Based on 1 Corinthians 12, we can define spiritual gifts as special abilities given by God through the Holy Spirit to empower believers for ministry to the body of Christ.

Looking at this definitions in three sections, we see that:

1) SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE SPECIAL ABILITIES GIVEN BY GOD.
   a) Paul highlights this part of our definition in verse 4 when he uses the word “charisma” which translates into the English – gift.
      i) It has the idea of something that God has bestowed on us by His grace.
   b) By defining spiritual gifts are “special abilities,” it helps to distinguish them from other things.
      i) Spiritual gifts are not the same thing as talents, or natural abilities.
         (1) Talents / natural abilities are things God gives every person at birth by His common grace.
         (2) Spiritual gifts are abilities that God only gives believers by His special grace, typically at their new birth.
         (3) At times, these special abilities are new and different from the abilities and talents a person had before becoming a Christian.
            (a) Example: Moses in Exodus 4
         (4) Typically though, God gives us spiritual gifts that enhance talents and natural abilities we already have.
            (a) Example… if you were a naturally gifted teacher and you become a believer who receives the spiritual gift of teaching, you may now have greater insights into how to clarify, and illustrate, and apply the material in a more fruitful way…
      ii) Spiritual gifts are not the same as spiritual responsibilities.
         (1) Spiritual responsibilities are those things that every Christian is commanded to do (e.g. serving one another, giving, showing mercy, evangelizing, etc.) regardless of our gifting.
         (2) Whereas all believers share the same spiritual responsibilities, not all Christian share the same spiritual gifts.
         (3) And yet, there often is a correlation between the two because some spiritual gifts are special abilities that concern an area of spiritual responsibility.
            (a) E.g. Some Christians have the spiritual gift of service, giving, showing mercy, etc.
            (b) They are able to do these things in a greater and in a more fruitful way than others.
         (4) This understanding should impact the way we spend our time ministering in the church.
            (a) We should all spend time fulfilling our Christian responsibilities, but we should spend the majority of that time using our spiritual gifts...
   c) We must remember that spiritual gifts are special abilities “that have been given to us from God.”
      i) Paul highlights this in verses 18 and 28.
      ii) So when we receive spiritual gifts, we receive them by God’s sovereign grace.
      iii) This aspect of spiritual gifts has at least three applications:
(1) We should be content with the gifts God has given us.
(2) We should not boast about our gifts or look down on the gifts of others. (cf. vv12-20)
(3) We need to be careful as a church about neglecting any one gift. (cf. 21-22)

2) **Spiritual gifts are special abilities given by God THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT TO EMPOWER BELIEVERS.**

   a) Though spiritual gifts are appointed by God, they are placed in us specifically by the Holy Spirit.
      i) Consider how many times the Spirit is referenced in verses 7-11.
      ii) Based the sovereign design of God the Father and the atoning sacrifice of God the Son, God the Holy Spirit is the One who operates these gifts in us.
      iii) Paul further demonstrates that our gifts are marked with the presence of the Holy Spirit when he uses the word “pneumatikon” or “spiritual” to describe our gifts in verse 1.
      iv) In light of what Paul conveys in verses 1-3 and the reference of “by the Spirit” next to each of the different gifts in verses 8-11, we must reject the teaching that says the presence of one gift vs. another has any bearing on our maturity or degree of spirituality.

   b) Since the Holy Spirit is operating these gifts within us, we are full of divine power.
      i) This is why Paul describes the spiritual gifts as “energma” or “activities” / “energies” which empower us.
      ii) So when we use our spiritual gifts, we’re displaying divine energy and power.
      iii) But the question is… For what?
         (1) (See point 3.)

3) **Spiritual gifts are special abilities given by God through the Holy Spirit to empower believers FOR MINISTRY TO THE BODY OF CHRIST.**

   a) One of the main reasons we have been given and empowered with spiritual gifts is to minister to the body of Christ.
      i) We see this several times in our passage. (cf. v7, 24-25, 28-30)
      ii) This purpose of ministry is so crucial that it is one of the four words Paul uses to describe the gifts.
         (1) In verse 5, he describes the gifts as “service” or “diakonia,” the same word we use for deacons and deaconesses –who are people gifted in service.
         (2) For Paul, ministry wasn’t some add-on to what spiritual gifts are – it was central to its very definition.
      iii) As we continue in this process of understanding and identifying our gifts, we must keep in mind the end goal: using those gifts to unify and build up the body of Christ!