



Branch Out Study – *Leader's Guide*
The Beautiful Bloom

Part 1: Petals of a Beautiful Bloom

Beauty is in the inside, although we're all trying desperately to create it on the outside ☺.

- ☼ *Think of your favorite flower. (refer to photographs of flowers to get participants focused on different kinds of floral blooms)*

The analogy of a Christian woman and a floral bloom: both have deep, healthy roots, are growing and changing, and have a dynamic yet layered beauty made up of different **petals** (or **attributes**). The strength for growing comes from within. Each flower is uniquely different in outward appearance. Some blooms are dense with numerous petals; some blooms have just a handful of petals. Both, the Christian woman—you—and a flower are uniquely beautiful. *What kind of bloom are you? (rhetorical)*

- ☼ *“Grow a flower” exercise*

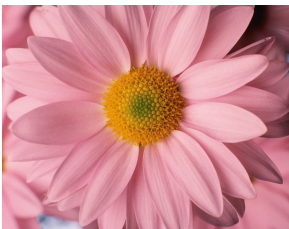
We'll find attributes of a beautiful Christian woman from the Bible.

Exercise: Each participant gets 1-2 petals to look up in her Bible, write a short description on the back, stick it up onto board to build up a flower, and give the definition to the group.

Briefly describe these positive qualities in your own words.

After this simple exercise, ask yourself, “*What kind of bloom am I? Where do I need some pruning? Am I missing some petals I think I should have? Do I need some more Miracle Gro' fertilizer (the Word)?*” (rhetorical question for each woman to reflect on)

Part II: “The Intimidator” . . . Proverbs 31 Woman



*The Proverbs 31 woman can intimidate any of us. She seems like Super Woman! Rather than being overwhelmed by all she accomplishes, look at her attitude. What permeates the chapter is her **attitude** of eagerness, of strength, of absolute delight in planning, executing, and enjoying the fruit of her labor. The attitude of the heart is key!*

It's helpful to know that Wisdom is personified as this woman. She is the “wife of noble character.” She demonstrates many of the qualities and values identified with wisdom throughout the book of Proverbs. (Qualities a young man was told to look for when choosing a wife.)

Read through Proverbs 31:10-31.

What particularly impresses you about her?

Part III: Spiritual Gifts (definition and perceptions)



“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.” 1 Peter 4:10

Do these thoughts sound familiar?

“I’m not needed because Sally is more talented than I am.”

“All I do well is bake a mean pan of brownies.”

“I’m sure Janie will do it--she always organizes that event so well every year.”

“No one will notice if I am not involved. I’m busy. I’ve got other things to do.”

“I don’t have any gifts to lead a group.”

“That family needs some help. I’m sure my church will come to their aid.”

“I don’t have a musical bone in my body.”

“What talents do I have?”

Have you ever thought any of these in your mind?

These thoughts are negative and break down our desire to use a spiritual gift. Let’s throw those thoughts out and focus on the positive.

Spiritual gifts are those special abilities given to all Christians to build up the fellowship and ministry of the church. Many Christians make pain-causing mistakes about spiritual gifts. Some people assume that only certain believers are gifted—for example, those who speak or sing well. But this assumption ignores the critical truth that the encouragers, administrators, and givers are just as powerfully gifted by our Almighty God compared to the more visible leaders and teachers. The Bible shows us that every Christian is gifted and valuable and needed in the church. You are one of them!

Other people recognize that they have spiritual gifts, but then refuse to use or refine their gifts. They forget that the work of understanding and using a spiritual gift is well worth the effort. As each believer contributes his or her gift, the church discovers even better ways to care for each other and to draw attention to God.

A. 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 Working Together

Read 1 Cor. 12:1-11



1. Describe a relationship you have with another Christian that is interdependent—you need them and they need you. (1 example)



2. What is the main truth to understand about the source of spiritual gifts (verses 4-6)? Why is this critical to know?

The different gifts come from the same Giver . . . our triune God, showing the diversity and unity of spiritual gifts.



3. What do the words **service** and **working** reveal about the nature of the gifts the Spirit bestows (verses 4-6)?

They are active in all Christians and show themselves to others.

B. *Ephesians 4:1-16* Unity in the Body of Christ



Ever put a puzzle together with someone else? Working on a 1000-piece puzzle can be a challenge. Maybe assembling the border is your specialty, while a child or friend helps study the other pieces and tries to get them to fit. As you work together, an unhurried discussion naturally begins. Sitting around that puzzle brings a level of sharing that happens rarely in our busy lives. If you both did not contribute your efforts, the puzzle experience wouldn't be complete.

In a similar way, expression of our spiritual gifts is carried out by trying again and again to see how they fit together in unity with others. Paul compares the members of God's church to parts of a human body: we're all interrelated and interdependent.

Read Eph. 4:1-16



4. What are the purposes of spiritual gifts according to verses 11-16?

To prepare God's people for works of service; to become mature Christians—solid in understanding; build up the believers in the same faith (unity)



5. If Christians are given these spiritual gifts listed in Eph. 4, what dangers are there in not using the gifts given (verse 14)?

Believers become instable; they will become weak Christians. As then and now, weak Christians will easily be led astray by "anything that sounds good" – different teachings by MAN who are sometimes deliberately deceitful. It is only in Jesus Christ that any unity in the church is possible. True unity is spiritually based.



6. How does the picture of one body with many parts encourage you in expressing your spiritual gift?

Paul continues the metaphor for the church as one body with many parts.

Read 1 Cor. 12:21-25

It appears that the Corinthians have gone to excess in gift expression after becoming Christians. The warnings in these verses indicate that the Corinthian Christians wanted to rank each other, and use their gifts to draw attention to themselves. Paul urged them to value one another, to recognize that each member of the church is valuable, and use their gifts to focus attention on Jesus.



7. All churches contain some people who feel like they don't belong and other people who are certain they do belong. What does Paul recommend for cultivating harmony between these two groups? Between two individuals?

Honor and give support to the weaker ones—encourage them—they are vital! Christians who have very obscure, less important, or ordinary gifts are to be given special respect. Persons with more spectacular gifts do not need to be given special honor. All are needed (indispensable)!



8. "Concern" (v. 25) is something we feel more often than we express. What actions would show that you really care about what's happening in another believer's life?

One possible example:

First, **ask** about what is happening. Then **listen** to her/him in a focused, unhurried way to show you really do care. Taking time and direct eye contact makes a person feel loved and respected. **Follow up** with another conversation to find out changes that may have happened or an **action**, with some help given by you or others.

C. Romans 12:1-8 *Humility*



Pride can lead to ugly power struggles and people-abuse. The truth is all Christians are equally important vessels through whom God works, no matter how spectacular or commonplace their gifts seem. We let God do this work through us.

Read Romans 12:1-8



9. What attitude is recommended for a healthy expression of spiritual gifts (verse 3)?
Humbleness

A low self-evaluation of ourselves produces hesitance to use the gift God has given (too much humility). A too-high evaluation of ourselves leads to self-promotion rather than God's glory (brazen). Be aware that these 2 opposites threaten the expression of spiritual gifts. We strive to be in the middle!

It's OK to talk about your gifts openly with others—use humility as your guide but not to an extreme that you can't accept a compliment from someone else.



10. Name a reason God gives different gifts (verses 4-6).

Like a body part, each gift has a different function, but all are needed for the health of the body. All the gifts are freely given by God to his people to meet the needs of the body.



11. The list of spiritual gifts Paul names in verses 6-8 is: prophesying; serving; teaching; encouraging; contributing towards others; leadership; showing mercy. It's important to be able to recognize our own spiritual gifts. Do you identify with any of these particular gifts? In what way? If not, name a different gift God has given unique to you.

Everyone takes turns to name a spiritual gift they see in themselves. This may be uncomfortable for some. But it is important to practice this, to recognize their gifts from God and openly acknowledging them, being happy for others' gifts as well. So often we are raised to use humility to an extreme, which as stated before, can lead to a hesitancy of using those gifts.

D. 1 Peter 4:7-11 Called to be Faithful



Have you ever felt that it might be better not to use your spiritual gifts, rather than risk hurting someone by using it the wrong way? (pause) Fears can keep us from reaching out. But spiritual gifts are not land mines that will explode if we step in the wrong place. They're more like prized roses that grow stronger and more beautiful with each pruning. Certainly all roses have thorns, and someone may bleed because of a well-meaning but hurtful misuse of a gift. But rather than miss the blooms, God urges us to deliver our "roses" carefully and faithfully.



12. What fears keep you from using your spiritual gifts?
Fear of focus on me, the pastor's wife, by others . . . it can get in the way, or be misunderstood. I.E. If I make ph. calls to others in order to ask about something, I feel insecure that the other person is "guilted" into saying yes.



Read 1 Peter 4:7-11.

13. What actions are listed here that increase the probability that we will express our spiritual gift in a helpful rather than harmful way?

Loving others deeply, keeping their best interest in mind.



14. If spiritual gifts were like a three-legged stool, what should some of the "legs" (attitudes) supporting the use of our gifts be? (verses 7-8, 10)

Self-control, love, service to others

Personal Reflection ~

This personal exercise can be a big benefit to you! It can help yourself and others in your church. It broadens the view of the many different ways spiritual gifts can be used. Go through it on your own time; do it with a friend—don't skip it!

With these attitudes and actions in mind, think through how some of the spiritual gifts could express themselves in loving ways for God's glory.

GIFT

EXPRESSION

- ☼ Administration
- ☼ Contributing to the needs of others
- ☼ Encouraging
- ☼ Leadership
- ☼ Showing mercy
- ☼ Message of wisdom
- ☼ Serving
- ☼ Teaching



F. 1 Peter 2:9-12 *Celebrate the Gifts*

15. What is the ultimate purpose of our being chosen and gifted (vs. 9, 12)?

To declare the praises of God, & to live God-pleasing lives among unbelievers so they may see our good deeds and recognize God, and become a believer.

16. Our spiritual gifts can often guide us to live creatively in our everyday tasks and jobs, as well as our contributions to the body of Christ. Discuss practical ways you could express your spiritual gift in these setting:

- ⊗ your home:
- ⊗ your career and/or job:
- ⊗ an ordinary daily responsibility:
- ⊗ your relationships:

Personal Reflection~

Thinking about the 3 main thoughts we just discussed in this hour, they are (1) attributes of a God-fearing, Christian woman, (2) example of beautiful Wisdom demonstrated through Super Woman of Prov. 31, and (3) spiritual gifts. Write your personal description of a Beautiful Bloom. (This acts as a quick summary)



A Beautiful Bloom is . . .

...someone who loves others first, and uses the guidance from God's word on how to live with others day-to-day, and who uses her unique gifts and talents willfully to further his kingdom on earth.

Closing Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father,

You have made us like a Beautiful Bloom. For our own uniqueness, we praise and thank you! Today we humbly ask you to be our constant Gardener, growing unselfishness, humility, a spirit of joyful service to others, and deep concern demonstrated for the believers in our own church and people around us. Keep our attitudes lifted up in every task we do. Often we are negligent in recognizing and using our own spiritual gifts that you are growing in us and through us. Please help us to find our gifts, and use them with confidence. Open our eyes to the talents our friends possess and give us wisdom to encourage them to use their own unique giftedness to bring glory to you, too.

In Jesus' name we pray,
Amen

I Timothy 3:11	be worthy of respect, trustworthy
Titus 2:3-5	older women teach, train, love, be self-controlled, busy, kind, submissive
1 Peter 4:8	love each other deeply
James 3:13	wisdom is doing things in humility
Colossians 4:5-6	Be a wise example to outsiders to let our talk show of God's grace
1 Peter 4:9	Be hospitable to others without complaining
Proverbs 27:2	don't praise myself
Ephesians 4:29	Talk only that is helpful and builds up
Proverbs 15:13	Happy heart = cheerful face
Proverbs 29:20	Think before I speak
Psalms 101:2	Strive to lead a blameless life
Philippians 2:14	Do everything without complaining or arguing
Hebrews 13:5	Be content with what I have
Colossians 3:13	Forgive grievances
Proverbs 20:19	Talking too much might lead to gossip
Proverbs 12:22	Lord loves truthful people
Proverbs 10:4	Hardworking diligence brings wealth (condemning laziness)