanting to know the answers to their questions, and always wants to know the future. However, the person with the spiritual gift of prophecy, and the church wanting to hear from the gift of prophecy, must remember that any word that is given must be

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confirmed by the scriptures, and that no spoken word holds authority over the inerrant Word of God.

Creative Communication – Whether by art, words, music, or drama, the gift of creative communication is vital to the gifts of discernment, knowledge, prophecy, and many of the shepherding gifts that were examined in other lessons. Creative Communication ensures that the truth of God’s Word is spread abroad using whatever methods available. Their great desire is to see God’s Word proclaimed and they are gifted in finding unique and meaningful ways to tell His message.

As with any spiritual gift, the strengthening gifts come with a risk of falling into pride as the gifts are used. The Lord always needs to receive all the glory for the good works He enables us to do. Additionally, the strengthening gifts are in some ways most prone to abuse and sensationalism. The power of God is miraculous enough on its own; we do not need to try and enhance it with our attempts at greatness.

If you, or others in your church, have the strengthening gifts, pray that the Lord will use them mightily for the edification of the church and for the building up of the individuals in it.

IN REVIEW

- The strengthening gifts are given by the Lord for the edification of His people and for the building-up of the body of Christ.
- The strengthening gifts are Encouragement, Healing, Discernment, Prophecy, Knowledge, and Creative Communications.
- While each of the strengthening gifts comes with cautions, when used appropriately they can contribute to the health and strength of the church in a powerful way.

HAVE YOUR SAY

- Do you recognize the spiritual gifts that strengthen in anyone in your life? How have you been blessed by the ministry of strengthening gifts? Take time to praise the Lord for how He has strengthened you through the use of these gifts.

- Do you recognize this spiritual gift in yourself? If yes, pray and ask the Lord to reveal to you how you might be able to hone the gift and to appropriately use it for His glory in your local church.

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