

## Serving Christ's Body Pt. 3: The Joy of Community Service

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Romans 12:6-8

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*For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. Romans 12:3–8*

### WHAT IS A SPIRITUAL GIFT?

A spiritual gift is a supernatural ability given by the Holy Spirit to every believer at his or her conversion that equips them to serve a unique function that edifies and builds up the Body of Christ.

### THE TRUTH ABOUT SPIRITUAL GIFTS

1. Every believer has at least one spiritual gift. (v. 6)

*To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 1 Corinthians 12:7*

*As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace. 1 Peter 4:10*

2. No believer has all the gifts.
3. We don't all have the same gifts. (v. 6)

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given us...

4. Your spiritual gift is a grace given by the Holy Spirit. (v. 6)

The Greek word in verse 6 for “gift” is *Charismata*. It has the word *Charis* in it, which means grace. Our spiritual gifts are a “grace gift” that we have received from the Holy Spirit.

For to one is given *through the Spirit* the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 1 Corinthians 12:8

But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, *as He chose*. 1 Corinthians 12:18

5. Your spiritual gift enables you to edify or build up the body of Christ.

So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the *edification* of the church. 1 Corinthians 14:12

For the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the *building up* of the body of Christ. Ephesians 4:12

From whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the *building up* of itself in love. Ephesians 4:16

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for *edification* according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Ephesians 4:29

Therefore encourage one another and *build one another up*, just as you are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Warren Wiersbe says, “Spiritual gifts are tools to build with, not toys to play with or weapons to fight with.” The purpose of spiritual gifts is to build up the Body of Christ.

## CAUTIONS REGARDING SPIRITUAL GIFTS

1. Don’t allow the gifts of the Spirit to take priority over the fruit of the Spirit.

It has been said that, “Giftedness with character is essential; giftedness without character is lethal!” It’s possible to exercise your spiritual gift without love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. In other words, it’s possible to exercise your spiritual gift out of the flesh. It’s possible to serve begrudgingly; it’s possible to teach with a bad attitude; it’s

possible to give with impure motives; it's possible to serve in hopes of being noticed. God isn't only concerned with what you do...He is also concerned with the heart attitude that you do it with. The more we are growing in Christlike character, the more useful our giftedness will be to the Body of Christ.

2. Don't allow a preoccupation with your spiritual gift to keep you from serving in areas outside of your giftedness.

One pitfall that we want to avoid as it pertains to our spiritual gifts is to compartmentalize our lives according to your our particular giftedness. In other words to say, "My spiritual gift is serving, so I don't have to give," or "I'm a distinguished teacher so I don't need to get my hands dirty in mercy ministry." There is a real sense in which each one of us, regardless of our unique gifting is responsible to serve all the ministries of these gifts. We certainly understand that some have been gifted to do a better job at a particular ministry, but we can all learn and grow by watching others and jumping in to help shoulder some of the load. Remember, the body of Christ is a family and we all, to some degree, share the responsibility of the ministry!

3. Don't allow an uncertainty about your spiritual gift keep you from serving at all.

The other pitfall that we want to avoid is using uncertainty as to what our spiritual gift is as an excuse not to serve at all. That isn't the way God works, brothers and sisters; God has designed it such that we learn our particular gifting through the means of serving. As you grow and get involved in various ministries, your giftedness will become evident. A better question than "What is my spiritual gift?" might be "How can I serve Christ and His people"? The latter will get you moving and when you are moving, you will learn in what capacity God has designed you to serve within the body of Christ. Don't use uncertainty as an excuse, use it as an encouragement to get busy!

## USE YOUR GIFT WHOLEHEARTEDLY

It's important that we know Paul's list of spiritual gifts in verses 6-8 is representative and not exhaustive. There are 4 places that teaching on spiritual gifts is found in the New Testament – Here in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4. There are 19 gifts mentioned in the NT. Paul lists 7 gifts here, but he seems less interested in giving us an extensive list, but instead seems to give us broad categories of gifts and then urges us to exercise the ones we have! Getting busy is the emphasis of our text this morning.

1. If you have the gift of prophecy, speak with great faith.

Paul says, "If prophecy, in proportion to our faith." There are two ways that prophecy has been used in the Bible – Foretelling and forthtelling. In the Old Testament, many of the Prophets were given direct revelation from God to speak to the people and would communicate saying, "Thus says the Lord..." I believe that the gift of prophesy, in terms of communicating as one who is inspired, has ceased with the Apostles. By God's grace, we now have the completed Cannon – Old Testament and New Testament - and the Church no longer has a need for the gift of foretelling. But the Church has an incredible need for solid, biblical, fourthtelling or passionate, theologically sound preaching. Above all, Paul encouraged Timothy to Preach the Word! 2 Timothy 4:1-5

That is what Paul is referring to here in Romans 12:6. There is nothing mystical about the gift of prophecy. The Greek word for prophecy literally means "to stand in front of another person and speak on behalf of God". It is essentially the gift of preaching. It's the God given ability to authoritatively declare biblical truth in such a way as to convict and build up its hearers. In 1 Corinthians 14:3 Paul said, "On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their up building and encouragement and consolation."

Notice the qualification that Paul adds to the gift of prophecy. He says we are to exercise this gift if we have it, "In proportion to our faith." Actually a better translation would be "In proportion to [the] faith" as a direct article appears in front of "faith" instead of the personal pronoun our or his. What Paul means is that there are controls or limitations on set on the one who has the gift of prophesy. In other words, we are not to go beyond what the Scripture teaches. The one who has the gift of prophesy is limited in that he can only say what God has already said. Jude wrote, "Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" Jude 3. The one who has the gift of prophecy speaks nothing other than that which was once for all delivered to the saints. Nothing more and nothing less! If you have a desire to preach and when you do people are convicted, encouraged and built up, you probably have this gift!

## 2. If you have the gift of service, serve others well.

Paul says, "If service, in our serving." We get our word service from the Greek word *diakonia*. Paul isn't only referring to those who are deacons in the church, though deacons should possess this gift. The service that Paul speaks about here is service in a broad sense – embracing all kinds of ministry for the glory of Christ and the good of the Church. The carpet needs to be vacuumed, the light bulbs need to be changed, the doors have to be locked and unlocked, the coffee has to be made, the children need to be cared for and taught, the facility has to be maintained, the missionaries need to be prayed for, envelopes need to be sealed, copies need to be made, single moms need to be cared for, VBS is in June, visitors need to be greeted at the front door, the trash needs to be taken out, walls need to be washed, the sound board needs to be run, table cloths

need to be washed, the grass needs to be cut, we have a thriving youth group that you could serve, college students that you could invite into your home, encouragement cards that can be written, and meals that can be prepared. We are all called to serve one another, but some are given this gift in a special measure in order to lead others in the work!

It is interesting to note that service follows the proclamation of God's Word in Paul's list of gifts. Without being dogmatic, it's possible that Paul is suggesting that service, under prophecy, is one of the most essential ministries of the church even though it is often behind the scenes. If you have the desire to serve the needs of others faithfully and loyally, apart from acknowledgement, you probably have this gift! Paul essentially says, "He or she who has the gift of service is to exercise it to the fullest – giving himself or herself wholeheartedly!" There is no qualification here as there was in the case of the gift of prophecy... The encouragement here is – just do it! Even Jesus was a deacon... Matthew wrote, "Even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" Matthew 20:28. Each of us has a service ministry to perform. Where can you serve?

### 3. If you have the gift of teaching, teach with all your heart.

Third, Paul says, "The one who teaches, in his teaching." What is the difference between prophecy and teaching you might ask... The Greek word for teaching here in verse 7 is *didasko*. It is the word that we get our English word didactic from. If prophecy is the authoritative proclamation of God's Word, then teaching is the unique ability to explain and apply the Word of God. Teaching is to communicate God's Word in a clear, understandable, and relevant manner. Teaching is ongoing and more systematic in nature. It seeks to move a person from point A to point B. It can refer to a Sunday School teacher or someone who disciples others in a one-on-one relationship. Paul told Timothy, "What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" 2 Timothy 2:2.

James Montgomery Boice says, "If you know anything about Jesus and the gospel, you should teach what you know, formally if you have the opportunity but also informally by a casual word or testimony." Many people are gifted teachers. This is one of the qualifications for an Elder. Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 3:2, "Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach." Jesus was a teacher. To the two men on the road to Emmaus Jesus "beginning with Moses and all the prophets interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." Donald Grey Barnhouse gives those with the gift of teaching some helpful perspective:

*Have I listened to His voice? Have I laid my own reason in the dust before Him in order to take it again, enlightened by Him for use in my work? Have I been spiritually alert and dependent on the Holy Spirit? Have I gone again and again to the Word of God to refresh my own soul before*

*speaking to others? Have I tried to live what I preach? Have I acknowledged my sins when the Lord showed them to me, and repented of them? Have I recognized moment by moment my utter dependence upon the Lord? Have I been lazy? Have I been diligent? Have I insulted the Lord by feeding His sheep with ill-prepared food?*<sup>1</sup>

Teaching takes place in homes, in Sunday School classes, discipleship relationships, older women teaching younger women (Titus 2:4), in more formal settings. Some of the best teachers in local churches are not those who preach on Sunday mornings. Rather, they teach in the trenches throughout the church. If this is your gift, be faithful in it, apply your all to your teaching!

4. If you have gift of exhortation, seek to encourage.

Paul moves next to the gift of exhortation. He says, “The one who exhorts in his exhortation.” These are those with the wonderful gift of encouragement. The Greek word that Paul uses here is *parakaleo*. Many of you are probably familiar with the word *paraclete* as it’s often used to describe the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This word is used 107 times in the New Testament and is translated beseech, comfort, pray, entreat, console, and counsel. It means “one who comes alongside”. Encouragement literally means to put courage into!

We live in an incredibly narcissistic age in which it appears as if everyone is preoccupied with his own needs and his own concerns. Oh how there is a great need, especially in the Church, for those with the gift of coming alongside the hurting with encouragement from God’s Word. Barnabas had this gift. His real name was Joseph (Acts 4:36), but he was called Barnabas, which means “Son of Encouragement.” He encouraged John Mark when Paul refused to take him along on one of his missionary Journeys because Mark had deserted them earlier. Barnabas got behind Mark and encouraged him, lifted him up. Paul acknowledged this later (2 Timothy 4:11).

Exhortation is much more than a pat on the back or an “atta boy”. It focuses upon the application of truth to everyday life. Paul used the verb *parakaleo* in Romans 12:1 when Paul wrote “I exhort [*parakaleo*] you brothers and sisters by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is your spiritual service of worship.*” Hebrews 3:12-13 Exhort one another daily! For those of you that have this gift, are you willing to be worn out in its use?

5. If you have gift of giving, give generously and joyfully from a pure heart.

Paul refers next to those with the gift of giving. He says, “The one who contributes, in generosity.” Though we are all encouraged to give cheerfully, God has uniquely gifted some who have a

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Grey Barnhouse

special desire to meet special needs from their resources. I had a gentleman call me last week and ask if there were any special needs in the church that required additional finances. What a blessing these people are! You don't have to have a lot of money to have the gift of giving. It has less to do with the amount and more to do with the heart, attitude, and desire when you see a need.

Generosity or liberality, as it's translated in many of our Bibles, would better be translated simplicity or single-mindedly. This refers to the motives of our giving. Paul is saying that those who have the gift of giving are to exercise their gift without ulterior motives or hidden purposes, simply out of love. When we give, it is to be simply to the glory of God and to help meet the needs of our brothers and sisters. If you have the gift of giving, give single-mindedly, for the glory of God!

6. If you have gift of leadership, be diligent in your leadership.

Paul says, "The one who leads, with zeal." God has gifted many within the Body of Christ with the gift of administration, organizing and managing. Elders are to be able to manage the flock (1 Timothy 3:5). Leadership is to motivate, coordinate, and oversee others in ministry. Every ministry needs godly leadership – those who lead out of humility. Leaders are called to exercise "diligence". Diligence means that the leader is dependable, trustworthy, and can be counted on. He or she is self-disciplined, a self-starter, and a motivator of others. There is a major difference between leadership and just driving people. Cattle need to be driven people need good leadership. Dwight Eisenhower once illustrated leadership with a piece of string. He would show that if you pull the string it follows, but likewise if you try and push the string it goes nowhere. If you have the gift of leadership, lead! Do it with great love for God, love for others, and patience.

7. If you have gift of mercy, love people cheerfully.

Lastly, Paul says, "The one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness." Mercy is the gift of special love, care, and concern for the hurting. This gift takes many forms – working with poor, serving someone who is handicapped, visiting the sick. Mercy perceives people's hurts and gently and lovingly consoles them. Every believer has been the recipient of lavish mercy from God, and we in turn are to show mercy to others. Jesus felt mercy when he looked out over the multitudes. "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." Matthew 9:36

Notice how those with the gift of mercy are to serve – cheerfully, not begrudgingly. The Greek word here is *hilaroteti* from which we get our word hilarious. Mercy is not to be shown reluctantly or patronizingly, but cheerfully. If you have this gift, use it with great joy. The bright countenance of a Christian makes the presentation of the gospel all the sweeter!

## HOW DO I LEARN WHAT MY SPIRITUAL GIFT IS

1. Make sure that you know Christ. Only a child of God has received a spiritual gift.
2. Present yourself to God as a living sacrifice. Romans 12:1-2
3. Study the passages in God's Word that deal with spiritual gifts.  
Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28-30, Ephesians 4:11, 1 Peter 4:11
4. Ask God for wisdom to help you discern your giftedness. James 1:5
5. Jump in and start serving! What areas of service bring you great joy?
6. Listen for what others commend you for doing.
7. Be content with the gift(s) that God has given you. He knows what's best for you and the Body!

## A FEW CLOSING THOUGHTS

1. God has graciously given you a gift to build up the Body of Christ – Use it!

As with all things God has graciously given us, we want to be good stewards of our spiritual gift. Peter in 1 Peter 4:10 said, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." Ray Steadman once said:

*I am a son of God among other sons of men. I am equipped with the power of God to labor today. In the work given me today God will be with me, doing it through me. I am gifted with special abilities to help people in various [ways], and I don't have to wait until Sunday to use these gifts. I can use them [anytime and] anywhere. I can exercise the gift God has given me as soon as I find out what it is, by taking note of my desires and by asking others what they see in my and by [serving] in various [ways]. I am going to set myself to the lifelong task of keeping that gift busy.<sup>2</sup>*

2. Our gifts are not a means for our own glory.

*When we exercise the gifts which Christ has given us we are really saying to our fellow Christians and others: See how much the Lord Jesus Christ loves you and cares for you; He has sent me to serve you in this way; He is using my hands and feet, my lips and ears, to show His love. It is a tragic mistake if we think that the message is: See what a superb Christian I am; see the wonderful gifts I have... Gifts are for service, not self-advancement.<sup>3</sup>*

Remember the exhortation of Romans 12:3 not to think more highly of yourself than you ought!

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<sup>2</sup> Ray C. Steadman, *From Guilt to Glory, Volume 2, Reveling in God's Salvation* (Portland: Multnomah, 1978), 118.

<sup>3</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Grow in Grace* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1989), 69.

3. In your exercise of your gifts, keep fellowship with Christ the main thing!

Spiritual gifts are a good thing, but as with anything else, we can elevate them to such a place as to eclipse the main thing. Seek to grow in your giftedness for God's glory and the good of the Church, but don't neglect intimacy with Christ in the process. Pursue sweet fellowship with Jesus, who is to every believer the embodiment of each of these gifts.

Jesus is our Prophet. Matthew 21:11

Jesus is our Servant. Matthew 20:28, Philippians 2:7

Jesus is our Teacher. John 13:13

Jesus is our Paraclete and He sends the Comforter. 1 John 2:1, John 14:16

Jesus has given Himself for you. 2 Corinthians 8:9

Jesus is our Leader/Head. Colossians 1:18

Jesus has shown us mercy. Luke 4:18-19