

REVISED & EXPANDED

CHARLES F. STANLEY BIBLE STUDY SERIES



MINISTERING THROUGH SPIRITUAL GIFTS

USE YOUR STRENGTHS
TO SERVE OTHERS



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CHARLES F. STANLEY



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

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Published in Nashville, Tennessee, by Thomas Nelson. Thomas Nelson is a registered trademark of HarperCollins Christian Publishing, Inc.

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ISBN 978-0-310-10566-4 (softcover)
ISBN 978-0-310-10567-1 (ebook)

First Printing August 2020 / Printed in the United States of America

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INTRODUCTION

THE HOPE OF GREATER STRENGTH

A number of books are available today to help you understand your talents and abilities and learn how to use them to achieve success. This book is unlike them in two ways. First, it is intended as a personal Bible study, not as a standalone book. Second, it is intended to help you discover the spiritual gifts that God has given you so you can use them for the body of Christ as a whole—not just your own personal success. The intent for using any spiritual gift is not personal gain but the building up of others within the church.

Note these gifts are *spiritual* in nature, so they are not going to be understood by anyone who does not have a relationship with Christ. The Holy Spirit is the One who reveals the spiritual gifts and their use—and those who have not accepted Christ as their Savior do not yet have the Holy Spirit residing within them. Therefore, this study should only be undertaken by those who are followers of Christ and who desire both to know and to use their gifts effectively.

In this study, we will use the terms *motivational gifts* and *ministry gifts* interchangeably. These are the spiritual gifts that *motivate* you to minister to others. They are *ministry* gifts in that they are always intended to build up others in the body of Christ.

This book can be used by you alone or by several people in a small-group study. At various times, you will be asked to relate to the material in one of the following four ways.

Ministering Through Spiritual Gifts

First, what new insights have you gained? Make notes about the insights you have. You may want to record them in your Bible or in a separate journal. As you reflect on your new understanding, you are likely to see how God has moved in your life.

Second, have you ever had a similar experience? You approach the Bible from your own unique background . . . your own particular set of understandings about the world that you bring with you when you open God's Word. For this reason, it is important to consider how your experiences are shaping your understanding and allow yourself to be open to the truth that God reveals.

Third, how do you feel about the material? While you should not depend solely on your emotions as a gauge for your faith, it is important for you to be aware of them as you study a passage of Scripture and can freely express them to God. Sometimes, the Holy Spirit will use your emotions to compel you to look at your life in a different or challenging way.

Fourth, in what way do you feel challenged to respond or to act? God's Word may inspire you or challenge you to take a particular action. Take this challenge seriously and find ways to move into it. If God reveals a particular need that He wants you to address, take that as His "marching orders." God will empower you to do something with the challenge that He has just given you.

Start your Bible study sessions in prayer. Ask God to give you spiritual eyes to see and spiritual ears to hear. As you conclude your study, ask the Lord to seal what you have learned so you will not forget it. Ask Him to help you grow into the fullness of the nature and character of Christ Jesus.

I encourage you to keep the Bible at the center of your study. A genuine Bible study stays focused on God's Word and promotes a growing faith and a closer walk with the Holy Spirit in each person who participates.

LESSON 1



GOD'S SPECIAL GIFT TO YOU

IN THIS LESSON

Learning: What exactly are motivational gifts?

Growing: Where do motivational gifts come from?

Do you know your innate spiritual gift? Have you identified the most important gift that God has given to you for the purposes of ministry in His name? Every Christian has been given a spiritual gift from God—a gift designed to be used as part of the body of Christ and for the purpose of assisting others. All believers receive these gifts the moment they accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. These gifts are intended to be the main avenue through which a person ministers to others within the church as a whole.

Ministering Through Spiritual Gifts

I refer to these gifts as “motivational gifts,” for they are intended to motivate you toward service. They are gifts that compel and inspire you to act in specific ways. They are the particular bent that you have to serve God’s people and others whom you desire to see become Christians. I believe it is vitally important to your personal spiritual life—as well as to the overall spiritual life of the church—for you to recognize these gifts, to encourage their proper use in the church, and encourage one another as you exercise them.

1. Do you know what your motivational gift is? If so, how are you using it at present?

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2. What are some ways that you have sensed God *motivating* you toward service?

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NATURE OF MOTIVATIONAL GIFTS

Several things about these motivational gifts are vital for us to acknowledge at the outset of our study. First, *every person has received a motivational gift*. Some people may seem gifted with a number of these types of gifts, but there is going to be one covered in this study that will be dominant in a person's life. The Lord instills that gift in a person at his or her birth, and it becomes fully operative for its God-given purposes when that person is born again.

Second, the motivational gifts are intended to be used in the church for building up God's people. As the apostle Paul wrote, "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all" (1 Corinthians 12:7). Each of the motivational gifts may be employed "in the flesh," or employed by the person for his or own personal gain. When this happens, disaster follows. The misuse of the gifts is actually counter-productive to the work the Holy Spirit desires to do in us individually and in the church as a whole. We must thus rely completely on the Holy Spirit to assist us in the use of our motivational gifts.

Third, God has commanded us to use these gifts. Peter wrote, "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10). Paul advised Timothy, "Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of eldership" (1 Timothy 4:14). The Bible is clear that God has given us the motivational gifts for a purpose. We are not to neglect our responsibility to uncover our gifts and learn how to use them effectively in the church.

Fourth, the motivational gifts reside in the believer. The New Testament identifies certain gifts that reside in the *Holy Spirit*. Such gifts operate "as the Spirit wills" and may be manifested in a believer's life from time to time (see 1 Corinthians 12:8-11 for a list of these types of gifts). However, the motivational gifts are built into our personalities as believers in Christ and are permanent. For instance, we will not manifest the motivational gift of prophecy for six months, and

then shift to a motivational gift of service for the next three years, and then shift to another gift. Furthermore, the motivational gifts span the course of our lives. They may manifest in slightly different ways, in different situations, with varying degrees of intensity, but the identity of the gift remains intact and is unchangeable.

Fifth, we each have a responsibility to discover and use our spiritual gifts.

The more we learn about our spiritual gifts, the greater the responsibility we have to use them for the benefit of others. The first thing we must recognize is that we have a motivational gift given to us by God. We must then recognize which of the seven gifts have been given to us. This is a major step for many believers who have never considered themselves to be “gifted” by God in any particular way. But let me repeat: *you* have been given a motivational gift by God. *You* bear this as part of your identity. *You* are responsible for identifying your gift, developing it, and using it for the glory of God. The more you use your motivational gift, the more you will grow in it, and the more the Holy Spirit will be able to use you in it.

- 3.** “The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all” (1 Corinthians 12:7). What does this say about the nature of spiritual gifts?

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4. “Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership” (1 Timothy 4:14). Why do you think it is important to use the particular gift or gifts that God has provided to you?

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NO SPECTATORS ALLOWED

The church was not designed by God to include spectators. Every person within the church—which is the greater body of Christ—is expected to be vibrantly alive and active, each one using his or her motivational gift at all times and in as many situations as possible, and each believer being open to use by the Holy Spirit as He wills in the manifestation of other spiritual gifts.

So many people in the church today are sitting on the sidelines, just watching others take active roles. In fact, it has been estimated that eighty percent of those who attend church regularly watch the other twenty percent do the work. The phenomenon is called the “80/20 Rule.” Jesus understood this tendency of people—even those among His followers—to want to sit back and just observe what is happening around them. As we read in the Gospel of Luke, “After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two . . . Then He said to them, ‘The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest’” (Luke 10:1–2).

Ministering Through Spiritual Gifts

In many ways, it is similar to athletes who choose to sit out for all or part of the season. While there may be good reasons for these athletes to make this choice, in the end their decision not to use their particular gifts, talents, and abilities is detrimental to the team. Team sports are dependent on all of the members showing up and doing their particular roles. When one person is missing, it is like a puzzle that is missing a piece. The other players on the team have to stretch and adapt to fill the missing player's role.

When believers in Christ choose not to use their gifts, it is detrimental to themselves, to those in the church who are active, and to the work of the Lord as a whole. It certainly is not God's desire or design. Rather, God desires for all believers to be active in the use of their gifts so they will grow more and more into the fullness of what He intended in their lives from the moment of their creation. He desires for the work within the church to be evenly distributed so that no one reaches the state of overload or burn out. And He desires that the work of the church as a whole will be balanced, vibrant, and effective to reach the lost for Christ.

- 5.** “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10). What does it mean to minister your gifts “to one another”? How is this done? Why is it important?

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6. What does Peter mean by “the manifold grace of God”? What does God’s grace have to do with your spiritual gifts?

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WORK AS GOD GIVES THE ENERGY

I like what the psalmist says about doing the work that God has given us to do: “The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing, to declare that the LORD is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him” (Psalm 92:12–15).

We’re to work as long as God gives us the energy. Even in “old age,” we can still bear good fruit for Christ. We can be “fresh and flourishing” in our mission. How do we do this? Well, science tells us that if we want to lead a long and healthy life, we have to eat right, exercise every day, and avoid doing things that will be detrimental to our physical state of being. The same is true of our spiritual lives. If we want to flourish and continue to bear good fruit for God, we read His Word, pray, fellowship with other believers in Christ, and avoid doing those things that would be detrimental to our spiritual state of being. In other words, we have to engage in “spiritual exercise” every day . . . which involves operating in our gifts.

Ministering Through Spiritual Gifts

My desire for you is that you look at yourself and say, “God, here is who I am today. What do You want to do in my life? Where do You want me to go? I refuse to accept the excuse that I am too old, too weak, or too inexperienced to do what You have called me to do. I refuse to allow fear to hold me back from using the gifts that You have given to me. I know that I have talents, and I have the Holy Spirit in me. So, I’m going to give it my best beginning today. I’m listening for direction. I’m going to trust You. I’m going to obey you.”

Today could be a life-changing day. It’s a choice you make.

- 7.** “Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:9–10). What are some ways that believers in Christ might get “weary” in doing good for others?

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- 8.** What does this passage say will happen if you refuse to give up and persevere in using the talents, gifts, and abilities that God has provided to you?

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DO TRY THIS AT HOME!

Remember that the motivational gifts were never designed to be used *independently* but with *others* to build up the church. The church is not a building or an organization. It is a living spiritual entity—just like the body is a living physical entity—and it is composed of all people who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Savior sent by God to reconcile mankind to Himself. Remember, genuine “church members” are wherever you find believers in Jesus Christ. Sometimes that will be at work, or in the community as a whole.

Your ministry gift is thus to function in *all* settings, not merely when you are serving on a church committee or as a part of a church-sponsored program. Whatever your gift may be, find ways to employ it in love, humility, and peace to those around you and in conjunction with other members of the body of Christ.

You and your spouse are likely to have different ministry gifts. Openly acknowledge your differences and find ways you can work together, building up one another and your family, rather than tearing one another down through criticism or competition. You and your children may very well have different ministry gifts. Again, openly acknowledge your gift and seek ways of employing them in a harmonious way that builds up your family life.

Your ministry gifts are intended to bring glory to God. So always make that your goal. Exercise your gifts as you believe Jesus would manifest them. Do what He would do and say what He would say. Always use your ministry gift with the fullness of the character of the Holy Spirit: “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23). If you use your gift while manifesting the true character of our Lord, you will be a blessing to others, and you will reap the Lord’s rewards and blessings in return.

This study is designed to help you *understand* the spiritual gifts, *identify* your particular gift, and *motivate* you to use that gift. I believe

that two things will happen as you understand who you are in Jesus Christ and what your identity is within the body of Christ. First, you are going to be excited about your identity and the ways in which God desires to use you. Second, you are going to be challenged to develop your gift and employ it to the best of your ability. God has many special rewards reserved for those who employ their motivational ministry gifts to the best of their abilities. So don't miss out on them!

- 9.** “I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:6-7). What does it mean to “stir up the gift of God which is in you”? How is this done? Why might it need to be stirred up?

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- 10.** How can fear interfere with your use of God's gifts? What role is played by “a sound mind” in eradicating such fear? How is it done?

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TODAY AND TOMORROW

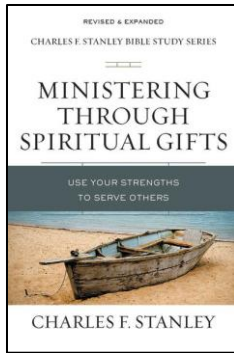
Today: Every Christian is given a motivational gift by the Holy Spirit, intended for use in building up others.

Tomorrow: I will spend time in prayer and reflection this week, asking the Lord to show me what motivational gift He has given me.

CLOSING PRAYER

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Father, we thank You and praise You for the amazing gifts that You have given to every one of us. Teach us today the nature of these gifts. Let our minds be open to receive Your instruction and our hearts be open to put those instructions into action. We desire today to be operating the gifts that You have given. We pray that You will reveal these gifts to us and put us into situations where we can use them. We don't want to be "spectators" but active in Your plans.



MINISTERING THROUGH SPIRITUAL GIFTS

by Charles F. Stanley

What are your gifts?

How are you using your abilities to grow God's kingdom? In *Ministering Through Spiritual Gifts*, you will find how to pinpoint your God-given strengths by exploring the seven gifts listed in Romans 12. You will be challenged to consciously develop these gifts—not for your own personal gain, but to minister to others. Challenging, thought-provoking, and deeply rooted in Scripture, this Bible study calls you to deeper service to the Lord as you embrace the ministry gifts He has given you.

The **Charles F. Stanley Bible Study Series** is a unique approach to Bible study, incorporating biblical truth, personal insights, emotional responses, and a call to action. Each study draws on Dr. Stanley's many years of teaching the guiding principles found in God's Word, showing how we can apply them in practical ways to every situation we face. This edition of the series has been completely revised and updated, and includes two brand-new lessons from Dr. Stanley.

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