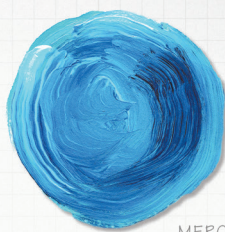
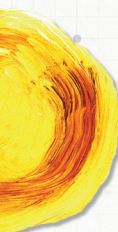


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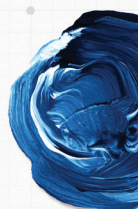


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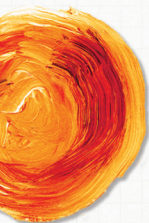
THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS BLUEPRINT



TEACHING



SERVING



PROPHECY



GIVING

GOD'S DESIGN FOR YOUR GIFTS,
TALENTS, AND PURPOSE



LEADING

ANDY REESE

FOREWORD BY JAMES W. GOLL

“Andy’s biblical gift descriptions and model are foundational to solid identity and the joy that comes in walking in what you were made for. It is clear that his goal is not about the gifts but about the Giver—the ‘one thing’ of being led by the Spirit in connection with God. I know his blueprint will provide direction for many searching for their purpose and identity.”

Jennifer Barnett, executive director, Freedom Prayer;
author, *First Freedoms*

“Andy’s revelation regarding spiritual gifts is only surpassed by his heart for the Body of Christ to be equipped to function in their gifting. I highly recommend this book and its insight for every follower of Jesus—seasoned saint and new convert alike!”

Pastor Steve Berger, founder and president,
Ambassador Services International

“Finally some clarity! As the pastor of a large nondenominational church, it has been a struggle to unify the cornucopia of perspectives about spiritual gifts. Reese brilliantly honors varied traditions while inviting everyone to the table. Solid theology partnered with principles that are refreshingly applicable make this book a must-have.”

Brad Bowen, lead pastor, Heritage Church

“If you are a newcomer to the area of the Holy Spirit and want some insight that will help you gain traction with this Divine Helper, this book is for you. If you have been a believer for years, but still feel that you could use some help in understanding how the Holy Spirit works in His various ways, and how the various listings of Holy Spirit work flow together, this book is for you. I can almost guarantee you will profit from listening to Andy. I gladly recommend this book.”

Dr. Don Finto, pastor; founder, Caleb Company;
author, *Your People Shall Be My People*

“*The Spiritual Gifts Blueprint* is a wonderful prequel to Andy Reese’s outstanding work *Freedom Tools*. In this new book, Andy Reese has created a primer on the understanding and practice of spiritual gifts. In essence, it is a master class on the subject—profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

Dr. David Kyle Foster, Mastering Life Ministries

“Understanding the role and power of the Spirit is a lifelong pursuit of the head and the heart. While there are no experts on the Trinity,

there are helpful guides who walk alongside us as we navigate our role in God's big story. Andy has proven to be a helpful teacher and writer, and I know this book will give you insight in your pursuits of the Kingdom being made manifest in everyday life!"

Dr. Josh Graves, lead minister, Otter Creek Church;
author, *The Simple Secret*

"In *The Spiritual Gifts Blueprint*, author Andy Reese has once again produced a treasure. Yes, Christians have different perspectives on gifts, but Andy clearly describes the relevant Scriptures, especially Romans 12. As a rainbow gives hope, the gifts are diffused in this prism into seven primary colors. There is one Lord, the Light, but here the many colored gifts of the Spirit lead us back to Him."

Stephen Mory, MD, DLH, psychiatrist

"Spiritual transformation must always be grounded in biblical and practical teaching. In this book the author shares a systematic process of maturing into the person God created us to be and allows one to identify spiritual giftedness. This discovery gives way for each one to become a person of purpose and to begin to experience the smile of God."

Rhonda Lowry, retired assistant professor of spiritual formation,
Lipscomb University; spiritual mentor

"As a Vineyard pastor for the past thirty years, and a third-generation pastor kid from the Pentecostal and charismatic traditions, I thoroughly enjoyed the 'good professor' Andy's wonderful explanation and encounter of the use of spiritual gifts, and how they are displayed in his writing—the pastor/teacher gifts working hand in hand to lead us to a greater understanding of spiritual gifts. I highly recommend it!"

Jon Sterns, pastor, Franklin Vineyard Church; former regional
leader, Southeast Vineyard Churches

"*The Spiritual Gifts Blueprint* is a fresh and essential tool that untangles, declutters, organizes, and simplifies what has often been made overly complex. With a laser focus on Scripture, Andy shows us how to connect to the holy Trinity to receive and use what he beautifully describes as our 'grace package.' In doing so, he leads us to discover and dive into layer upon layer of depth within the things of the Spirit."

Rob Touchstone, director, Center for Vocational Discovery,
and instructor, College of Business and College of Bible
and Ministry, Lipscomb University

THE
SPIRITUAL
GIFTS
BLUEPRINT

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GOD'S DESIGN FOR YOUR GIFTS,
TALENTS, AND PURPOSE

ANDY REESE



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To my wife, Susan, four children,
mates, and grandchildren.
I am so very blessed by this gifted,
joyful, and all-in family.

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Foreword

This is Dr. James W. Goll, the founder of God Encounters Ministries and GOLL Ideation LLC, an author or co-author of more than forty books, a certified Life Languages coach, a recording artist, a founding member of the Apostolic Council of Prophetic Elders and Harvest International Ministries, a father to four, and a grandfather to eleven at this point and time. But why did I awkwardly open up a foreword to a book like that? Well, among the many hats I have worn in my life, my family has also been a neighbor to some incredibly dear people. It brings tears to my eyes and joy to my heart to remember the sweet times when some of the Reese kids came and hung out with the Goll clan. And now our brilliant prodigies from both families are all grown-up, married, walking out their life choices, and making their marks in life.

Yes, I personally know the author of this book, Andy Reese. I have had the distinct privilege and benefit of knowing Andy in multiple settings over the past 25-plus years. He has been one of the nation's top engineers by trade; the founder of Freedom Prayer; a stargazer by hobby; an instructor, teacher, and educator at heart; and a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. His passion is to see people know their true identity in Christ and discover their destiny in Him. This quest has now led him to author *The Spiritual Gifts Blueprint*.

Foreword

Andy and I hold many things in common. We both love the Word of God, and we both glean from various streams in the Body of Christ, historically and in the present day. In my book *Releasing Spiritual Gifts Today*, I wrote,

My three main purposes for this book are *information, inspiration, and impartation*. First, that the information presented here will bring you into a greater awareness of biblical truth about spiritual gifts. Second, that you will be inspired, through the personal and biblical stories, to greater levels of hope and faith regarding the tremendous potential of the gifts God has given to you. Third, that you will be imparted by the Spirit with the courage to step forward and use them.

After reviewing this manuscript, I believe that once again my friend Andy and I have found yet another place of common ground. Remember, it's a three-cord strand that will not quickly be torn asunder! I believe this book is also filled with those same three ingredients—information, inspiration, and impartation.

So it's my deep honor and wonderful privilege to commend to you a book that I do not have the skill set or the technical capacity to orchestrate and compose. But thank the Lord, I have a friend and fellow member in the Body of Christ who does! Thank you, Andy, for building bridges and aiding people to safely walk into the beautiful land where gifts are freely given and fruit is maturely grown for the glory of God!

Your fellow servant,
James W. Goll

Acknowledgments

To my extended Freedom Prayer team, you are my inspiration as you labor quietly in many countries to teach us that “it was for freedom that Christ set us free.” You also help us find that precious freedom, and then help us all say, “I am free unto . . . this!”

To Brad, Rob, Jen, Mike, Jeannie, Hugh, Ghislain, Loral, the HeartPrint writers’ group, and many others who provided improvements to both my engineering of English and my ideas, you have provided moral support over the years of this book’s development and testing.

Preface

Thank you for reading this preface. You are among the few and the brave. I'll make it worth your while.

For about 45 years, every once in a while in a large variety of settings, someone has asked me something like, "Do you know what your spiritual gift is? If so, how did you figure it out!?" Early on I never had a good answer for that question. And I was not sure it was even worth the trouble. Most in my circles had long ago settled on the idea that it is unknowable and probably not worth knowing. More on that in chapter 1.

Yet in our Freedom Prayer ministry, thousands of individuals have been freed from constraints targeting their calling and purpose. And they ask themselves the obvious question, "What am I freed *to*?" They deserve an answer. This book is designed to answer that question.

Even yesterday, I was with a young woman who was stuck in a frustrating controversy, and she was sent to me by her counselor to help her figure it out. In maybe thirty minutes, we walked through who she really was; we talked about what truly motivated her and how it did, what seemed to link the best steps in her life, and what her sense was of the smile of God the Father. Somewhere near the end of our time she exclaimed, "That explains it! Thank you so, so much."

Jesus demonstrated a high regard for Scripture, often confounding the scribes and Pharisees with His “Have you not read?” statements.* Over the decades of Scripture study, project development, and practical application, I have developed a similar regard.† And the patterns and truth that can be uncovered on this book’s topic are sort of mind blowing to me.

This book is designed to do for you what the thirty-minute discussion with the young woman did for her. It is designed to intrigue and stir up amazement at the patterns of purpose-producing truth hidden in plain sight for us to find, as it has done for me over the years. It is presented to be an easy and helpful read.

I want you to know that I fully understand, maybe more than most, that this topic has been taught thousands of times and written about tens of times, and that there are many mutually exclusive definitions of the term *spiritual gifts*. And I deeply respect and have learned from each one of those books. I’ve put this book off for over a decade for just those reasons—but no longer.

This book might be seen as a bit of a departure from some of the standard approaches, even radical. But then, so was Paul’s response to the confused Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 12. And I tried to follow his corrective explanations laid out in several places in Scripture point by point. You will see that Paul’s response goes far, far beyond “spiritual gifts” and outlines a comprehensive approach to Christian life itself that has proven to be biblical, practical, God-connecting, and transformative.

As such, this book is designed for a pastor, professor, or Bible study leader to be satisfied that the book is not simply yet another set of an author’s good ideas—not just popular literature. It is designed to be faithful to scriptural exegesis and to the original meanings of texts and their variants. It is designed, along with the workbook, for Bible studies, college classes, and sermons. It can, however, be a bit dense in places. It is designed to change you if you let it. It is designed to last.

*For example, Matthew 12:3, 5; 19:4; 21:16, 42; 22:31

†See, for example, “The Magi Project,” YouTube.com, September 20, 2013, <https://youtu.be/CtJ8Jjma5cM>; and Freedom Prayer nonprofit at <https://freedomprayer.org>.

Preface

Therein is the problem: how to make it fit both audiences without putting one to sleep and frustrating the other. We humans are so complex.

To make it flexible in that way, I have done three things. First, the first two chapters lay out the problem and outline Paul's response to the Corinthian version of that problem. Second, the next eight chapters come in pairs. The first in each pair gives background information on that particular spiritual concept described by Paul in his corrective to the Corinthians. The second gives a quick background summary of the paired one, and then moves to practical application tips and approaches. And finally, for the things that might seem hopelessly boring to most and necessary to the rest, I have provided appendices that are referenced where applicable throughout the book.

I urge you to read chapters 1 and 2. I hope that you will see yourself there, and then you can decide how you will move through the rest of the book. I hope you, too, will exclaim, "That explains it! Thank you so much."

Andy Reese

Introduction

The Burning Plane

It was 1988, and I was daydreaming and gazing out the window of a small twin-prop plane on approach to Nashville. Suddenly, a woman across the aisle shrieked, “The plane is on fire! The plane IS. ON. FIRE!” That is when I first began to learn about gifting and finding God’s purpose for my life.

It probably took such an event to wake me up. In the terminal prior to takeoff, I had been having a complaint session with God. I said something bratty like, “Am I supposed to go into full-time ministry or not? How am I supposed to know? Jesus had a book written about Him—not fair!” I continued in that vein for most of the flight. Just before the scheduled landing, I heard the screaming.

I frantically leaned across the aisle, looked past the woman, and saw flames and smoke streaming from the engine. The plane lurched as everyone else leaned, too. Fear shot through the passengers like a lightning bolt. There were shouts, lots of murmuring, a woman calming her daughter, and someone crying. It didn’t help that the copilot pulled the curtain back, walked halfway down the aisle, looked out the window, and exclaimed, “Oh sh%#!” That is

not what you want to hear from the pilot at a time like this. My stomach knotted.

Then a sudden calm came over me.

On takeoff, God had begun to answer my complaining with the fact that He had a book written about me, too. All my days and even my hairs are numbered (I'm less trouble than most of you), all my tears are in His bottle, and I was known before I was created (see Psalm 139:16; 56:8; Romans 8:29). He wisely hadn't laid out all the details and steps for me. I'm the type who would have run off and tried to do them.

That is when the scream punctuated the conversation. And He simply seemed to whisper, *Oh, and it's not written that you are going to die today.*

I considered bargaining about not being injured either but thought better of it. So I blurted out something hopelessly awkward like, "Don't worry. We are all going to be okay." I got a few well-earned incredulous looks.

The runway approach took forever, and we had a rough, roller coaster landing with lots of white-knuckled gasps. We stopped abruptly amid siren-screaming fire trucks and foam that was spewing onto the airplane engine. We quickly exited, moved to a safe distance, and sat in the grass on the runway's edge while they—ever so slowly—found a bus and had it cleared through security to come get us.

As I sat there, God began to talk to me. The thoughts came faster than I could process right then, but they seemed to be stored for me. That 45-minute wait changed almost everything I had thought or believed about gifting and purpose. It served as the basis and impetus for writing this book. It has proven itself true over 35 years, and I'm certain that will continue.

Here is what I learned on that runway that has filled out over the years. I'll save you the fire, screaming, and the rough landing. So let's go.



We Have a Problem

The conversation went something like this.

I was talking with a deeply spiritual and highly energetic young woman after a college group meeting. She told me about the latest personality test she had taken.

She said, “Wow, I finally understand my personality. I’m *not* crazy!”

She might still be crazy, I thought with a friendly smile, *but now she’s happy about it.*

And I said, “That’s great! That personality type sure seems to fit you. Now you know who you are! Oh ta-da!” Immediately a sort of icy chill came over her face. She looked away for a long second. When she looked back at me, her eyes were misty.

“Oh,” she whispered. “You know, Andy. You know. We’ve talked about all this. That personality test doesn’t tell me what I’m made for, only what I’m like. I think only God can show me my gifting and purpose, and I don’t know why He won’t!”

With growing angst, I asked, “I thought you had looked into all that. What happened?” Her eyes became fiery.

“Every answer I find seems to be unhelpful and contradicts every other answer. ‘Spiritual gifts’ seem to be sort of a Christian inside joke. I need to pick a major next week, and I need answers. Where is God in all this anyway?”

I hated “that” conversation. I lamely said something to her like, “I’m so sorry. You’re right. I bet there is more there than what you’re experiencing. I’m not satisfied because I don’t understand spiritual gifts, either. I guess I sort of let it all go years ago. How about this—let’s both look into the topic more and get back together.”

She smiled weakly and said, “Okay, Andy. Great. Let me know what you think. I’d really like to have an answer to that question. I’ll hold you to it!”

If that conversation had been an isolated incident, there would be no need for a book like this. A bit of counseling or spiritual direction, and all would be well. But reality is far, far from that scenario. Her summary of both the state of affairs at that time across the Church and its impact on individuals was spot on.

And that description still is true today. In the fall of 2021 and again in the spring of 2022, I spoke about spiritual gifting to two classes of about seventy students each at Lipscomb University, a fairly conservative Christian institution. At the beginning of my talk, I took a poll.

The first question was, “On a scale of one to five, how comfortable are you that you have a pretty good understanding of your ‘spiritual gifting’—however you define it?”

I explained a vote of one meant “I have no clue about my spiritual gifting” and five meant “I am completely confident in my God-given spiritual gifting.”

For the first class, I asked for a show of hands at “one.” Maybe sixty percent raised their hands. When I asked about two . . . three . . . four, almost no one raised a hand. Okay . . . five!? Very few raised their hands for any number other than one! What?

I started over by defining zero to mean, “I don’t have any real idea what that term actually means, much less what my giftings are.” Then I got raised hands . . . and pained looks. The average score across the students in the first survey was just above 0.5—meaning

most were clueless about spiritual gifts in general and their applicability to their personal lives. The average in the second class was just above 1.0.

In each case, after a brief overview of the subject using the understanding I'll describe in this book, I asked, "On a scale of one to five, how important do you feel it might be to understand your gifting package?" While I know it was a bit of a setup, the averages to that question were just above 4.2. That gap, between an understanding ranked 0.5 or 1.0 and a 4.2 informed desire, is the problem I am addressing in this book.

And this gap doesn't just exist among college students. Dr. Larry Gilbert, president of ChurchGrowth.org, surveyed 72 church-going adults, asking, "What is your spiritual gift?" Only 15 answered with what could be considered a valid name for any sort of spiritual gift, and 22 gave no response. Most amazing was that 28 listed their gift with a term that was nowhere in Scripture; and others listed fruit of the Spirit.¹

I have spoken to business professionals, pastors of various stripes, professors, Sunday school classes, and incessantly to my friends about this subject. Among those who had even thought about it seriously (maybe fifty percent), none felt very comfortable with their current understanding even if they could give an answer that had a biblical name.

And you. What might your answer be? It's okay to be unsure. Welcome to the confused family!

I find that mix of disinterested, hopeful, confused, ambivalent, and disappointed desire for more understanding of and experience with spiritual giftings to be a near universal reality. Somewhere in our past and our minds, we have believed there must be something substantial and important to incorporate in our lives on the subject of spiritual gifts. But within our lives and behaviors, little of actual substance exists. An unmet longing for meaningful experience in the related areas of spiritual gifting, purposeful Christian living, and God-connection plays as insipid background music within the lives of most Christians I know. The older are just more inured to this unfulfilled longing than the young.

The saddest part to me is the widespread resignation. Is that really God’s plan? I don’t think so. And those who have grasped the concepts in this book would agree.

Spiritual Gifting Summary

It has been enlightening for others to hold up a mirror to allow each of us to see our church background and its beliefs and how those beliefs compare to others. But before I describe that “confused family” and its broad spectrum of beliefs about spiritual gifting, I wanted to give you a quick summary of what is generally meant when people mention the term *spiritual gifts*—a jumpstart into this subject. Here are the three major places in Scripture that, by general Church consensus, provide the listings that many have termed “spiritual gifts.” I have inserted basic Greek terms for consistency in translation.* Take a quick look, and the rest of the chapter’s discussion will be more clearly understood. Note in particular the wording Paul uses to describe each list.

1. Romans 12:6–8 states there are seven (*charisma*) gifts or functions performed by a gifted individual seeing through that gift’s lens and feeling that motivation: prophecy, serving, teaching, exhorting, giving, leading, and showing mercy. First Peter 4:10–11 succinctly partners with Paul’s verses stating there are two categories of gifts (speaking and serving) in the “many colored” grace of God.
2. Ephesians 4:11–12 gives five equipping ministry (*diakonia*) positions in the Body of Christ: apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher. In this passage, Paul clearly states that each of us has a current job or ministry and a growing career path measured out to us by Jesus—the head of the Body.

*To avoid confusion, where appropriate, I will refer parenthetically to the singular and most common expression of each Greek word, regardless of its Greek part of speech, tense, or cognate form, though such forms were taken into account in translation.

3. First Corinthians 12:8–10 lists nine “manifestations” (*phanerosis*) of the Spirit: tongues, interpretation of tongues, prophecy, word of knowledge, discerning of spirits, word of wisdom, gifts of healings, miracles, and faith. These are sometimes termed gifts, or miraculous gifts, of the Spirit. They can best be thought of as power tools to assist in the work of God.
4. Throughout Scripture, we might notice the often hidden work of the Father (*energema*) to steer and resource His children who love Him and are working according to His purposes in and through them (see Romans 8:28).

With that quick summary (don’t worry, there is much more on these four later), let’s now look at the understanding of spiritual gifts across the Church spectrum.

Spiritual Gifts—The Situation across the Church

I have found it important to gain a quick appreciation of the diversity of beliefs and practices concerning spiritual gifts across the Church. The definition of “gifting” seems to be institutionalized in several different ways. Author Wayne Grudem oversaw the writing of an interesting book documenting the range of beliefs concerning whether the 1 Corinthians 12 manifestations of the Spirit (not necessarily synonymous with spiritual gifts—see the four summaries previously given) are valid for today.² In each case, a scholar representing a particular position on the broader Church spectrum develops and supports the strongest argument for his or her beliefs while the others develop counterarguments, which are then also countered. The book convincingly demonstrates at least one thing: Brilliant scholars can come to thoughtful yet opposite conclusions on the topic of manifestations of the Spirit—and probably the wider topic of gifting covered in this book as well.

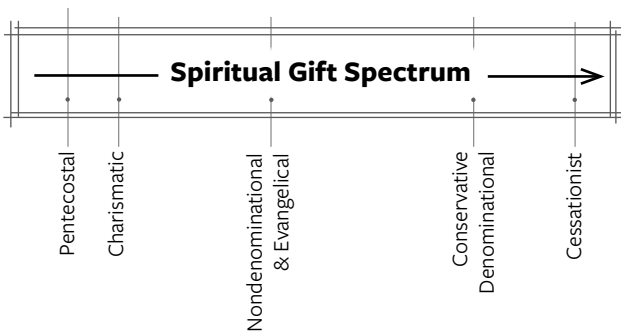
Let’s use a visual guide (which I’ve called the Spiritual Gift Spectrum) modified from Grudem’s book that can help frame the wide

The Spiritual Gifts Blueprint

range of spiritual gifts beliefs and practices, however each group defines them. In my 45 years as a Christian, I have fellowshiped with every major stopping place along this spectrum. From my experience, typical beliefs within each grouping described below are essentially correct—at least enough to help us understand the spectrum of beliefs. Within any named category, there will certainly be a church, group, or individual whose belief and practice better resembles another group.

I also need to state that I have come to deeply appreciate the puzzle pieces of truth that each expression of Christianity has found and deployed within their context. Over the years, when I observed the variety of beliefs and practices, I have repeatedly said to myself, “I love this about them!” So I want to ensure that these observations are not meant to be critical, but simply informational in nature.

Let’s cover each coast, first starting with the left, more charismatic (Pentecostal and charismatic), end, then the right, more conservative (cessationist and conservative denominational), side—saving the vast center (nondenominational and evangelical) for last.



The Left Side of the Spectrum

On the left and moving toward the center is a continuum of various expressions of belief in the continuation of the manifestations and activity of the Holy Spirit from the Day of Pentecost until today.

They differ from each other, however, becoming less exclusive and rigorous in that belief as we move to the right and the more recently emerged expressions. To an outsider they might all fall under the broader practice-based title of “charismatic.”

Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism grew out of the early twentieth-century Wesleyan-Holiness movement and the Azusa Street Revival of 1906. From a gifted perspective, Pentecostals tend to focus on the list of nine manifestations of the Holy Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12 as the definition of spiritual gifts (see the description earlier in this chapter entitled Spiritual Gifting Summary), with primary focus on the most common: tongues and sometimes prophecy. It is typically believed, based on their understanding of the accounts of Holy Spirit activity in the book of Acts and denominational history, that all believers will probably speak in tongues as a sign of being filled with (or being baptized in) the Holy Spirit. This typically happens at water baptism. Thus, they promote and give expression to the most common manifestations of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12.

The Charismatic Movement

The Charismatic Movement originated in the 1960s and exploded within the Church in the 1970s. The movement was marked by exuberance in worship and hunger for an experience of the Holy Spirit, both individually and corporately. Charismatics encourage believers to seek the gift of tongues, but as *a* sign, not *the* sign, of being baptized in the Holy Spirit.

The question “Are you Spirit-filled?” was a common one in those days. Charismatics also focused more on other manifestations, openly encouraging prophecy, words of knowledge, and others listed in the 1 Corinthians 12 passage in the description above. Across the movement, spiritual gifts are still largely recognized as the nine manifestations in 1 Corinthians 12. Many lives were deeply touched by this movement as the presence of God seemed to become more deeply and personally experienced. One gift this movement seemed

to give to the Church worldwide was a strong expectation that the Spirit would move within and through the Church.

Coming on the heels of the Charismatic Movement, shifting still further toward the center of the spectrum, was the “Third Wave” (so named by C. Peter Wagner, also called Neo-Charismatic). The Third Wave began in the 1980s and continues today, merging with and maturing the earlier charismatic movements. Members accepted the charismatic concept of the manifestations and began to add a focus on topics such as spiritual warfare, faith, and miraculous healing. The leadership of John Wimber (1934–1997) of the Vineyard movement, the healing emphasis of Bill Johnson and Bethel Church in Redding, California (1996 to present), and the revivals in Toronto (1994 and following) and Pensacola (1995) are examples of popular front-and-center drivers for this movement.

In terms of understanding of gifting within the current day charismatics, there seems to be a maturation in the use of manifestations and a much-needed sort of “opening door” consideration of the other lists given by Paul and summarized above. Sam Storms, a Calvinist and former Wheaton College professor, might be considered a good example of leadership in this part of the spectrum. Storms provides examples of a more mature consideration of manifestations in his books *The Beginner’s Guide to Spiritual Gifts* and *Practicing the Power*.³

The Right Side of the Spectrum

Let’s now move to the right end of the figure to the more conservative portion of the Church.

Cessationist

At the right end of the spectrum are what have been termed, from a spiritual gift perspective, cessationists. Their definition of spiritual gifts is similar to the Pentecostals’, yet they have come to opposite conclusions as to current-day usage. While they generally acknowledge that the nine 1 Corinthians 12 manifestations of the

Spirit did have an important purpose in the early Church, they believe that purpose has long since ceased, passing into history with the completion of the written canon of Scripture. Most cessationists would say that God can heal or work a miracle through anyone (or no one) anytime He desires, but that is different from, for example, the “gift of healing.” Any broader view of spiritual gifts beyond the manifestations is not common.

Something I deeply appreciate about the far right (cessationist) end of the spectrum is an emphasis on the importance of proper biblical exegesis and hermeneutical understanding—both of which are sometimes lacking in other expressions. Typical of this approach when considering spiritual gifts are books by Church of Christ scholars Harvey Floyd, Tim Woodroof, and Leonard Allen.⁴ Spanning 1981 to 2018, they seem to demonstrate what I have experienced in these settings as a growing interest in, and openness to, the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts.

Conservative Denominational

If we move one stop to the left of cessationist, we enter the world of conservative, older line denominations (e.g., Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopalian, etc.). While the Charismatic Movement might have had an impact on individual churches in these groups, the general focus remains on sound Christian theology and practice—each group expressing its desire to raise mature, doctrinally sound believers in strong churches. From a spiritual gifting perspective, many appear as “functional” cessationists, meaning that the focus on spiritual gifts seems mostly muted; however, some of these churches or groups within them have a growing interest in the Holy Spirit and the gifts and manifestations of the Spirit.

The Spectrum Center: Nondenominational/Evangelical

As we move along the spectrum from both the right and left, we enter the vast “open prairie” of Christianity: nondenominational/evangelical. This group’s varied definitions and beliefs on spiritual gifts are where things can get interesting. This expanse includes

a large number of individual nondenominational churches, more “progressive” churches from various denominations, and church networks that believe in “continuationism” when it comes to spiritual gifts—meaning that spiritual gifts (however defined) have continued from Pentecost until today. Often there are various caveats, some of which I will summarize.

Multiple Gift Lists

Many megachurches, scholars, pastors, and spiritual thought leaders in public media within this group have taken a hard look at gifts. As they did so, they realized that the nine manifestations found in 1 Corinthians 12 are not the whole story. They assessed that their members were seeking, like my young friend at the beginning of this chapter, a sense of calling and purpose. And, lacking a scholarly consensus, many different interpretations and understandings of spiritual gifts have been developed. In so doing, each has had to make judgment calls on several critical components.

The first judgment call was to determine which items they would call “spiritual gifts” and what specific names they would give them. Most, but not all, derived their gift lists only from the three gift-list Scriptures summarized above: Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Corinthians 12. Second, each needed to determine what sacrifices, assumptions, and omissions were necessary to combine things into one coherent, noninflammatory list. And finally, each had to come up with explanations of various anomalies, such as repetition of some names, omission of others, and differing contexts within which the lists are given.

Some groups, for example, omit tongues or interpretation, saying that it is apparent who has those gifts and further mention can bring unnecessary division or misunderstanding. Others omit the nine manifestations but include all the others. Some, to make things fit, change various gift names. Some express sort of a selective cessationist belief, saying that some gifts have ceased. Some teach, for example, that apostles were only necessary to begin the Church, and their purpose and office died a long time ago—maybe taking prophets with them. Others include every use of the word

charisma as a gift of the Spirit—which then includes, for example, celibacy. Some make up new gifts they considered implied within Scripture. Many variations.

Author C. Peter Wagner developed a popular spiritual gift approach that lists 28 spiritual gifts, extending beyond the Scriptures summarized above to include missionary, hospitality, voluntary poverty, celibacy, intercession, and leading worship. Author Rick Yohn combined all lists, renaming some things (e.g., a “word of knowledge” becomes “the gift of knowledge”). Author Robert Heidler describes kinds of gifting and assigns the source of the *charisma* gifts in Romans 12 to the Father. Darren Tyler⁵ has written about the seven *charisma* gifts in Romans 12 and has chosen, for ease in his dynamic application, to rename them Visionary, Collaborator, Discerner, Encourager, Imparter, Guardian, and Responder. There are dozens of other authors who have written about spiritual gifts, generally in the same vein, with multiple variations on the list-modification theme.

A somewhat disconcerting internet search is the question “How many spiritual gifts are there?” The responses include What are the 22 spiritual gifts?; What are the 7 spiritual gifts?; The 12 gifts of the Holy Spirit; The 18 gifts of the Holy Spirit; 28 gifts to grow your church; and What are the 16 spiritual gifts? Many websites that people use to discover their gifts come with online tests that could help them quickly learn what they are—some with higher or lower probabilities included.

If you would like to experience this for yourself, I suggest that you search online for “spiritual gift tests” and take several. On a challenge from a friend, I tried that recently. The exercise was as disorienting to me as it was to my young friend so long ago. The results of my testing came out with all of the following being my spiritual gifts: creator, prophecy/knowledge/leadership, teaching/word of wisdom/discernment/tongues/exhortation, and shepherding/teaching. Thankfully, in no case was I gifted with celibacy or hospitality!

I’m probably naïve, but it seems painfully obvious that the Church has an immense problem—the gap between God’s probable intent and our actual experience of “spiritual gifts.”

The Intersection of Spiritual Gifts and Personality

Another complication (as if we needed another complication) is that there is some concern from academics about the purity of the results of spiritual gift tests. Statistical studies have been done relating personality test results and spiritual gift test results. In most cases, the concern is that spiritual gift tests may be measuring personality as much as or more than spiritual gifts—however defined. S. D. Choi, for example, found that gift questionnaires and personality inventories produced similar results. Gift characteristics and personality characteristics matched in a high percentage of the test takers—though those results differed between seminarians and Filipino sample sets.⁶ He concluded that either the believer's personality was made to harmonize with his or her spiritual gifts, or spiritual gifts and personality traits are not essentially different. He theorized that at the time of conversion, the basic personality traits are made spiritually powerful.

Psychologist Dr. Kenneth Stone surmises in his detailed study that using spiritual gift tests is misleading and essentially useless. He believes that over half the questions are influenced by personality traits; therefore, the tests do not measure what they claim to measure. He states, "It is believed that these [spiritual gift] inventories are contaminated by personality traits, which account for the large amounts of error variance. This error may be hiding the distinct gifts."⁷ His recommendation is that revising the tests would not produce better results, and "the best method of [gift] discovery seems to lie in the trial-and-error process" where mistakes are assumed, and leadership must be patient and tolerant of them.

If this topic is of interest, perhaps the most detailed information is developed within two complex websites. Over seventeen years, Jason Hawthorne developed detailed comparisons between a listing of 16 or 21 "spiritual gifts" and Isabel Myers's Myers-Briggs (MBTI) personality types—which she had originally named "Gifts Differing," an obvious reference to Romans 12. Aurelian, a pseudonym, also published detailed information on both the history of spiritual gifts and their potential connection to MBTI personality traits.⁸ He

summarized that opinions on the relationship between spiritual gifts and personality traits tend to fall into four categories:

1. They are often but not always related.
2. Both are important but are not related.
3. We confuse personality and gifts.
4. There is a one-to-one correlation of “personality types” and “spiritual gifts.”

To address this issue, various churches have developed combined gift, personality, motivation, and even experience tests for congregants. The SHAPE profile of Rick Warren’s Saddleback Church and the Network System of Bill Hybels’s Willow Creek Community Church are the most well-known. Another site, Uniquely You,⁹ ties one of several gift approaches (7 to 23 spiritual gifts) to the DISC personality profile system and generates lengthy reports on all combinations and permutations.

What is my takeaway? In some sense, the results of this research do not matter. I’ll share more about this later, but I am one thing—one person. I have a gifting and a personality—I am spirit, soul, and body. The work of God in and through me does not need definition as much as it needs simple awareness and attention. God makes it easy if we simply do our best.

What about Me?

God is calling each of us to look past a particular denomination’s or church’s definition and teaching and ask ourselves what we believe and what that means to our Christian beliefs and walk. Ask yourself: Where do I fit into the spectrum of beliefs? How did I come to that understanding? How do my belief and practice square with Scripture? What is their fruit in my life? Most say that someone taught on it, they took a test, or they just believed that they were good at this or that—biblical name or not. Only a very small minority arrived at a sense of gifting via personal study, prayer, and self-observation.

Fewer yet have taken steps to exercise that gifting, and far fewer come into a sense of purpose based partially on that gifting.

It seems each of us also has a problem.

The Purpose of This Book

On that day so long ago with my young friend, I felt strongly that God's intention was not for me to offer a myriad of alternate explanations or tests on the topic of spiritual gifts, which I believed would invite more confusion into her life. Instead, it became clear to me that, like the Corinthians, we were asking the wrong question. We had been asking, "What are my spiritual gifts?" And God's answer through Paul is far wider and wiser than that question. He places spiritual gifts into a broader and more coherent context, creating a way for people to understand and engage with Him that is biblical, God-connecting, practical, and life transforming.

The remainder of this book is the result of a long trial-and-error process, of starting with a clean tabletop, few presuppositions, simple questions, soaking in Scripture, and years of developing and rejecting ideas that did not meet the four-part criteria. This book is also a synthesis of a hundred conversations—some going long into the night, some in class, some with scholars, and most with wise old friends.

The answer I feel I have arrived at is far better than the "What are my spiritual gifts?" question I asked so long ago. It meets my four criteria. It can be easily demonstrated in Scripture without recourse to stretching things. It draws us to active connection with each member of the Trinity. It has a simple and clear application. And it has been shown to change lives for the better.

So with sincere thanks for the many great insights of other writers and the pieces contributed by various expressions of Christianity on this subject, I push my own puzzle pieces to the center of the table and ask you to see if they fit, if they might be just the pieces you're looking for. Many have said they are. I hope you think so, too. These pieces are pretty revolutionary, I'm told. See what you think.

We need a revolution.