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**Presentation Transcript**  
**About Spiritual Gifts**  
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The title of this presentation is *About Spiritual Gifts*. It's the fifth in a series on the *Eight Qualities of Congregational Health* as set forth by the *Natural Church Development* people.

We've been working our way through a series on the *Eight Qualities of Church Health*. The second quality that we're talking about is *Gift-based Ministry*. Today we're on the third one on gift-based ministry. In the previous ones we saw that it's helpful to think about this as having three elements involved. First of all there's *power* – power from God to do the things that He needs done in the church. That comes from the gifts that God gives us through the Holy Spirit. The second one is *commitment* – commitment to *use* His power in His service. Just because we have a gift doesn't mean we're willing to use it or are committed to using it. So that's necessary. Then the third one is *wisdom* – wisdom to know what our gift *is* and wisdom to know how to use it for the best *effect*.

So we're going to talk about a number of characteristics of spiritual gifts today. And we're going to do this by looking in the Bible and by using our detective abilities and just plain common sense, as well.

Turn with me, to begin with, to 1 Corinthians 12, verse 7. It says:

**1 Cor. 12:7** – *To each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. So everyone has at least one. That's a promise, right? Everybody has one, at least. 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 that 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 working of one and the same Spirit. And He gives them to each one just as He determines.*

So there it is! All kinds of gifts. God deals them out to the people in His church for use in the church. And nobody is left out.

Now, Natural Church Development did a survey some time ago. What they discovered was shocking. It was shocking! They discovered that only twenty percent of Christians know what their spiritual gifts are. Twenty percent. They surveyed twelve hundred people, which is a big enough sample that you can predict that that's going to be across the board pretty much. That's really pretty sad, since our gifts tie in directly with the whole point of our purpose in the church, isn't it? It's no wonder so many people are wandering around aimlessly, and without motivation, and feeling unfulfilled, and like something is missing in their lives. And it's even worse when the leadership doesn't want you to know what your gifts are, because they're afraid they won't be able to control what goes on in their church any longer. When that happens, it's stunts the spiritual growth of the members and makes them dependent on the leadership, which is exactly what the leadership wants to happen in these extreme cases.

When people tell you that they're not allowed to listen to religious material from any other organization but theirs, that's pretty scary, isn't it? And that you can't even study your Bible with friends unless there is a minister present...that's pretty scary! So when that happens, there's a spiritual diminishing, or arrest, that takes place among people.

These gifts have been given to us for the development of the church. And since we see that *everyone* is gifted, let's think about that purpose. Let's go to Ephesians 4, verse 11.

**Eph. 4:11** – *It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, 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 – for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up – until we all reach unity in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

You see, it's in the *doing* of the works of service – it's in the exercise of our spiritual gifts – that we become mature. And if we don't get to do that, then we're stunted spiritually.

I'm learning a lot about this topic as I study it. The first material I came across took the specific gifts mentioned in the scripture and they determined that these were the only spiritual gifts that there were. Of these gifts, I've noticed, that some groups tend to focus on the "more spiritual gifts" – that's what they would call them – like healing, and speaking in tongues and miracles. Then other groups focus on the ones that have to do with order and knowledge, such as teaching and administrations. Then there are groups that consider, since God created us, any ability that we have is a gift from God and, if we ignore the abilities we were born with, then our gift picture is going to be incomplete. And as I process all of these differences of opinion, I ask myself, "What is the point of this whole gifting thing that God has given to us anyway?" Isn't it to accomplish the work of God? It is. If someone is born with the ability to organize details, for example, should we ignore it because they were born with it? Where did that come from? Where does that ability come from? Does somebody develop that on their own? No, usually that's a genetically inherited characteristic. I guess we can always get better at that, but some people can just do it easily and naturally.

The apostle Paul. He was an evangelist. There's no doubt about it. It says that evangelism is one of the *gifts* that God gives people. I read that section where he went to Mars Hill in the Aeropogus and his comment after seeing the idols of the unknown god – or the altar – he said, “I see that you are very religious people.” Well, that was so brilliant it was obviously something that he was led to say by the Holy Spirit. But at the same time, it's a comment that's so completely Paul. I mean, he was just an innovative and confrontive person. And he wasn't going to let something like that go by. It was just his nature, it seems to me.

So, in my thinking about this, it's starting to make more sense to me to think about natural abilities as gifts from God to be used in His service. One way of thinking about that is to just ask ourselves, “Do we develop our own natural abilities?” No, then they wouldn't be *natural* to us, would they? As I say that, it just seems to me that it's so much of a no-brainer. I'm wondering why I didn't understand it sooner. Of course, there are some here that realize I *am* slow on the uptake, so it's not a surprise.

Let's go to Romans 12:6 and think about something else about this issue.

**Rom. 12:6** – *We have differing gifts according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.* So these are gifts that are given according to grace. They're not given because we've done anything, or we deserve anything. They're just *given* to us. They are gifts. They are not rewards for character. They are not rewards for spiritual maturity. They are not rewards for keeping the oral tradition. They are just things that God gives us. They are not fruits of the Spirit, which are given to those who *yield* to the Spirit. They are just spiritual *gifts*.

Let me ask you this question. Do you know anybody, whose use of their spiritual gifts, you admire? I'd like you to write down their names right now. This is an audience participation presentation. If you know somebody who is using their spiritual gifts, and you admire the way they are doing it, just jot their names down. While you're doing that, I'm going to ask you another question. Do you have any questions about spiritual gifts in general? If you do, it would be good to jot down those questions as well.

Let's talk about gifts and calling for a minute. In 2 Timothy 1:9, we read:

**2 Tim. 1:9**- *He who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity....* That's our calling. He saved us and called us with a *holy* calling, not according to our works.

What is your calling? We're all called to live holy lives, aren't we? That's what we're called to do. We're all called to participate in the church. What we do in the church is mostly determined by how we use the gifts – or don't use them – that we have been given.

Christian Schwartz, in his book on *Ministry*, tells of meeting a man who was thinking of going to Africa to be a missionary. As he talked to this man more, the man told him that

he had very little ability as a missionary or an evangelist. He said, in talking to this fellow, it seemed to him that God relished making him do what had no interest in. It's kind of like, "I'm going to send you to do this task, and it needs to be done, and you're not going to like it and you're not good at it." So this fellow was thinking God was going to send him to do this, and yet he had no experience, no interest and no ability. And he was even wondering why God was sending him to do this. I think Christian Schwartz suggested that maybe He wasn't, because that isn't how it works.

If we have a gift, we're usually interested in it, and we find satisfaction in using it, and we get good results. We're all called to exemplify Christ in our lives. That's our calling. But we all have differing abilities, which we are to use to serve Him in different ways. The common thing in the calling. The uncommon thing is the gifting. These are the things that add interest and fun to our calling if we use them.

There was a lady in one of the congregations that I...she wasn't in my congregation – and I can't remember whose congregation she was in – but the pastor was a friend of mine, as I recall. This lady would ask...every time a new child was born in their congregation, she would ask for a picture. And she would try to get a picture of every child in the congregation – a school picture – every year. And every morning she would lay all those pictures out on her bed and she would pray for each and every one of them. She would talk to all of them at church when she came. She just had a personal connection with every kid in the congregation. She *loved* to do that. And the kids *loved* to spend time with her because they knew, unlike a lot of the adults in her congregation, she cared about them. She was interested in them. Just because they didn't have any power, or authority, or money, or ability to provide anything she wanted or needed, she cared about them anyway. That *has* to do with gifting, doesn't it? The ability to do that is special to some people. And she *loved* doing that! That was one of the things that made her get up in the morning. She was very advanced in age. And that's what kept her going.

So the gifts are the things that add interest and fun to our calling. I know church and fun aren't supposed to go in the same sentence for us, but that's because a lot of us don't know what we're good at and don't know how to have fun being in the church.

So let's ask some more questions in our audience participation presentation today. Are there any specific tasks that you are certain that God has called you to? Can you think of any? How do those things correspond to your gifts? I'm not saying that it's bad if you don't have a specific thing that you feel called to, but I'm just asking that question – to think about it. And if you *do* have some, how do they correspond to the gifts that you might have?

We're just covering a lot of specific things about spiritual gifts questions that people have and, frankly, things that I'm just learning about. I want to talk about what we could call our *gift mix* right now. I know a family that has a lot of the same gifts. They're all really well-organized and creative. I sent them, some time ago, the very first iteration of the Park City Feast Site Activity Calendar. I sent it as a spread sheet. It was a single sheet. When it came back, it had two others attached to the workbook. The first one was all spiffed up – everything actually looked the same. The next sheet was a detailed speaking

schedule with all the rooms and everything laid out. Of course, we didn't have any speakers yet, but it was all ready for me to plug all that stuff in. Then the third was an organizational chart for an organization that did not yet exist. So they're all just way out ahead of me on all that stuff.

See, I can come up with an idea and make up a general plan, but when it comes to the fine details, I am lacking. So it's a huge relief to know that I don't have to do all the work myself and that there are other people that are *good* at what I'm not good at. Isn't that nice when you find out that you don't have to do everything yourself? You know, those of us that aren't good at music are *so* relieved when we find out that there's a good pianist or a good vocalist in the group. And those of us who are detailed-minded, but can never see the big picture, we're so relieved when there is somebody that can just point us the right direction and turn us loose and we'll do it.

I notice that some people envy others in the gifts that they have, when all it really means is that we don't have to do what we're not good at and don't enjoy doing. It's so nice when there are other people that can do that for us.

God is so wise, isn't He? He has it set so that we all have something to contribute – something we're good at – and yet He has gifted others to do the things we're not good at, so we can relax and just enjoy doing what we can do well.

I remember early in my studies about spiritual gifts I was taught – and I really believe this is true – that if you have a group of people, and there are some things lacking there – for example, we don't have a pianist in our group – that just means that God doesn't think we need one right yet. When He wants us to have one, then it will happen. I think what's going to happen is, Jesse is going to wake up one morning and know how to play classical music on the piano...I'm just kidding. It doesn't work like that, does it? Although I suppose God could do that if He wanted to.

Here's another way to think about this gifting thing. One way to help us find our gifts is to notice what they are *not*. I just thank God for pianists and vocalists, because I know that those are not my gifts. I'm not either of those.

I have a little client in my private practice who's having some anger problems, and I talked to his parents. They told me that he really likes church. He was taking classes – he's in the fifth grade – sixth grade – he just started sixth grade – to learn more about the Bible and his faith. His parents said that they were amazed at how quickly he could learn and how well he could retain the stuff he was learning. His dad said, "He calls me on stuff all the time and quotes scriptures to me." I said, "Don't you love it when your kids preach at you?" So the next time I saw this little guy in session, I asked him about church and his eyes just lit up when I talked to him. I could see that he was really enjoying telling me about it. He told me all about the stuff that was going on, and he said, "I think I might have a photographic memory." I said, "Tell me about that." He said, "Well, I can remember things I read for a long, long time." He said, "It freaks my dad out." I think that's what his dad was referring to. So where might this child go with this ability and his interest in God later in his life? When you get to know kids and you find out about their

spiritual side, a lot of times you can start to get a glimmer. So this is something that his parents can help steer him in the right direction. His father doesn't have that same gift, I can tell, because he is non-plussed by his son's ability to retain and repeat. And it amazes him what his son can do. So there's a family where they're aware that they have a son that has a really special ability and it relates to God. Is that a natural thing? Well, it probably is, but God gave it to him, right? And can it not be used in God's service? I think so.

Okay. Are there any certain gifts you know you do *not* have? Now that could be a long list for me. But you might just think of the big ones that comes to mind right off, and you can "X" them off your list if you're not sure what your gifts are. Just being able to "X" off a bunch of them is a really good thing, because it narrows the field – makes the list of things to check out shorter.

Moving on. I've mentioned before, I think, when I've spoken that, when I was first being called, my parents asked me a lot of questions because I was changing religions. I wasn't an Episcopalian anymore. I was changing to become a Sabbatarian and a holy day keeper. I was advised that I should let a minister answer their questions, because I was just a neophyte Christian, and I didn't know any answers, and I'd just mess it up. I don't think they used those words, but that was how it came across to me. So this brings up, for me, the whole issue of quality control in doing the work of God. I know a number of churches that try to stifle the use of gifts among the membership because the leadership doesn't have faith in the Holy Spirit. I mean, that's the only way you can say it. If the gift is power from God given by the Holy Spirit, why wouldn't you want people to use it? It says, "With God *all* things are possible," and "all things work together for good to those that love God." So even if we don't have the best way to answer a question, God says He'll put the answers in our mouth. And even if we don't do it as well as someone else, if we're gifted, then something good is going to happen.

It's true that I didn't know as much of the Bible as some minister might back then, but I did know why I did what I did. And I did know my parents – probably a lot better than that minister, whoever he might have been. And actually, besides all of that, my parents didn't have easy access to a minister, so they didn't get a lot of their questions answered. I was the one that was on the ground in that situation. But I believe – looking back – that even, if I couldn't have explained it as some, God would have been with me. And I believe that because it specifically says that in the Bible.

In thinking about gifts and how they help us do God's work, it's important to realize that there are many ways to apply the same gift. Let's take the gift of evangelism, for example. Some people can stand in front of an audience and move people to give themselves to God. Others can talk to people one on one and do that, but they'd be a failure on the radio or television, or at some big revival or something – standing up in front of a microphone. Other people can't do either of those, but they're still evangelists because people, somehow, are able to watch how they live their life and be convicted by it. Then there are others – like that lady I was talking about – who can work with children and have a lifelong impact on them.

While we were at Camp Outreach in Boise last summer, the entire group went to church with the Celebration Church of God. We had a very nice Sabbath with them. I noticed that one of the teenage girls in our group was a magnet for little kids. They were all over her in just a few minutes after she walked in the door – obviously a very strong ability to connect with little children. That is one of the core skills necessary to evangelize them. I mean, I was watching it. They were just all around her – couldn't get enough of her. She seemed to do that without any effort whatsoever.

One of the young women coming to our Feast this year is a teacher and she volunteered to work with the elementary-aged kids. Up to that point I had been thinking about lessons, so I asked her if she had a curriculum in mind. She told me that she wanted to have the kids plan, write, design and publish a Feast book to give to the congregation as a memento of the Feast from them. So much better than going through a set of lessons, right? That lesson is real-life creating and giving. That's how you learn things. So there's yet *another* variation on the gift of evangelism. Do you think those kids would ever forget that? Of course, we'd have to have them all up on stage, and thank them, and make a big deal out of it, right?

Then there are also degrees of giftedness, aren't there? It's okay for other people to have the same gift we have, but in greater degrees than we might have it. It's still a gift. Just because you can't do it as well as some people, doesn't mean that it isn't useful.

I listen to these presentations that I make and I don't even like to look at them on the DVD – to listen to them on an audio is bad enough – and I compare them to the public speakers that I see on television, and I'm just *revolted* by my own lack of speaking ability. It's *so* humbling! In a forty-minute talk, I can cut out ten minutes of uhs and duhs. It still feels like God has given us something to say, and so we say it. And we don't see anyone else saying it, so we keep going with our calling, even if we haven't been given as great a degree of skill at delivering it as some people might have.

I remember that Paul said that he asked God to fix his eyes so that he could do his work better. He asked him three times, he said, and finally God told him to stop asking. He was effective enough, even though he could barely see. If we have a gift, our job is to use it – not to say, “Oh, somebody can do it better than I can,” and stick out our lower lip and go home. We have to go on.

Okay. Questions. After listening to this – thinking about what God may have given you after you were born and what God has given you from birth – what might one of your gifts be. If you think about what you can do naturally, which is a gift from God, and what He might have given you after you were born, what might one of your gifts be? It would be good to write it down. I mean, if you're really serious about doing something about this, it's good to write it down. You can do something right *now* by writing it down. That might be the first step.

Let's ask this question now. When God gives us a gift, is it permanent? You think about natural gifts. We all get old and lose our abilities. But what about the gifts that He gives us after we're born? And does it count, if, when you're getting older and in decline, that

you aren't as good at it as you were, it's still almost a whole lifelong thing, isn't it? So if somebody asks, "Is your gift permanent?" umm.... Some think that gifts can be temporary – you know, just for a moment, at the right time at the right place.

I remember once, when our church school was in Hollywood and we were watching a makeup demonstration. The guy that was doing the makeup demonstration said, "I understand that we have some college students here that [the girls] don't wear makeup. Would somebody like to explain why?" Well, there were all the big evangelists sitting there on the front row watching. They were all looking back and forth. They all looked like squirrels in a cage, you know. And nobody was saying anything. And this freshman raised his hand and everybody looked like, "Oh know, not him!" He said, "They don't need any." The guy just looked at him, and smiled, and nodded his head. He didn't say, "Touché," but that's what that look meant. And he just went right on. Here was a guy with the right words at the right time. Did he ever say anything else so timely? Well, I never heard it if he did. But I wasn't the one that said it either, so I'm not knocking him. So was that just a temporary thing that was given to him? Maybe. I don't know.

Sometimes there are tasks that need to be done and somebody steps up like Esther – you know, "if not you, then who?" And then I think of the man who buried his talent. His was taken away from him, wasn't it? But on the other hand, that might just be an exception. We don't want to quote the exception to prove the rule. God gave us gifts to be used all our life because we're in the church all our life. So it makes sense that He would give them to us *for* all our life as a general rule. That's the way it seems to me. If I'm wrong on this, I'll admit it later. But just seems, to me, to be the way that makes more sense – that He would give them to us all our lives.

When God called Paul and gifted him to be a missionary and an evangelist, it was for the rest of his life. And what that means is that, once we find our gifts, we can begin planning our life's work for God at that point.

Some people think that sometimes our gifts change. Maybe we learn more or get something along the line, but I don't ever – and the analogy of the body, I think, holds true – a nose doesn't turn into an ear. Noses are good at one thing and ears are good at another. And noses stay good at what they do. And ears stay good at what they do. So I just think that it's probably more logical that we can pretty well plan our life's work around what we can find within ourselves.

You know that young girl that was a kid magnet at the church? That ability is something that she can focus on all her life. And she can do an *incredible* amount of good with that, because it's so powerful. But she has to be committed, right? She has the power to do that. But she has to be committed to do and she has to use that ability wisely. She has to know that she *has* it. She has to know how to get the most out of it.

By contrast, I didn't discover what I was supposed to do until I was fifty-eight years old. How old was Moses when he...? He was eighty. So I don't know why that happened that way to me, but since God is in charge, and He sends us wherever He wants us to go when

He wants to, I'm not supposed to complain about that and say, "What if...." I'm supposed to say, "Yes, sir," and get busy now. I'm just happy that I finally learned.

So, questions. How do you react to the idea that the gifts you've been given are for life? How does that affect you? Why? Just think about it. What does it mean?

I also want to talk about the difference between gifts and universal Christian responsibilities. Universal Christian responsibilities is a term that Christian Schwartz came up with. I think it's a really good concept. Sometimes we get spiritual gifts confused with basic Christian responsibilities. Let me give you a couple of examples. Not all Christians have the gift of evangelism, but all Christians are expected to share their faith. Just because you're not gifted as an evangelist, that doesn't mean that you can leave all of that to somebody else. Jesus said that He would be ashamed of those who were ashamed of Him. So if we're reticent about expressing ourselves, or standing up for ourselves in our beliefs, and our salvation, and our Christ, then we're not doing what we're supposed to do. We don't have to have the gift of evangelism to do that, do we? We can just be real.

Let's look at another example. Not every Christian has the gift of giving, but all of us can tithe. I realize that some people, from our little corner of the church scene, get angry when tithing is mentioned because of past injustices. But we need to get that out of the way so we can see what the Bible teaches and begin doing it – *again*, if we've stopped.

We always like to blame other people, but the real truth is that all of us always had a choice where we gave our tithes, and we were responsible to send it where it would do the most good in our view. It's not God's fault that some of us abdicated that responsibility.

Now, if we know the difference between gifts and responsibilities, that can protect us a lot from drifting away, because we will not be inclined to justify disobedience. It's really easy to say, "I'm not an evangelist, so I'm not going to talk," or "I don't have the gift of giving, so I'm not going to tithe." But all that is is disobedience – disobeying the responsibility that God gives us as Christians. So we shouldn't use those spiritual gifts as an excuse. "I don't have to be open with my beliefs because I'm not an evangelist" doesn't wash!

How many gifts are there? How many gifts, do you think? Well, there are three places in the Bible where we can find a list of gifts. There's Romans 12. There's 1 Corinthians 12. And there's Ephesians 4. It's really interesting that none of these lists are identical to any of the others. They're all different. They have some similar things and then different. So neither one is a complete list. So does that mean – the fact that none of them are complete – does that mean that there could be other gifts? There really is no clear-cut answer to that. But since the Bible is complete, maybe completely irrelevant that we know the answer to that.

Just thinking common sense here, maybe it's only important to think about the point. You know, what is the point – or purpose – for spiritual gifts? Whatever we can do to serve

the church and God is a way to glorify God, because we came from God and so did all of our abilities, right? So what does it matter whether it is something we were born with or something God added later? Well, it's probably interesting to be able to figure that out, but in the long haul, all of that is going to be used, hopefully.

Look in Matthew 22, verse 37, with me.

**Mt. 22:37** – *Jesus replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.”*

So, if we're supposed to be involved with our *whole* being, that certainly would include all of our natural abilities, wouldn't it? So when we think about it this way, the question seems to become less important. How we can proceed seems to become more clear to us. Whatever we can do, we do it. We don't worry about whether we were born with it or whether it was added later.

I was thinking about the Feast site at Park City again. I was wanting a visual theme for the Feast that would be nice, wouldn't it? If all the announcements, the brochures, the banner – everything – kind of looked the same? Now they are all being done by different people, so the chance of that happening by osmosis would be not good. It would be nice if it all looked alike and was all tied together. If you're going to get the same thing, you should get one person to do it. If the person who does this, would that be a gift from God they got later, or would that be a natural ability? Well, you know, Honor is going to do that for us. And maybe God will give her some inspiration to use her considerable natural talents to this task, but there's going to be natural talent involved there. In any event, it's not necessary to know what to call it. As long as a good thing happens, it's fine. It only matters that she has a way to contribute.

And isn't that true for all of us as well? Music adds to our worship – and it's a natural talent. Art adds to our worship – and it's a natural talent. Organization adds to our worship. That's a talent. So it all works for the good in the long run. Or, as we say these days, “It's all good.”

All right. That's some thoughts about spiritual gifts. I hope you're getting a little closer, if you haven't already determined what yours are. Maybe it will give you some more food for thought.

Next time we're going to talk about how to find your gifts in more detail. But that's not going to happen until after the Feast.