2

A Quick Orientation

With our spiritual gifts class just around the corner, I thought it would be good to touch base with Jeff and Jane again to be sure they are still on board and to see if they're feeling more prepared than they were at our last conversation. They responded with a strong "yes" to the first question, but a more mixed answer to the second.

Jeff spoke up. "We're both feeling good about the guiding principles for the class and less worried that it will be a source of friction for our church. That much is positive. But as we've discussed the subject in preparation for the first session, I've become more and more aware of just how unprepared I am.

"Jane has heard sermons and participated in multiple studies and seminars on the Spirit's gifts. She's read a bag-full of books on the subject. She knows what passages we're going to examine. Without even trying, she tosses out terms like 'cessationism' and 'continuationism,' and explains main views of 'Spirit-baptism.' She understands how Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Movement and Third-Wave Evangelicalism are similar and different. Ask her what gift she has, and she not only answers, but pulls out a 10-page self-assessment chart to explain it.

"That's not where I'm at. I'm still trying to sort out the differences between my Baptist Church and the Full Gospel Tabernacle down the street. I know I heard a sermon last year about gifts from 1 Corinthians, but I can't remember what chapter we read. The only thing I know about my own gifts is that I've never spoken in tongues or healed anyone."

Jane chimed in as her partner paused for a breath. "So he's nervous. He feels like he'll be left behind in this study. Or that if things move at a pace he can manage, I'll nod off to sleep."

This will be a real issue for us. We don't want anyone frustrated because they can't keep up. Nor would it be good if half the class are snoring. In an informal Bible study there will always be a mix of people who bring a lot of background and some who are catching up. But our group will have a happier journey together if we can shrink the distance between the veterans and the newbies just a little.

To that end I'm going to take two steps as we launch into our study.

First, in this chapter I'm going to offer a quick historical and conceptual orientation to our subject. That will allow me to introduce some of the main questions that come up when people explore the Spirit's gifts as well as some of the noteworthy traditions that exist.

Then as we dip our toes into the biblical material in the next chapter, we'll begin with a quick review of some of the most widely-known passages and concepts, mixed with a peek at some things most people—even most experienced Christians—do not know about gifts in the New Testament. This will help folks like Jeff to get up to speed, and I trust that it will motivate all of us—even the "Janes" in our midst—to be on the lookout for new insights.

K. G. Radant © 2026

If you, like Jane, already have a strong background in the Bible's spiritual gift teaching, you can safely skim most of this chapter. I recommend that you take a little time on the summary statements, which will only tie you up for a few minutes. And do *skim* rather than skipping it all. You may find some points of interest in unexpected places.

If, like Jeff, you're still trying to get your bearings, plan to give this chapter a little more time. I understand that not everyone loves history, so I've boxed up the details in sections that can easily scanned and then summarized the big ideas in a couple paragraphs. Dig in or fly over, whichever works best for you. Personally, I find the facts and trends interesting and helpful. But I'm one of those "academic types," and I know not everyone is as patient with the details as I am.

With that said, here's a quick orientation to the spiritual gift landscape. Then we'll launch our study in earnest in the next chapter.

A. A (very) quick historical sketch

Let's start with a high-speed journey through the history of the church, looking for major themes relating to the Spirit's gifts. This is an extremely quick overview, full of generalizations; but it gives a sense of how the subject has been treated by major leaders and teachers over the years. If you prefer to stick to the even shorter 30,000-foot flyover summary, you will find that just below the shaded boxes.[1]

(1) Early church: a.d. 30-600

For the first 17 centuries of church history, there isn't really that much to say about "spiritual gift" teaching—at least, not teaching of a fully-developed sort. In the patristic era (c. 30-600 a.d.), our spiritual forefathers were preoccupied with other things: preserving the gospel faithfully as the message spread, surviving persecution, maintaining spiritual life in a transition from persecution to comfort, and establishing a baseline of orthodox theology centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ. They cared deeply about life in the Spirit. But the spotlight of their theological attention was firmly fixed on Jesus, and little effort was given to develop a detailed doctrine of the Holy Spirit, including the Spirit's gifts.

This is illustrated in the major creeds that were crafted during this period. Consider the Apostles' Creed, which affirms belief in "God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth," together with "Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord," described in detail in ten subsequent lines of content. This is followed by the important but remarkably simple statement, "I believe in the Holy Spirit." Full stop. Ten lines on the nature and work of Christ, and six words given to the

[1] For those who want a richer version of this overview with bibliographic references, you may find it more helpful to browse chapter 3 of *Grace for Service*, where the subject gets 24 pages with a forest of footnotes.

Spirit.

The Nicene Creed of a.d. 325 follows suite, with a lengthy paragraph on the nature of Jesus, followed by the simple phrase: "… and the Holy Spirit." This is elaborated somewhat in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381, which adds that the Spirit is "Lord and Life-Giver, who proceeds from the Father [and the Son] and who is to be worshiped with them, who spoke through the prophets." But the emphasis was still on the doctrine of the Trinity, not on the work of the Spirit as such.

This doesn't mean the early church forgot all about life in the Spirit. They believed the Spirit was still at work among them, and they sought to live in His fulness. But we can find little or no evidence of an explicit effort to build a theology of spiritual gifts during this period. Early Christian authors describe activities and phenomena which coincide with NT gifts—miraculous and more ordinary. (Some observe that the miraculous experiences have grown less common since NT times.) But they make relatively light use of "spiritual gift" vocabulary, and show little interest in developing a package of gift-teaching to be shared and applied in local churches. Their references to miracles, prophecies, teaching, evangelism, and other recognizable gifts are consistently linked with the lives of noteworthy saints and martyrs, and to the work of bishops, priests, and monastic leaders.

(2) Roman Catholicism: a.d. 600-1600

If we follow the path of the western (Roman Catholic) church beyond a.d. 600 up to the 16th century, we will find little advance on the earlier trend. In broad terms, Roman Catholic doctrine and practice followed a road whose main signposts were hierarchical organization, sacramental worship, and mystical spirituality. The emphasis on hierarchy and sacrament tended to compress the concept of spiritual gifts into a priestly shape: the gifts that really mattered were clerical ordination and the power to consecrate the bread and wine of the Eucharist so that it brought spiritual life to the recipient. A premium on mystical experience allowed some individuals outside the hierarchy to rise to prominence; these otherworldly heroes often made special reference to the Spirit's presence. But celebrated mystics were the exception, not the rank-and-file. They rarely promoted a coherent doctrine of the Spirit and His gifts. If their teaching and example was perceived as undermining the official ecclesiastical authorities in any way, they were quickly black-listed as heretics and persecuted if their influence grew too large.

The recognized teachers of the Roman church and their informed disciples were too well aware of the Scriptures and the creeds to forget about the Spirit and His ministry. However, the idea that the Spirit distributes gifts to *all* members of the body, empowering every-member ministry among the laity, was generally overlooked and in some respects forbidden. So we can hardly act surprised when we find very little medieval teaching on the spiritual gifts as the basis for all members of the body to serve in Jesus' name.

(3) Eastern Orthodoxy

The churches that form the Eastern Orthodox tradition moved on a somewhat different trajectory during the same period. As in the Latin west, the Orthodox were concerned about well-organized leadership hierarchy, and their spirituality was decidedly mystical. But it had a different flavor. Western Christianity was captivated by the legal imagery of guilt, punishment, righteousness, and forgiveness, building on themes that are prominent in Paul's letters. Even the sacraments, applied directly to the individual, were conceived as a medicine to solve the problem of guilt and to remove the sinner's debt as recording in God's cosmic account book. From early years, Eastern Christianity placed more emphasis on a relational union between God and the believer, exemplified in the "in Christ" imagery associated with John's Gospel. Salvation was viewed more in terms of spiritual oneness with God, pursued through the sacraments but also through a full range of spiritual practices, rites, and images from the Christian tradition.

Eastern Orthodoxy was, therefore, more inclined to emphasize the presence of the Holy Spirit and His role in connecting every believer to Jesus in an experience of spiritual union. Nevertheless, we look in vain for extensive teaching on the spiritual gifts as a practical framework for mobilizing the members of Christ's body in ministry. In part this probably reflects an outlook that was more contemplative than activist. More generally, it fits the profile of Orthodox Christianity, which invested less energy in the development and publication of creative theological teaching than its western counterpart.

(4) Reformation: 1500-1600s

We who belong to the Protestant tradition often feel a little lost in the world of Medieval Christianity, both Eastern and Western, and we sigh with relief when we turn to the more familiar developments that sprang from the Reformation in the early 1500s. Nevertheless, modern Protestants are likely to be surprised to learn that the Reformers also put relatively little ink to paper on the subject of spiritual gifts.

Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and their counterparts led a movement committed to address perceived problems in the Roman Catholic empire: calling for a rearrangement of authority structures, a renewed emphasis on personal faith and transformation over against ritualism, and a commitment to Scripture (read as normal language by the community) as the final standard for faith and life. With these passions driving them, the Reformers had much to say about the Spirit's role in inspiring Scripture, His activity to help the church interpret Scripture, His anointing on leaders who preached and taught the Scripture, and His convicting and sanctifying work in the lives of those who believed and followed the Scriptural message. Yet they wrote relatively little about the gifts of the Spirit which empowered *everyone* for ministry, and they were extremely cautious about claims that some were exercising miraculous gifts—particularly gifts that might be construed as exalting individual leaders and undermining the unique authority of Scripture.

One of the major questions on which the Reformers differed was the degree to which reform meant rebuilding the church from scratch, versus retaining as much as possible while addressing perceived abuses. The more established Reformation churches—Lutheran, Anglican, Reformed—tended to preserve many Catholic structures, including a formal priesthood and a fairly clear division between clergy and laity. They uniformly taught that every Christian had direct access to God, and a right and responsibility to worship in all aspects of life. They did *not* uniformly teach that "ministry" was the responsibility of every believer. This would be championed by the more radical streams of the Reformation: Baptists, Anabaptists, Quakers, and related groups. It was in these latter circles that we begin to see more emphasis on the Spirit's enabling grace in all members of the body, enabling biblical interpretation, empowering preaching and teaching, and equipping for ministry through various gifts.

Little by little, such concepts of every-member ministry and the gifting of all believers would filter into all Protestant traditions and beyond. This was greatly accelerated by widespread renewal movements in Europe and North America in the 1700-1800s.

(5) Renewal movements: 1700-1800s

From a traditional Christian perspective, the "Enlightenment" period (beginning in the late 1600s) was a time when renewal movements were sorely needed. Protestantism had a profound spiritual and religious impact on the western world; it also shattered the nearly-universal political power of the established churches. Prior to Luther, individuals who were skeptical of Christian faith were driven underground and largely silent. By the 1700-1800s, a smorgasbord of anti-supernatural theologies and expressions of overt atheism were spreading, and a growing segment of the population no longer bothered with the church at all. Even in theologically conservative circles, the expectation that God would show up in miraculous ways diminished, and the life of faith sometimes came to be equated with a dry doctrinal correctness or a commitment to social activism.

Naturalism, theological liberalism, and perfunctory orthodoxy certainly left their mark on western society. But the church didn't roll over and die with the rise of the Enlightenment. In this same period, we see the rise and growth and cumulative impact of many renewal movements, large and small. The best known were associated with names such as John Wesley, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, D.L. Moody, and Charles Finney, and they have come to be remembered as the First and Second Great Awakenings. These were times of evangelistic advance, and they coincided with the rise of the modern missionary movement. The revivals also confronted nominalism in the church, "urging pew-sitters not to be satisfied with ritual Christianity, but rather to seek a more dynamic and tangible experience of Christian life through confession of sin, steps of personal faith, and pursuit of a transformed and empowered life brought about by the inner work of the Holy Spirit."[2]

[2] *Grace for Service*, 48.

Note the presence of several important themes in this period of awakening. (a) Christians were called to an experience of personal spiritual renewal, rooted in active decisions of faith, leading to transformed life and practical service. (b) This was for everyone, not just the clergy. (c) It was frequently accompanied by unusual manifestations of God's presence—some of which echoed the extraordinary gifts named in the NT. And (d) it was permeated by references to the Holy Spirit. He was understood to be the source of conviction and renewal. He made the presence of Jesus tangible among God's people. They were called to Spirit-filled living. And their service was to be an expression of the gifts He dispensed.

Here, we begin to encounter publications, preaching, and teaching that place more emphasis on a more fully-developed doctrine of the Spirit and His gifts than anything we have seen to this point in the church's history. The stage was set for the 20th century and its unprecedented interest in the gifts of the Spirit.

(6) The Spirit and the gifts in the 20th century

When we turn the page and enter the 1900s, the prominent heading underlined and highlighted in bold print is the rise of Pentecostalism. Seeds of 19th century Spirit-oriented renewal germinated and burst into flower in the first decade of the 20th. Scattered small group gatherings and local revival meetings grew into a regional, national, and international movement defined by Pentecostal doctrine and practice. Pentecostal churches emerged, followed by Pentecostal denominations, mission organizations, universities, and other agencies. By all counts, the Pentecostal branch of the Christian tree grew more rapidly and dramatically in the 20th century than any other, expanding from its humble beginnings into a major force on the global religious stage.

The rise of Pentecostalism was not without incident, even internally within the Christian community. Between 1901 and the 1950s, tensions often flared high between Pentecostal groups and established Protestant churches, particularly around the role of miraculous gifts and the function of tongues as an initial physical evidence of Spirit-baptism. (Much of the debate and division noted earlier concerning spiritual gifts has its roots in these early disagreements. I'll say a little more about the specifics in the next section.)

In time it became clear that Pentecostalism was not going away, and dialogue led to greater mutual understanding—even where disagreement remained. The first dramatic public strides toward reconciliation took place in the 1950s and '60s in what has come to be called the "Second Wave" of Charismatic Renewal, in which a greater emphasis on the Spirit, spiritual gifts, and miraculous manifestations swept across segments of the Roman Catholic Church together with mainline (mostly liberal) Protestant churches. A similar "wave" of interest in the Spirit and His gifts, including miraculous gifts, made its way into Evangelical Protestantism in the 1970s and 80s, creating more open doors for collaboration between Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal groups in spite of lingering differences in some matters.

These 20th century developments are mirrored in the literature you will find on spiritual

gifts, much like the history of a river can be traced in the sediment layers on its banks. If you scan the shelves of a Christian bookstore or library, you will find that most spiritual-gift-related books from 1900 to 1960 are either general calls to a holy and Spirit-filled life, or salvos in the battle to support or discredit the distinctives of the Pentecostal movement. The latter theme continues to the present, though it has slowed and quieted somewhat. Beginning in the 1960s, you will find more books that attempt to provide a "neutral" study of Charismatic phenomena and the biblical texts that relate to it, together with calls for peace and cooperation.

Of special interest, the genre of "find and use your spiritual gift" books emerges in the 1970s, signaling a growing interest in the practical applications of spiritual gift teaching for ministry, beyond the questions that swirl around miraculous manifestations. These also continue to the present, though gift-discernment is increasingly linked with other personality and skill profiles beginning in the 1990s.

To this, the 1990s add a new stream of gift literature discussing, in matter-of-fact and practical terms, how to practice miraculous gifts such as tongues, prophecy, or apostleship. These come in the wake of the Third Wave Charismatic advances into the broader Evangelical community, and reflect an increased willingness to normalize gifts which were previously limited to the Pentecostal world.

Summing up: biblically-informed Christians have always known about the Spirit and His gifts, and serious disciples have sought to live in the Spirit's fulness in every era since the days of Peter and Paul. However, at least in the history that comes down to us through written records, the subject of spiritual gifts was eclipsed by other concerns and rarely developed in a systematic way until the late 19th and 20th centuries. You simply don't find books, seminars, or other forms of extended teaching on "spiritual gifts" in earlier periods. When the Spirit's gifts were discussed, most often they were appended to the stories of saints and martyrs, or defined in terms of the ministry of the clergy.

Beginning in the 1700s, secularism and naturalism became powerful forces in the modern western world. Pushing back in the direction of faith, the church also experienced multiple, widespread renewal movements. These revivals generated a fresh interest in the work of the Spirit, emphasizing the Spirit's presence and power for daily living and His enabling for ministry on every Christian—on "lay" people as well as clergy.

By the early 20th century there was an explosion of Spirit-focused study, discovery, and debate. An emphasis on the Spirit and His gifts would spread into all forms of western Christianity. In the first half of the 1900s it was championed most loudly by the rising Pentecostal movement. Theological differences separated Pentecostalism from other streams of Protestant faith, and a large portion of the dialogue about the Spirit's gifts between 1901 and 1960 was given to arguments for and against Pentecostal distinctives. Little by little, Pentecostalism became integrated (to various degrees, and not necessarily with full agreement) into the wider conservative Christian community. This trend was helped by the arrival of a "Charismatic" movement in mainline churches in the 1950s and '60s, and by another among non-Pentecostal Evangelicals beginning in the 1970s.

Since the 1970s, teaching on the Spirit's gifts has been a normal part of Christian discipleship in all forms of western Christianity and beyond. Opinions still differ on the nature and role of tongues and on the availability and use of other miraculous gifts, though there is more cooperation and less hostility between Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal groups. In the Evangelical world, gift theology has centered on helping Christians to understand their gifts and to find ways to put them to use in practical ministry. You will find more books and articles on "how to use miraculous gifts" since 1990, and more studies that connect spiritual gifts with a wider range of personal talents and aptitudes. The flood of publications that flowed strong between 1970 and 2005 has slowed somewhat in recent years, as well. Nevertheless, it is widely assumed that the Spirit's gifts play a vital role in the church, and that they should be studied and put to use, even if they still raise some lingering questions.

B. Some noteworthy issues and options

When people like Jane say they are familiar with spiritual gift teaching, what they almost always mean is that their faith has been shaped by the teaching and debates about spiritual gifts since the 1950s and '60s. They know about the sometimes hostile battles over Pentecostal teaching from earlier in the 1900s, but usually also want to see a more cooperative and peaceable discussion even though they recognize that Christians have different opinions. They agree that a healthy Christian life is a Spirit-filled life, and that gifts are crucial to good church ministry. They may or may not be eager to embrace miraculous gifts, and they have likely been exposed to different approaches for "finding your gift" and setting that gift in the context of the "SHAPE" you have received from God.

The books and seminars that have influenced Jane and others like her come in different shapes and sizes, and they adopt different perspectives. However, they all tend to raise and explore the same range of basic questions. Where they differ, it is because they answer those questions differently. Overall, the questions fall into 5 main areas.

(1) There are questions about the ***basic definition and nature of the Spirit's gifts***. How are gifts related to our *natural talents* and abilities? How do they relate to *church offices* and ministry roles? *How many* are there—is there a fixed number, and is it a large or small number? Is it really useful to divide gifts into *groupings*: miraculous versus non-miraculous, temporary versus permanent, etc.

I noted earlier that Christians of all stripes widely assume a similar definition for spiritual gifts (see p. ** above). That definition still leaves room to debate these other questions. Especially in older studies it was common to hear people argue for a fixed number of gifts corresponding to the main NT lists, probably meaning somewhere between 17 and 20. More recently you will hear more voices arguing for a larger number, or suggesting that there might be no limit to the possible number of gifts. Pentecostal groups sometimes divide gifts into those that are for service in the church and those that are signs of personal growth and means of personal encouragement. Some non-Pentecostals divide the gifts into those that are permanently available in the church and those that were only for the first generations when the church was being established. (This is known as the "cessationist" position because it holds that some NT gifts have ceased to function.)

Explanations for the relationship of (non-miraculous) gifts to talents vary widely, and I'm not aware that a particular answer has won the day.

(2) Other questions have to do with ***how a person experiences the Spirit's gifts***. *When* do we receive them? Many, but not all, hold that this happens at conversion, since that is when the Spirit takes up life-giving residence in our lives. *How many* can a person have? Earlier studies often argued that we each have one primary gift; more recent studies are inclined to speak of having a "gift-mix" with several. Do my gifts *stay the same* for a lifetime? It is widely held that they do, though this raises questions in light of Paul's instruction to seek certain gifts (1 Cor 14:1), and it depends on other issues such as one's views about tongues as evidence of Spirit-baptism.

At a very practical level, we could ask questions about *how a person discovers their gifts* (if such a thing is important) and *how they are put to use*. And, thinking about passages such as 1 Tim 4:14 and 2 Tim 1:6, how does someone "*stir up*" a gift and ensure that it is not neglected?

A significant question still widely debated is whether a spiritual gift can be *used "at will"* by the person who has it. This issue is especially significant in discussions about the availability of miraculous gifts. Could someone exercise a gift of healing or miracles "at will"? How would that work with tongues or prophecy? In spite of the potential complications, it has been widely (though not universally) assumed that if a person "has" a gift they ought to be able to use it when they wish.

(3) Most studies of the spiritual gifts spend some time ***discussing the main gifts that appear in the NT***, especially apostleship, prophecy, tongues, healings, miracles, and faith. How would we reconcile *contemporary prophecy* with the authority of Scripture? Does a gift of *healing* mean everyone will always be healed? Is *apostleship* the same today as it was in the first century?

And, at the center of the classic debates between Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals: does *the gift of tongues* always coincide with a person's first experience of Spirit-filling, and is tongues something available to and desirable for every Christian? Classic Pentecostal teaching says yes. Cessationists obviously say no. In more recent Charismatic circles, the answer tends to be more layered, allowing that miraculous gifts including tongues may all still be available but rejecting the claim that tongues should be experienced by every believer.

(4) ***Are the miraculous gifts still available***? All or just some? If they are, how do we use them well? Historically this has been the most divisive question. It has implications for our understanding of biblical authority, church leadership, and other theological concerns. It is often tightly interwoven with personal experience: experiences of gifts and the absence of gifts, of dynamic spiritual power and problematic abuses, and more. There is more agreement today than there used to be that at least *some* miraculous gifts may still be active in the church. But the subject still has the ability to generate a good deal of debate, at times rather heated.

(5) ***What functions to the gifts play*** and how do they work to fulfill those functions? At one level this seems easy, since the Bible so clearly links gifts with service and building up the body of Christ. But when we push into the details, other questions come to the surface. Here

again, the biggest issue has to do with the role of *tongues* as a sign of Spirit-baptism. Tongues also raises the question whether a gift can legitimately be used for *self-edification*, as opposed to building up others in the body. Gifts imply the Spirit's power, but does this mean that having a gift—miraculous or otherwise—*guarantee ministry success* in every situation? And are there consistent connections between certain gifts and *ministry roles and offices*?

If all this sounds confusing, here is a simplified map of some main questions and traditional views to help put it in order. (Please note that I've focused on the most distinctive groups, and have described a "typical" approach for each. In reality the people you and I meet will often have more nuanced, mixed views. Do not assume that you can pigeon-hole people into this chart!)

	Pentecostal	Charismatic or "open to miraculous gifts"	Cessationist
Basic definition	Supernatural abilities given at conversion, enabling each member to minister for the growth of the body (see p. **)		
How many gifts are there?	Focus is mostly on the miraculous gifts of 1 Cor 12-14 (17-20)	Tend to think of a large number of options, miraculous and other	Tend to focus on NT gift lists, 17-20, often have viewed the number as fixed and relatively small
When do we get gifts?	For ministry, at conversion; miraculous gifts at Spirit-baptism after conversion	At conversion? (May also relate to life-long talents)	At conversion
Do gifts stay the same? How many does one have?	Ministry gifts, yes; tongues is an exception; typically a Christian should have tongues plus 1 gift for ministry	Not necessarily; number may be fluid, people usually have a "gift-mix"	Yes; traditionally the focus is on finding your 1 dominant gift
Can they be used "at will"?	Yes	Maybe	Yes (and this is one reason miraculous gifts are not available now)
Are miraculous gifts available?	Yes, and all Spirit-baptized Christians should experience some	Yes, though everyone's experience is different	No
What is Spirit-baptism, and how is tongues related?	A distinct post-conversion reception of the Spirit's fulness in fresh power, always evidenced by tongues, similar to what happened to the first believers at Pentecost	Reception of the Spirit at conversion (Spirit-filling is living under the Spirit's empowerment and guidance, and may often involve distinct experiences after conversion—tongues being a possible but not necessary element)	Reception of the Spirit at conversion (Spirit-filling is living under the Spirit's empowerment and guidance)

Well, that's a whirlwind tour of the context in which you and I will study the Spirit's gifts. Jeff will now be a little more familiar with some of the main terms, issues, and perspectives that we will encounter going forward. I suspect that he also feels a little jet-lagged from flying through it all so quickly. Perhaps you do as well. If so, please take a deep breath, relax, and remember to keep things in perspective.

What really matters in this study is not what the Medieval Roman Catholic Church taught, or what cessationists and continuationists fought about in the 1950s, or who wrote the first "discover and use your gifts" handbook. It's not essential that we memorize all the possible questions that will come up or put a label on all the views they generate. Ultimately, the most important thing is to gain a clear, solid understanding of what Scripture has to say. That is where we will hear the Spirit's voice: informing, counseling, motivating, and transforming our lives and our ministries.

So now we begin our study in earnest. That is the main focus of this book, and it will be our preoccupation for the next eight chapters. I know it will be a valuable exercise for Jeff and others who need to become familiar with the Bible's message on the Spirit's gifts. I strongly suspect that the review (and the expanded boundaries of our study) will also be enriching for Jane and her counterparts who have been down this path before.

May our Lord guide us, give us clarity and understanding, build our church communities as we learn together, and equip us to serve even more effectively for the glory of our Lord Jesus, who is worthy.

Some questions to consider

- Which parts of the historical sketch were most familiar to you as you waded through (or scanned over) it? Which parts were new? Were there aspects of the historical treatment of the Spirit's gifts in the church that surprised you? Did it raise questions that might be relevant as we get into our Bible study?

- In the introduction I talked about the importance of the Spirit's gifts for healthy church life and ministry. Yet in this historical overview I've pointed out that for most of the church's history you can't find a lot of detailed, focused teaching on "spiritual gifts." How is it possible that the church survived and sometimes thrived through the centuries without all the books and seminars that we've seen in recent years?

  Does this tell us anything about the relationship, and the differences, between living in the Spirit and having a *doctrine* of the Spirit? What might that mean for our study of the gifts?

- I've summarized the most common questions people tend to ask as they learn about the Spirit's gifts. Which of these would be most important to you? Were some unfamiliar? Are there some others you would want to add?

- Are there key questions on which you feel that you already have a fairly solid answer? Questions that are currently unclear for you, or for your study group?

  Do you see the value of my comment in the previous chapter that our study will be friendlier and more effective if we hold our current views lightly until we've examined Scripture closely?