
Chapter 10 Laying on of Hands

The laying on of hands is a biblical sign used in several settings. The physical act does not carry magic, and Scripture does not present an anointing as private spiritual substance owned by a minister. Hands visibly express prayer, blessing, identification, recognition, or commissioning, while God remains the One who acts (Numbers 27:18-23; Acts 13:1-3).

Biblical Uses

- **Blessing:** Jesus placed His hands on children and blessed them (Mark 10:13-16).
- **Prayer for healing:** Jesus and the early church sometimes laid hands on the sick while praying (Mark 6:5; Acts 28:8; James 5:14-16).
- **Recognition and commissioning:** the church laid hands on qualified servants and missionaries, identifying them publicly with an entrusted work (Acts 6:3-6; 13:1-3; 1 Timothy 4:14).

- Prayer connected with receiving the Holy Spirit: Acts records occasions when apostles or disciples laid hands on believers who then received the Spirit (Acts 8:14-17; 9:17; 19:6).

The Holy Spirit Gives Gifts

The New Testament teaches that gifts are distributed by the Spirit according to His will (1 Corinthians 12:4-11). A believer may desire gifts, pray, receive prayer, and grow in faithful use, but no person can manufacture a gift or confer spiritual status by technique. Gifts are grace for serving others, not proof that the recipient is superior (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Peter 4:10-11).

Gifts Serve the Body and the Mission

The Spirit's gifts are given "for the profit of all" (1 Corinthians 12:7). Their purpose is not to build a personal platform but to strengthen the church, bear witness to Christ, and meet real needs. The believer asks, "How can this gift honor Jesus and help His people?" rather than, "How can this gift make me important?" (Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Peter 4:10-11).

Giftedness and maturity are not identical. The Corinthians were rich in gifts but troubled by jealousy, disorder, pride, and lovelessness (1 Corinthians 1:4-7; 3:1-3;

13:1-3; 14:26-33). Scripture therefore requires both spiritual power and spiritual character. A genuine gift never excuses manipulation, immorality, lack of accountability, or teaching that contradicts God's Word.⁸

This part of the teaching also concerns the Holy Spirit's anointing and gifting of believers for ministry. Every believer receives grace to serve, and the Spirit gives manifestations for the common good of Christ's body (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-7; 1 Peter 4:10-11). No Christian should assume that ministry belongs only to pastors or unusually gifted personalities. Every believer should learn to serve faithfully with what the Holy Spirit supplies.

In the early church, prayer and laying on of hands sometimes accompanied receiving the Holy Spirit, recognizing a gift, or commissioning someone for ministry (Acts 8:14-17; 13:1-3; 19:6; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6). Paul had already given extensive instruction about spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14, teaching that the Spirit distributes them as He wills and that they must build up the church. The hands did not create or control the gift; they visibly joined the church's prayer and recognition to the work God was doing.

What the Sign Does Not Mean

The New Testament does not make laying on of hands a required technique for every healing or every reception of the Spirit. Jesus healed without touch, and the Spirit fell on Cornelius's household before anyone laid hands on them (Matthew 8:5-13; Acts 10:44-48). God is free to work with or without the sign.

Paul reminded Timothy of a gift associated with prophecy and the laying on of elders' hands, but Scripture still says the Spirit distributes gifts "as He wills" (1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6; 1 Corinthians 12:11). These passages do not authorize modern leaders to claim they can activate any chosen gift or transfer a personal anointing on demand.

Use Wisdom and Accountability

Paul warned Timothy not to lay hands on anyone hastily, in a context involving recognition and responsibility (1 Timothy 5:22). Churches should therefore examine character and doctrine before commissioning leaders (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9). A dramatic ceremony cannot substitute for proven faithfulness.

A healthy commissioning joins two realities. God calls and equips a person, and the church recognizes that calling through observed character, sound doc-

trine, and faithful service (Acts 13:1-3; 1 Timothy 3:1-13). Laying on of hands does not manufacture the call. It publicly identifies the church with the person and the work being entrusted. This protects the church from self-appointed leaders and reminds the commissioned person that ministry is accountable service rather than private authority.

KNOW THE WORDS

WORD	PLAIN MEANING
Laying on of hands	A visible biblical act accompanying prayer, blessing, identification, healing ministry, or commissioning (Mark 10:16; Acts 6:6; 13:3).
Commissioning	Publicly recognizing and sending qualified believers for an assigned ministry (Acts 13:1-3).
Anointing	In the New Testament, God’s gracious consecration and empowering by the Holy Spirit; not a commodity owned or sold by a minister (2 Corinthians 1:21-22; 1 John 2:20, 27).
Impartation	A word sometimes used for God giving grace or gifts, but never a human power to distribute the Spirit at will (Romans 1:11-12; 1 Corinthians 12:11).

THINK IT THROUGH

Q Can God Work through the Laying on of Hands?

Yes. Scripture records healing, the reception of the Spirit, commissioning, and the recognition of gifts in connection with laying on of hands (Acts 8:17; 9:17; 13:3; 1 Timothy 4:14). The power belongs to God, not to the hands or status of the minister. Prayer may be offered with confidence while the outcome is entrusted to God's wisdom.

Churches may pray with hands laid upon a person in the biblical settings described above. The error is not the practice; the error is assigning automatic power to the act or authority to the person performing it. Faith rests in God, and every ministry remains subject to Scripture (Acts 8:18-24; 1 Corinthians 4:6).

Q Does a Spiritual Gift Prove a Person Is Mature?

No. A gift shows the Spirit's gracious activity, not the recipient's flawless character. Jesus warned that impressive works can be claimed by people He does not approve, and Paul placed love above spectacular manifestations (Matthew 7:21-23; 1 Corinthians 13:1-3). Test teaching by Scripture, examine fruit over time, and never let visible gifting silence necessary

questions about doctrine or conduct (Matthew 7:15-20; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22).

WATCH FOR COUNTERFEITS

Beware when leaders advertise transferable anointings, sell access to impartation, promise activation of gifts, demand physical contact, or use touch to establish dependence. Spiritual gifts are grace-gifts belonging to Christ's body and distributed by the Spirit, not personal property controlled by a celebrity minister (1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 1 Peter 4:10-11). Appropriate consent, accountability, and respect should govern physical contact (1 Timothy 5:1-2).

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Review Acts 13:1-3. Notice the church's worship, fasting, the Spirit's direction, and the community's commissioning. Pray for those your church sends and ask how you can serve faithfully without seeking a title.

TALK IT THROUGH

1. What different purposes accompany laying on of hands in Scripture?
2. Why is the act neither magical nor always required?
3. Who distributes spiritual gifts?

4. Why must churches avoid hasty commissioning?

5. What warning signs distinguish biblical prayer from manipulative impartation?

FIVE DAYS IN THE BIBLE

Day 1: Blessing and Healing — Mark 6:1-6; 10:13-16

Notice two settings in which Jesus laid hands on people.

Day 2: Servants Recognized — Acts 6:1-7

Identify the qualifications, selection, prayer, and result.

Day 3: Sent by the Spirit — Acts 13:1-12

Observe the roles of the Spirit and the gathered church.

Day 4: Receiving the Spirit — Acts 8:4-25; 19:1-7

Notice God's action and the warning against buying spiritual power.

Day 5: Do Not Be Hasty — 1 Timothy 3:1-13; 5:21-22

List the character requirements that precede recognition.