

✧ Finding God and Spiritual Gifts ✧



God Decides Our Gifts

*We must choose to use them,
to develop them--and to be
thankful for the one(s) He
gives us.*



I was born the fifth daughter in a family of six girls. My birth order placed me well to learn from my older siblings, and to pass on what I knew to my younger sister. The six of us grew up in pairs. The 'older ones,' the twins, and 'the two little ones.' When I started grade one, after school I'd run across the field for home, eager to set up a table in the trees to teach my younger sister. I admired teachers, and little did I know that teaching would rank high among my lifelong activities: teaching our own children, and also teaching teen and adult Sunday School classes, and speaking to women's groups.

GOD WOOS US WITH HIS TENDER LOVE

Our natural talents are not spiritual gifts. A spiritual gift is given by God when a person becomes a Christian. This hadn't happened to me yet.

At age 12, I stayed behind to pray with my Vacation Bible School teacher. I wanted to ask Jesus to be my Savior. As I waited for her to pray with another girl, my cheeks started to flush. I realized, "I don't know what sins to confess." I knew I sometimes got angry and I had taken a cookie without asking, but was that enough to keep me out of heaven? How can that be?

My teacher had been kind to us all week, and I became attached to her. "She's going to think I didn't understand." Yet I knew I had listened well enough to the lesson to know that this was what the prayer was all about: I had to admit that I had done

something wrong before I could ask Jesus to forgive me.

I thought about slipping out of the room, but my teacher had already seen me waiting. If I left, she might ask me later why I had left. Wouldn't it be worse to leave now than to stay and look stupid? (I didn't know what sins to confess). If I left, she might mention her concern to my parents. How had I gotten myself in this situation?

That day was the last day of Vacation Bible School--my last chance to pray. Nobody else had told me I needed to ask Jesus to save me. I wasn't going to leave that day without asking Jesus to be my Savior; I wanted to go to heaven. As I look back now, I realize my conscience wasn't fully awakened. I didn't know how needy I was. That would come much later.

My Confession

That day, alone with my teacher, I confessed I sometimes got angry and I had taken a cookie without asking. Afterwards, I was glad I had stayed and prayed. Now I could go to heaven! She encouraged me to tell somebody--and that my parents would be good ones to tell. In the afternoon I told my Mom. She was pleased.

I took my younger sister out to the trees to share with her what I had prayed. She wanted to go to heaven, too.

"Then you have to tell God you've taken a cookie or done something wrong. It doesn't matter what you say, but you have to tell Him something." She repeated some words after me as we prayed.

Although I had attended church with my family my entire life, we didn't talk about these things at home.

Later, whenever I tried to tell a friend how to become a Christian, I spoke out each point in an awkward, memorized step. But from that VBS-day on, I thought that I was saved.

Whenever squabbles erupted between my sisters, I admonished them, "God doesn't want us to argue and fight."

What is God's Love?

When I was 14, the day after summer holidays began, I jumped off of the porch of our two-storey house and made my way to the school swings. I had just graduated from grade eight--a milestone completed. In the fall, I would take the bus to attend a city high school. I was elated. On this exuberant day, I wanted to spend time alone.

I walked the short distance across my Dad's field. White billowy clouds dotted the wide open prairie skies. At that moment, I had the wonderful sense God loved me and was watching over me. Nothing else mattered that day as I pumped myself high on the swing. God had told me He loved me.

I thought God talked to me that day because I knew Him. Much later I realized He had spoken to me because I didn't know Him. He was wooing me--drawing me closer. It wasn't until years later when I needed some real answers that I started to ask some really hard questions:

- God, does Your love come and go too?
- Are You out there?
- Do you care about me?

Then the worst thought of all--the most crucial question of all came to me:

- Is there a God? Had I just been told there was a God--had grown up just thinking there was a God, but there really wasn't?
- Were we here on our own? Alone?

Saturday Night

A week later, my parents asked me if I wanted to attend a Youth for Christ film with them. I accepted. We arrived on time and joined the milling crowd outside the building. Already, the venue was filled to capacity.

We started to walk away when a man stepped out to announce, "The response has been tremendous. We'll show the film again, later tonight, if you'll come back."

My father cocked his head slightly and said to Mom and me, "So, I guess we'll come back."

"You don't need to do that Daddy. It's okay," I countered. I knew he didn't like to wait around. Gently he persisted, "I want to see it. We can drive around for awhile, then go to a restaurant and eat something hot." It was so unlike my father. He liked to keep busy. But that night, nothing else mattered to him.

We went back for the second showing. The drama on the screen unfolded quickly. An attractive woman dressed in a turquoise outfit caught my attention. She was searching for the meaning of life. I was glued to the story. Near

The soul at
struggle
--searching for
meaning in life.

And this was Only the Beginning!

the end of the film, two men were talking about God. One shared God's plan of salvation. The other man didn't think he needed God. He was fine just the way he was. His friend continued, "All of us have sinned--and Jesus died for us."

These were words I had heard all my life. I started to weep. I whispered to God, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'll go wherever You want me to go." At that moment, something happened to me. It was brand new. When the film ended, it took awhile for everyone to file out of the building. I glanced at others also leaving and wondered, "Did it happen to her too? to him? I had such peace. I felt such Light--and joy.

On our way home, from the back seat of the car, I leaned forward and said to my parents, "I almost threw religion overboard. It wasn't making any sense anymore. But something happened to me in there. God is real!"

I didn't know what to call what had happened inside me. The next morning, God spoke to me as I read the Bible--not audibly, but in my spirit. I had been reading my Bible regularly, now verses leaped off the page as He spoke to me. After work, I raced home to read my Bible again and to pray. It was awesome. God spoke to me in His Word and I talked to Him. A few weeks later a Bible verse caught my attention. Jesus said it to a religious man. "*Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and pharisees, you won't enter the kingdom of heaven.*" I wept for joy. God had been so kind to me. I had been religious--trying to be good, doing good things, and being positive. I had sat in church for 19 years and didn't understand God's message. I had been blind. On the night of the film, *Eternal Life*, the very power of God came into my life. Now He lived in me. I was born again. Jesus said, "Don't be surprised when I tell you, you must be born again!" His power made my spirit alive. I know for sure the moment I die, that His power in me will take me (like the pull of a magnet) to be where He is.

HOW DO WE GET OUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

I have briefly shared how I became a Christian. This is the first step to receiving spiritual gifts. We cannot receive a spiritual gift until our spirit has been made alive by the Holy Spirit. When I received **Jesus** as my personal Savior, He gave me at least one spiritual gift.

I Corinthians says, "Now there are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but it is the same Holy Spirit who is the source of them all...It is the one and only Holy Spirit who distributes these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have" (12:4, 11 NLT). There is no place for competition or envy. God gives His gifts to equip us to serve Him and others--and His gift(s) indicate what He wants us to do. As we yield to Him, He expresses His will and His power through us: "Lord, I will follow You and trust You. You will enable me **to do what You want me to do.**"

As we live in love--love God and others (I Cor. 13), and use our spiritual gift(s) (I Cor. 12), God empowers us to live far beyond our natural ability and comfort zone. This is how it must be, or we are still living on a natural plain. The ability God gives is supernatural--none of the glory is ours. We acknowledge that God is working in and through us to do something that will last for eternity. Only God can do that. As we use our gift(s), other people's lives are touched.

Have you received **Jesus** as your personal Savior? Yield to His Lordship. HE is LORD. Let Him live His life in You and through you. Ask Him to use you today to do whatever He wants you to do.