

## Lesson 2

# Equipping and Training the Ranks

## *Dedication, Service, and Action in Your Christian Life*

There is a progression of thought in Romans 12.1-8. First, Paul highlights the essence of spiritual dedication by underscoring the importance of presenting ourselves wholly to God, embodying the spirit of a living sacrifice. It's not a passive commitment but an active pursuit where we discern, prove, and showcase the will of God in our lives. Each day offers an opportunity to demonstrate our dedication, making conscious decisions in alignment with His will. Our priorities change from a self-centric worldview to one that asks, "How can I serve others?" Spiritual service becomes a journey that transcends personal ambitions.

Next, we're reminded of the spiritual attitude necessary to nurture and sustain our dedication. Humility is at the core, urging us not to place ourselves on undue pedestals. Instead, the Spirit directs us to recognize our role within the spiritual family. Every Christian plays a significant role within the body of the Church. We are not just members of a congregation, but truly members of one another.

Finally, in Romans 12.6b-8 Paul shifts the focus from introspection to action, emphasizing spiritual service. It's not enough to merely recognize our blessings and the ways God intends to use us; we must act upon this knowledge. Complacency has no place here. We aren't meant to be mere spectators, content with analyzing the actions of others from a distance. Instead, the call is to dive in, to be part of the action, and to contribute actively to the mission. Being a Monday-morning quarterback, critiquing from the sidelines, isn't the path we're called to. We're summoned to the field, to engage directly in the divine play orchestrated by God.

What Paul calls for here outlines the way of life within the local church. The church isn't just a static institution; it's a dynamic, living entity that functions both proactively and reactively. Every action, every service, is performed under the benevolent watch and guidance of Jesus Christ, who resides within each of us, guiding, and encouraging us.

In this lesson we will discuss the importance of offering ourselves to God. We'll reexamine the significance of approaching this commitment with the correct mindset. Furthermore, we'll underscore the imperative of taking action, emphasizing that the church is a realm of deeds, not just words.

## ***You Have Presented Yourself to God***

We are called to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, to willingly place ourselves at God's disposal. Paul says:

Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship, Romans 12.1.

The use of sacrificial language in Paul's writings is evident in more than just one passage. For instance, in Romans 6:13b, we are reminded, *And do not offer any parts of it to sin as weapons for unrighteousness. But as those who are alive from the dead, offer yourselves to God, and all the parts of yourselves to God as weapons for righteousness.*" Similarly, Colossians 1:22b emphasizes that through Christ's physical sacrifice, he has reconciled us to "present [us] holy, faultless, and blameless before him." This is echoed in Ephesians 5:27b which describes Christ's intent to *present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless.*

God desires our entirety: our soul, mind, body, and will. Delving deeper into this concept in 12:2, we are encouraged not to let the world shape or influence our identity. Instead, we are to allow God to transform us by yielding ourselves to Him with the goal of renewing our mind. This renewal can be best described as the adoption of the Biblical worldview. With this renewed, spiritual perspective, our focus begins to shift towards serving others. Questions arise in our hearts: How can I serve? How can I actively work for God? What can I do to make a meaningful difference in the world? And importantly, how can I ensure I serve in a manner that aligns with God's will?

### ***You Must Approach Service with the Right Attitude***

In Romans 12:3a, we're reminded of the importance of humility: *For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one.* This isn't about boasting of our accomplishments or abilities. We must approach life with a sense of grounded sensibility, always recalling the divine perspective. Every talent, ability, or possession we have comes from God. As stated in 1 Corinthians 4:7, *what do you have that you did not receive?* And in 1 Peter 5:5, we are reminded to show humility towards each other, understanding that God honors the humble.

The importance of humility also extends to understanding the gifts God has bestowed upon us. It's not about diminishing our worth or abilities but recognizing the source and purpose of our gifts. As mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:7, *A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good.* Our talents and gifts, bestowed by a divine source, are meant for the growth of the body, not personal glory. The "measure of faith" mentioned in Romans 12:3c isn't merely about salvation but understanding that our lives are a stewardship for the growth of God's kingdom. As we reflect on our spiritual journey, we learn that having faith means trusting that God equips us for the tasks he has set before us, be it spiritually, intellectually, physically, or emotionally.

Recognizing this, our deacons, elders, and preachers have taken up their roles with dedication and love. Their commitment, even in the face of challenges like managing family responsibilities, reflects a forward-moving faith. A special acknowledgment must be made to the wives of these leaders. Their unwavering support, patience, and sacrifices don't go unnoticed. They stand alongside, helping their husbands lead, and for that, they deserve immense gratitude.

Romans 12:3 succinctly summarizes the essence of our spiritual life: every Christian possesses a unique gift from God, none of which should be a basis for superiority. Why? Romans 12:4-5

teaches that every person is integral, all playing a role in a unified yet diverse body of Christ. Whether these roles are visible, like leading a worship, or behind-the-scenes, like ensuring the church is clean and safe, each function is vital for the collective well-being of the congregation. It's about mutual respect and understanding that one's gifts may differ but are equally valuable in God's eyes.

Romans 12:5 reinforces this sentiment: *in the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another*. This scripture emphasizes the interconnectedness of the church family. The underlying message is that of dependency, appreciation, and love for one another. As we reflect on Romans 12:6a, we are reminded that our diverse gifts are granted through grace and should be celebrated and appreciated by all.

## ***We Must Go to Work***

After dedicating ourselves to God, after adjusting our attitude and perspective towards ourselves and others, we must not stop there. It's essential to put these commitments into action. Simply being involved in church and attending Bible classes doesn't suffice. It's not just about gathering and discussing. We must break free from mere discussions, align ourselves, and act upon the teachings. Execution is key; church work demands more than just talk.

Consider this analogy: What if your body was functioning at only 15% capacity? It's astonishingly said that, on average, only 15% of church members are truly active in terms of working and giving back. Many churches find themselves hampered by members who remain passive, not harnessing their gifts and abilities to serve and uplift each other.

The tasks listed in Romans 12.6b-8 are not exhaustive, but they are indicative. They emphasize not just the act but the intention behind them. For instance, 'prophecy' does not necessarily indicate supernatural powers. At its core, prophecy means interpreting the divine will or purpose. Think about it: can you discern God's intent without divine intervention? Certainly. And this interpretation aligns better with the other listed gifts such as service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, and showing mercy. All these tasks are ones that humans do without needing supernatural powers. Therefore, when you come across '**prophecy**', it can be thought of as a gift of public speaking. It's about communicating God's word with faith, leveraging the capabilities God has bestowed upon you.

**Service**, as mentioned in 12.7a, is about practical assistance in Christ's name. Whether it's helping people move, preparing a meal, visiting the hospital, or even something as simple as clearing a driveway of snow, it's about wholeheartedly attending to the need.

**Teaching**, as in 12.7b, revolves around communicating the scriptures. While prophecy relates to public speaking, teaching is more intimate – perhaps one-on-one or in small groups. It's about capturing the essence of the scripture and applying it in a manner people can relate to. Our teachers at Cornerstone have been instrumental in helping many fellow brethren grow. We are so blessed to have so many mature teachers.

**Exhorting**, highlighted in 12.8a, encompasses advising, encouraging, warning, strengthening, and comforting. It's a practice that's continually observed in our congregation, with many excelling at it. Encouragement, especially from our young members, keeps our spirits high and our mission steadfast.

The act of **giving**, stated in 12.8b, is beyond just monetary contributions. It's about donating time, effort, and resources. Our congregation's incredible generosity, both locally and internationally, speaks volumes about our dedication and sincerity in serving God.

**Leadership**, as described in 12.8c, thrives in our congregation. With godly shepherds leading with their hearts, showing zeal and consistency, we've cultivated an environment that promotes visionary initiatives and consistent efforts.

Lastly, the act of showing **mercy**, as in 12.8d, is a vital part of who we are. We aren't here to judge or accuse. We are advocates of mercy, reflecting the love and kindness our Heavenly Father showers upon us. Mercy isn't about patronizing; it's about genuine compassion and cheerfulness. Luke 12.32 mentions how God delights in granting us his kingdom, even when we might not deserve it. Demonstrating such benevolence in our relationships is the true essence of our faith.

## **Conclusion**

Recognize and appreciate the amazing blessings God bestows upon you. His unwavering provision has been a constant in your life, and it will remain so in the future. As a recipient of His grace, it is your duty to serve others, extending your hand and providing help where it's needed in the best way you can. Moreover, you must share the immense love of Christ with everyone you encounter. As directed in Galatians 6.10, it's crucial to show kindness to everyone, especially those who are fellow believers. A spirit of gratitude, service, and love is what makes the local church what it is.

Are you willing to offer yourself to God fully? Do you approach your service with sincerity and the right attitude? And most importantly, are you prepared to put in the work and make a difference?

## **For Discussion**

1. In Romans 12.1-8, Paul emphasizes the importance of presenting ourselves wholly to God. What does the concept of being a living sacrifice mean to you?
2. How can we ensure our daily decisions align with the will of God and move away from a self-oriented worldview?

3. Paul emphasizes the importance of humility, urging us to avoid placing ourselves on a pedestal. How does humility play a crucial role in nurturing and sustaining spiritual dedication?
4. How does recognizing our role within the spiritual family shape our interactions and relationships within the church?
5. The text mentions that every Christian possesses a unique gift from God. How can we identify and harness these gifts to benefit the local church family?
6. Romans 12:5 speaks to the interconnectedness of the church family. How can this sense of unity and mutual respect be cultivated and maintained today?
7. In the analogy given, only 15% of church members are said to be truly active. How can churches motivate members to be more active participants and contributors?
8. How do the tasks listed in Romans 12.6b-8, such as prophecy, service, and teaching, translate into practical actions within a church family?
9. The act of showing mercy is emphasized as genuine compassion and cheerfulness. How can we practice and promote this quality within our congregation and daily lives?
10. As a conclusion, the text underscores the essence of the local church. How can the principles highlighted, such as gratitude, service, and love, be integrated into the foundational activities of the church?