

Well, let's take our bibles and turn to Romans chapter 12:1-8. We're in a series called Total Grace, and this morning we're going to look at Serving Grace. God gives us grace to minister. God gives us grace to serve him, and that grace comes in the form of gifts, spiritual grace gifts, and that's what we're looking for the time we have this morning. Let's stand as we read God's word together, Romans chapter 12:1-8. I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service and do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

For I say through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we being many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us. Let us use them. If prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith. Or ministry, let us use it in our ministering.

He who teaches in teaching, he who exhorts in exhortation, he who gives with liberality, he who leads with diligence, he who shows mercy with cheerfulness. So reads God's word, you may be seated. I think you'd agree with me. God's grace is amazing. There's nothing quite like it to look on your life, look back on your life and anticipate in days to come within your life, the favor of God. His unmerited love. His constant grace and mercy. It's an astounding and confounding thing to be given what you don't deserve because that's what grace says, to be given forgiveness and justification and adoption into God's family.

The gift of the indwelling presence of God through the person of the Holy Spirit, the promise of heaven. It's a wonderful thing to be given what you don't deserve, and then on top of that, like a cherry on top of the cake, you are not given what you do deserve, which is judgment and punishment and everlasting conscious hell. What an amazing thing. What a fabulous thing. The grace of God is. My friend Pete Mothershead is right when he said to me one day, there is nothing greater than the grace of God that will come into your life unless you make it so. It's true. Grace is amazing, but here's the point we're focusing on in this present series Total Grace. Grace isn't only amazing, it's abundant. It's not just wonderful, it's full, it's complete. It doesn't just meet you on the front end of your Christian life. It's something that establishes it, excites it, energizes it and enables it. What do we read in John 1:16 of his fullness, have we received grace for grace. That's a wonderful image. It's the image of wave upon wave.

One experience of grace, followed by another experience of grace. Grace upon, grace. Grace isn't just amazing, it's abundant. Listen to the words of Paul in Second Corinthians 9:8 and that will reinforce my thought. God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you always having all sufficiency in all things may have an abundance for every or all good work. What a statement. This is a promise so big, so expansive, you can literally build your entire life on that one verse. See, the Greek grammar didn't have exclamation marks, and so when the Greek writer wanted to emphasize something, he repeated a word and you'll notice the repetition of the word all in our text. God can make all grace abound to you, in all things, at all times, with all sufficiency, for every or all good works.

That's a massive promise. That's a blanket big enough to throw over your whole life. Grace is not just amazing, it's abundant. Grace establishes justification. Grace fuels sanctification, grace promises, glorification. My friend it's grace all the way. It's God's favor through and through. Doesn't Paul says in First Corinthians 15:9-10. I am what I am by the grace of God, I like what Philip Graham Ryken says, Grace is not just the way into the Christian life, it is the way on in the Christian life. And that's why we've

been looking at this doctrine of grace, the theology of grace, what we have called Total Grace. We've seen Saving Grace, Ephesians two. We've seen Strengthening Grace, Hebrews four. We saw last time Speaking Grace, Colossians four, and then this morning we're going to look at Serving Grace. The message I've called highly gifted people. As we carry this series forward, we're going to see that God's amazing grace extends to the bestowment of spiritual gifts or graces among God's people for the purpose of mutual edification and Gospel effectiveness.

Look at the passage we read, Romans 12:1-8, and I want you to notice the wording of verse six. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us. The same grace given to us that redeems us, justifies us, and saves us. That same grace also gives us gifts, abilities, capacities to grow the body of Christ and have a life of Gospel effectiveness. Spiritual gifts are simply just one more manifestation of not only the amazing grace of God, but the abundant grace of God. So let's come and look at this passage. Highly gifted people. Now, let me just put the text in its context quickly. The first thing you'll notice is that Paul begins with, 'I beseech you therefore', this is a turning point. This is a tipping point in the book and we're moving from the doctrinal part of the book, chapters 1-11 to the ethical part of the book, chapters 12-16.

We're moving from doctrine to duty. We're moving from Gospel indicatives, truths about Jesus Christ and what he has done for us, to Gospel imperatives that which we must do in the light of that which he has done. So that's kind of the text in its context. We're at a pivotal moment. In verses one to two, Paul will challenge them to a consecrated life in the light of the mercy of God, and then he will begin to apply that in verses 3-8 and the employment and deployment of spiritual gifts. He calls them to a life of service. To a life of being a living sacrifice and he's letting us know that one of the major outlets for that kind of service dedicated to Jesus Christ is the local church. Where you employ your grace gifts. So there's three things here. If you're keeping notes, I hope you are.

Many of you do, and that's all was an encouragement, the argument, the assessment, the assignment. Let's move sprightly here. The argument versus one to two. This is the setup. As we've said versus one to two is the bridge between what has been said and what's about to be said. We're moving from the doctrinal to the ethical, but it's also a prelude to Paul's Instructions on spiritual gifts because he wants to make this argument, before you give yourself to serving the body of Christ, you will first of all have to have given your body in dedication and consecration to Christ. The one grows out of the other. As you commit to being a living sacrifice for the glory of Jesus Christ and the extension of his kingdom, one of the outlets will be serving the local church. See, our ministry within the body of Christ, as I've said, is predicated on the presentation of our body in Christ and an act of consecration. What we have here in these verses is Paul drawing from the Old Testament, from the sacrificial system, from levitical worship, and he's urging the Romans to give themselves as a living sacrifice to God.

If you get into the Greek grammar, you'll see that all the words are levitical in nature. When we read here about presenting or offering your body, that's a levitical word. That's a word that's used in the Greek Old Testament of the priest offering a sacrifice to God of bulls or goats. That's a levitical word. Here's another word that's levitical, living sacrifice. I mean that's in comparison to dead sacrifices. Okay? The Old Testament priest within the levitical system at the Tabernacle and the temple offered up slain animals to God where the blood was shed to cover and atone for the peoples sin. Well, we're not being asked to kill ourselves literally, but we're being asked to kill ourselves in service and sacrifice in a living manner, where we die to self, die to sin and give ourselves to a life that glorifies God in word, deed, and action. Notice the word service, reasonable service verse one, that's a Greek word that speaks again of temple worship.

That's why some of your translations will translate, that worship, which is your reasonable worship or literally you're levitical service, your priestly service. So just put that all together and the argument is here, God's looking for you to give yourself to him as a living sacrifice in relentless service. I like old Bishop Taylor of the Church of England who used to begin each and every day before getting out of bed by praying this simple prayer. Lord, this bed is the altar and I am the sacrifice. That's how everyday should begin. In fact, this word present your bodies is a word that carries the idea of presenting once and for all. It's a bit like a marriage ceremony where you present yourself to your husband. It's a lifetime of working that out. It's a lifetime of working that out with your wife, but that's the idea. You're giving yourself to Christ in Betrothal.

Your life is not your own. Your body's not your own. You've been bought. Now it's time to be a living sacrifice. Now, the challenge with that, as you can imagine, is that living sacrifices tend to crawl off the altar. Dead sacrifices stay there, but you see you and I have wills and volitions and desires, and we have got on a daily basis to bring every thought into captivity to Christ. We've got to beat our body into subjection in terms of its desires and pleasures that will sometimes veer off to a place outside the will of God. We've got to allow the word of God to dwell in us richly each and every day, you and I have got to bring ourselves to stay on that altar. It's not easy. It requires devotion and discipline and training, and it requires you and I kind of not allowing ourselves to be squeezed into the world's thinking because you and I have been brought up in a culture that has trained us not to believe in sacrifice.

This is a culture that wants to live off the sacrifices of past generations and not pay the price. This is a generation that wants to live off the sacrifice of their parents. This is a generation that wants to have others do the sacrificing. That's the culture we're in. We've been told, "You can have it and others will provide it." It's so antithetical, and Paul says, "Don't be squeezed in to the thinking of the world." Renew your mind and give yourself to Christ. And here's the argument for that. It's kind of the point I'm making. The argument is, you do it because of God's mercy. See, before he gets to spiritual gifts, where we give ourselves to the body of Christ, he's asked them to give themselves, body, mind, and soul to Christ. Well, Paul, why? I understand the what, but why? Well, let me make this argument.

I beseech you by the mercies of God, that's my why. That's my argument. You'll notice mercies are in plural, and so this giving of ourselves to Jesus Christ is to be done against the backdrop of God's mercies, his mercies in justifying us by faith alone and the gift of Christ imputed righteousness. His mercy and propitiation talked about earlier in this letter where Christ is made satisfaction for our sin by the giving up of himself. In Romans, Paul talks about reconciliation, how Christ has reconciled us to God. He talks about sanctification. He talks about how we haven't come into condemnation and we have now the spirit of God to allow us to live holy lives. He talks about future Grace, and shared glory. He talks about the present ongoing prayers and intercession of Jesus Christ. The benefits, the mercies pile up one after another in this book, until you get to chapter 11 where you know what?

It's one mercy after another mercy. Paul takes a breath and says, okay, those mercy's should produce something in you and me. They should produce surrender, sacrifice and service. Because of God's relentless mercy shouldn't we give ourselves continually to him? Isn't His mercy new every morning? In fact, he uses a word which I love, which is, your reasonable service, is the way the new King James puts in. It's the right word, reasonable. In fact, it could be translated logical. The Greek word gives us the word logic. I love it. Here's what he's saying, in the light of God's mercies, given the cross, given wave after wave, of God's kindness and mercy, isn't it logical? Is there some other conclusion? Is there another path? No. The only logical response to that is you giving yourself to the one who gave himself for you. That's our Greek word, logical, normative, credible, appropriate. I think Pauls saying this, it is

unreasonable, it's unimaginable that you and I would not live a life yielded to the will of God under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

It doesn't make sense. Surrendering your life to Jesus Christ is the only sensible thing you can do with your life. There's no other path. Wasn't it C.T. Studd who left behind wealth, in fact, I think he gave it all away by the time he was done. He was a professional cricketer in American parlance. He was a MLB base ball player in that sense. He was a household name, the world had laid at his feet. He gave it all up and went to China, and the reason he did it was because he said this one day, if Jesus Christ be God and He is, and died for me, which He did, then there is no sacrifice too great for me to make for Him. It's logical. It's logical. So that's the argument. Number two, the assessment, the assessment. Please notice that the Apostle Paul prefaces his instruction on spiritual gifts with a call to self-reflection and personal assessment.

That's verse three. Having made an argument, he now calls for an assessment, for I say to you through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly as God has dealt with him with a measure of faith. Having spoken about a renewed mind, he now asks them to exercise this renewed mind in a sober judgment of their abilities and capacities to serve the Christ they have just given their lives to. So here's the point. Each believer has been graced by God, mercied by God. That's the argument. In the light of God's mercies, give yourself to him. So now that you've given yourself to Him and you want to serve Him and that will work itself out in local church ministry through spiritual gifts, you need to make a sober and measured evaluation of your giftedness, your capacity, where you fit in, what contribution you can make to the church, that's what Paul is asking for here in what I call the assessment. And by the way, by implication, Paul is saying this, it is very important you hear this this morning, it is not wrong to have an assured confident assessment of your giftedness.

It is not wrong to think by the grace of God, for the glory of God, I'm good at that. I excel in this area. This is what God has made me to do. Remember how Eric Liddell said, God has made me fast and when I run, I feel His pleasure. That's a sober judgment. That's just a fact. He was fast. God made him a good athlete, and when he ran, he felt God's pleasure. So Paul is saying, here, look, I want you to make a sober, measured, proportionate judgment about your giftedness. Since you've now made a gift of yourself to God for His service. And what he argues against here's two things that are wrong. It's not wrong to know you're good at something or you're gifted, but what is wrong is to overestimate or underestimate.

So he says, what, in verse three, not to think of yourself more highly than you ought. That would be to overestimate. That would be pride. That might be, hey, look at me. Look at how good I am. I'm better than you. Something like that to overestimate your giftedness, to forget it's source or actually to make yourself more important than you really are, so don't overestimate. Number two, don't underestimate. If one danger is pride and self-glory, the other danger is false humility. Well you know pastor, I'm really just a humble servant of Jesus Christ. I'm not very good at anything. Really. You're a spiritual Eeyore. That's what you are. Come on. I want a sober judgment, okay, you might not be good at that, and you may stink at this, but hey, I believe you are a highly gifted person endowed by capacity of the Holy Spirit to serve the church. So tell me what it is.

We'll make you as good at it as we can. We'll equip you as the saints of God. Ephesians four, to do the work of the ministry. I want you to have an assured confidence about your giftedness, So don't overestimate, don't underestimate. Here's the point. There's nothing wrong with being comfortable in

your own skin. Nothing wrong by being happy to embrace how God has made you and gifted you both naturally and supernaturally. Psalm 139:13-16, He knit you together. He wove you intricately in your mother's womb, and baked into that cake was talents and strengths and capacities. And then not only at your birth were you given natural abilities, at your new birth, you were given grace gifts, spiritual gifts, charismata, a capacity to serve the Church of Jesus Christ, to edify it and impact the world.

So embrace that, I like the bumper sticker, "Be yourself, everyone else is taken". Great little bumper sticker. And I think Paul is saying the same thing, be yourself, be comfortable in your own skin, know that you have got a certain giftedness. Now don't wish for someone else's giftedness. Don't downplay your own giftedness. Don't make yourself more than you are, but embrace how God has made you. Because everyone else is taken. Remember how the Lord chastised Peter when he was asking about John in John 21:20-21, Jesus says, Peter, what's that going to do with you? Follow me. We'll come to it in a moment. It's the analogy of the body. We've got two hands, two feet, two eyes, two ears, one heart, two lungs, a liver, a spleen, the stomach on and on it goes. And every part of the body is there for a specific use, and it's important.

And that's the analogy. Let's have a sober judgment. Let's decide, am I a hand, am I a foot, am I an eye, am I an ear. I've got some place in the body. So here's something I'd also say, by the way, I don't have time to go through these, but I wrote these down, so don't be a spiritual copycat. Now it's good to admire others. It's good to be mentored by others, but don't try and be a spiritual copycat. Don't let your hero or your favorite Bible teacher or your spiritual mentor become an idol where you want to be them. Because every baby born is a fresh and brand new idea in the mind of God. Don't be a spiritual copycat. Concentrate on your own giftedness. Discover it, develop it to a point of competency and avoid an overreaction by the way, because I think it's important to say that while we will excel in the area of our spiritual giftedness, it doesn't mean you don't serve in other areas where you're not gifted.

Paul talks about the gift of mercy so I don't have the gift of mercy so I can be nasty. No, that's not the point. That's not the point. The person whose got the gift of mercy just has another gear, but you are to be merciful. Same with teaching, same with administration, you get the point. Listen, every tennis racket has a sweet spot at least so I'm told I could never get mine to work. Every golf club has a sweet spot. Every baseball bat has a sweet spot. What's the sweet spot? The sweet spot is the place engineered by engineers to cause the ball to go kapow and you and I are engineered by God and we all have a zone, a region, a sweet spot that causes our lives to go kapow where we're effective, we minister with joy and we advance the Kingdom of God. Okay. The assignment, we're just going to have to fly through this.

I don't have a lot of time to develop this, and I want to wrap this up today. The assignment. Embedded in the gift of God's grace in Christ, are grace gifts. See when we embrace Christ, we got the gift of the Holy Spirit who has come to indwell us. And with the gift of the Holy Spirit, we've been giving gifts of the Holy Spirit. Capacities, abilities to serve effectively in the body. And I want to say this, everybody has got a capacity. Everybody has got an ability. I'll give you one verse and then at least I'll read it and then I'll give you another just to write down, just to prove my point. First Corinthians 12:11, where Paul says this, and it conveys my point clearly, but one in the same spirit works all things distributing to each one individually as he wills. In First Corinthians 12, Paul talks about spiritual gifts. And he is saying here that the spirit of God, sovereignly by his choice gives each believer a gift.

We've got a similar thought in First Peter 4:10, and it's the implications certainly of our passage, Romans 12:4-8. And these gifts are to be employed for the benefit of the body. First Corinthians 14:12 tells us that they are for the edification of the church. So you know what they haven't been given to us for the

purposes of self-congratulation or self-glory. They've been given to us for the benefit of everybody in this room. And the point is also in this assignment, this big picture, and then we'll quickly bring out a few points. Spiritual gifts convey a very simple message that Christianity's not a spectator sport. If everybody's been given a gift, then nobody should be on the bench. Everybody should be in the game. Wasn't it Howard Henricks of Dallas Theological Seminary who famously said that church reminded him of major football games where if you go to one of these NFL games there are 70,000 fans in the stadium desperately in need of exercise watching, 22 men desperately in need of rest.

And it's a reminder typically in the church there's the 80/20 principle. 20% of the people are doing 80% of the work and 80% of the people are doing 20% of the work. And I think our percentages are much, much better and much higher at Kindred. But I'm, you know, pretty sure there are those of us here this morning who are not in the game and you've been given an assignment. Notice three things here. Unity, diversity, mutuality. We'll just hop, skip, and jump across them for the sake of time. It is worth noting that Paul begins with unity, not diversity. He's going to talk about diverse gifts, but he begins with unity and that's found in the image and the analogy of the body for we are many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we being many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another.

This one you'd underscore the idea of unity. We are one body. The Christian life is a life lived in relationship to other Christians. We must act in unison. Psalm 133, it is a beautiful and a pleasant thing for brothers to dwell in unity who work in unison, who function in a coordinated manner. That's a wonderful thing. Let's just keep up Paul's analogy. A body that's functioning in coordination with each part is a beautiful thing to watch. Watch someone dance. The coordination and the united effort of the body. When you see grace, and you see beauty, you see movement. You see it in the simple act of eating. Okay, my hand lifts the food, my mouth chews the food, and my stomach digests the food, it's the body working together. That's Paul's point. We're a body, we work together, we coordinate, we work in unison. And so his emphasis is on unity before it's on diversity because the diversity takes place in the context of unity.

But he does go on to talk about diversity where he admits that we're one body in Christ, but we are made up of many members, each with its own function. The eye, the hand, the foot, indispensable parts of the body, all with various functions. Such a beautiful thing when they work together because more gets done when things happen. But the point is the hand can't say right to the food, I don't need you and the food can't say to the hand, I don't need you.

That's Paul's argument in First Corinthians 12:15, no spare parts in the body, no spare parts in the body of Christ. That's why there shouldn't be any envy among us. We should complement each other rather than compete with each other. We should be grateful for every one of us because we're all part of a body. All got a particular role to play. And we don't have time to get into this in any major way, but look at the seven gifts that Paul outlines. They're seven of probably 19 if you compare them with other lists in Ephesians four and First Corinthians 12 and first Peter four. But he talks about prophecy in its purest sense, in its historical context, prophecy was foretelling of an event that hadn't yet happened. It was a direct revelation for God. It was information you didn't have that only God could give, and you shared it with the people.

So the prophet was a conduit of revelation. But here's what's interesting if you study the prophets of the old and New Testament, you will see that it wasn't just for telling, it also included forth telling. You'll find prophets quoting other prophets. They quoted what had already been revealed. They reinforced to the

people of God what had already been said and had been missed in terms of their obedience. So, the profit wasn't just a foreteller, he was a forthteller. So in its purest sense, and in its historical sense, I don't believe that gift is in operation today, I believe the canon is finished, I believe God is not directly speaking to people apart from his word. But if the prophets are in the foundation of the church, Ephesians two, the elder, the pastor, the preacher who takes the revelation already given and repeats it to the people and applies it to their lives, that's an element of prophecy because he's repeating what the prophets have already said.

That's forthtelling and to a degree that is certainly in operation today. Then we've got ministry, right? Ministry, this is the word that gives us our word Deacon, and so perhaps in an official capacity it speaks of the office of Deacon, but generally it's just those who serve, those who minister to the body. I was with our team last night in the tent, the coffee and donuts crew and we were just thanking them for all that they do. I reminded them that an army marches on its stomach. In fact I was telling them a while ago, someone on our staff thought might be a good idea to cut the donut budget and we reminded him, we would cut him first before we would cut the donut budget because it's so important and those people do a great ministry with a warm Cup of coffee and a really nice delicious donut, they get the people moving on a Sunday morning.

That's ministry, that's service. We've got teaching. If it's different from prophesying, it's in some ways the profit goes for the heart and the will where the teacher goes for the mind. The teacher takes what's already been revealed in scripture and through study and hard work brings those truths clearly to people's minds and helps them live that out. Exhortation is a wonderful gift. That's the cheerleading gift. That's the person who comes alongside you and encourages you when you're down. Acts like spiritual smelling salts to get you up and fight one more round. It's a word that means to come along side. It's the picture of the parent learning alongside the child who is learning to ride a bike for the first time. You've got your hand under the saddle. You're keeping them upright and straight. You're running along saying you can do it, you can do it, and they're screaming, no, I can't, I'm going to die. You say, yeah, you can. Yeah, you can, and then you just send them down the hill.

That's the gift of encouragement. That's exhortation. It's coming alongside and helping people do what they say they cannot do. Giving with liberality what we're all meant to give. We're all meant to support the Lord's work and set aside on any given day what God has blessed us with. But this would be a gift that's another gear. And by the way it doesn't necessarily mean wealth. If you remember the story of the widow's mite. Sometimes it's what we keep, not what we give that the Lord measures, but generally speaking, it is those who have an abundance through God's grace and they give it away with liberality and generosity to the work of God. What other gifts? Leadership. This is a kissing cousin of administration. This carries the idea of being upfront, leading, giving direction, mercy, with cheerfulness. Again, we're all meant to be merciful. This is someone that's just got a particular gift, especially towards those hurting in the body, to come alongside them and just shower them with love and TLC, and this is just a sample.

This is seven gifts out of possibly 19 when you compare them all. But we've all got a gift and we're all meant to act in unison, each individual part playing its part. So Paul talks about unity, diversity. Finally, on mutuality. It's kind of an overlap, but I want to go back to a verse in verse five, it's important. So we being many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. Here's how John Murray, the great reformed commentator puts that, you and I have property in other people's lives. We belong to one another. You have a gift that God has given you for my benefit, I have a gift that God has given

me for your benefit, and when I don't deliver, when you don't turn up, you're robbing the other Christian of what is rightfully theirs, which is your gift, your service, your mercy, your leadership.

You're teaching your prophesying. That's strong, isn't it? I don't want you to miss that mutuality. We are dependent upon one another. We must live our lives out within the church for the good of others. We don't have all the gifts. Others must supply what is lacking. You and I have a right to each other's giftedness. And when you don't function, you are cheating the church, and you are robbing the people of God.

Lets pray. Lord, we've kind of ran through this text when we probably should have walked. Much here, good stuff to rally and cry for the Church to give themselves to Christ. Head to foot so that then they might serve the body of Christ enthusiastically and effectively. So help us lord to think through the grace gifts you have given each of us. Help us not to rob or defraud one another by our laziness, by are sitting on the sidelines. Help us to get out of the stands and off the bench and into the game. Help us to find out what that giftedness is and then have a confidence before God by grace to fulfill a missional function within the life of the church and the community. For we ask and pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.