

Using Gifts as an Act of Worship

Culture of Grace: Practices & Habits of GracePoint Church / Romans 12:1-8 / August 24, 2025

Introduction:

This morning, we are stepping out of Acts to look at Romans 12:1-8 as part of our Culture of Grace series. We normally work through books of the Bible yet break occasionally to consider habits and practices to pursue as God's people. One of which is the use of spiritual gifts, which are uniquely spiritual giftings God gives to every believer. Why are spiritual gifts important? Look at 1 Peter 4:10, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." We know Peter is speaking of spiritual gifts because the same Greek word for "gift" is used in 1 Corinthians 12:1 and Romans 1:11 in conjunction with the word "spiritual," and each passage speaks of using these gifts in similar ways. Note how Peter says they should be used, "as stewards of God's varied grace." A steward was someone entrusted by the master of a house to manage the affairs of the household. Jesus says in Luke 12:42, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager (steward), whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time?" One primary responsibility of a steward was distributing food rations to the whole household. Likewise, as stewards of God's household, we dispense "God's varied grace," through the spiritual gifts He gives. Spiritual gifts are important because God has designed His grace to flow through our spiritual gifts. And note there isn't only a few stewards that minister God's grace. Each believer is a steward. Family, everyone who believes in Christ is given a spiritual gift to use. The gospel makes us aware of our sin and need for a Savior before proclaiming how Jesus suffered in our place on the cross to pay for sin, absorbing God's wrath reserved for it. When we repent and place our trust in those truths, we are saved, and God gives us His Spirit. The Spirit gives us love for God and others, teaches us to follow Christ, and is manifested in our lives through spiritual gifts given to serve one another and distribute the grace God desires for them to receive. The Christian life is not a spectator sport. You are called to spread the faith to others, encourage the faith in others, and build the faith of the church. And I believe two things are vital to walk in this calling. We need the right motivation for using gifts and to understand what they are. Today, I want to consider that motivation and some of the gifts listed in Romans 12:1-8. We covered the main point of Romans 12:1-21 the Culture of Grace sermon titled "Building a Contagious Community" a couple of years ago. If you are new to GracePoint, I would encourage you to listen to that sermon later. Today, I will focus on Paul's flow of thought as it relates to using spiritual gifts. The first and foundational thing Paul calls us to do is in verse 1-2,

Seek to Worship by Mindfully Living to Prove God's Marvelous Grace

After detailing God's mercy and grace in the gospel over 11 chapters, Paul shifts to our appropriate response. Look at Romans 12:1, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." Notice what grounds Paul's appeal. He says, "by the mercies of God." Leading into chapter 12, Paul taught how God's sovereign choice in extending mercy to some highlights the riches of His glory in chapter 9. Then, after detailing how God's mercy has been shown to the church and will be shown to all of the true Israel who turn to Christ in chapters 10-11, Paul says in Romans 11:32, "God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all." This appeal is grounded in God's mercy to turn Jew and Gentile to Christ despite their disobedience. What is his appeal? "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God," as "spiritual worship," or reasonable worship. Note two things for our purposes. First, John Stott comments, "The traditional evangelical invitation is that we give our 'hearts' to God, not our 'bodies'...But Paul is clear that the presentation of our bodies is our spiritual act of worship. It is a significant Christian paradox. No worship is pleasing to God which is purely inward, abstract and mystical; it must express itself in concrete acts of service performed by our bodies" (John Stott, *The Message of Romans*, p. 322). Second, Paul calls this spiritual or reasonable worship. While worship in song is an important part of worship, there is more to worship than singing.

All that follows explains how to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. Notice how he begins with the overarching principle in verse 2, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Paul gives two commands. The first is not to conform to this world. We often think of this only in terms of morality, but it goes deeper than that. 1 John 2:16 says, “the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life” are what is in the world. Lack of conformity involves all our flesh and eyes desire, and the pride of life that marks this world. There are desires and a strong love for life that seem harmless, but they are really just subtle ways of conforming to this world. The second command, to be transformed by renewing our minds explains how not to conform to this world by way of contrast. Paul says this transformation is for the purpose of testing everything to discern what is the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God. The word for testing carries the idea of proving something is valuable, like sifting for gold to prove the value of a single nugget. God’s will is always perfect and our transformed lives prove its value. This tells us living outside the good and perfect will of God is conforming to this world. Being a living sacrifice means we mindfully live to prove God’s grace is marvelous by striving to discern and do His will in all areas of life. And, family, it is no accident this immediately connects with life in the church. In verses 3-5, Paul calls us to,

Understand God’s Marvelous Grace in Relationship to His Church

I don’t enjoy section divisions in bibles because they often separate full arguments. Notice the flow of thought in verses 2-5, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. 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.” Verse 3 begins with “for” signifying it is a ground for what was just said. Note the emphasis on thinking. Part of what the worldly pride of life entails is thinking too much and too highly of oneself. So, the renewal of our minds starts with thinking in sober judgement, according to “the measure of faith that God has assigned.” This either means we think of ourselves in light of the faith God has assigned to all in Christ, or faith’s connection to the different gifts He supplies. In either meaning, the point is to understand how all that you have and are comes from God’s grace. Paul, then, grounds this call in the analogy of a body. He says, “Consider a body. Eyes don’t have the same function as feet. Nor do fingers as knees. Yet, each is a functioning part of one body. In the same way, though there are many people in the church, we are one body with different functions by the grace of God.” Think about that analogy. What if you were only a couple of body parts? Maybe you have some feet, a head, a neck, and a mouth. What kinds of things would never happen? You would never see a beautiful sunset, smell a delicious meal, or hold a loved one. As our body parts serve different necessary functions, each of us, by God’s marvelous grace, serves a necessary function in the church. This brings us to the connection with spiritual gifts. In verses 6-8, Paul calls us to,

Prove God’s Marvelous Grace is Valuable by Using Spiritual Gifts

Verses 6-8 continue what Paul has been saying. Look there with me, “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.” Pause there. We know Paul is speaking about spiritual gifts because he starts with the gift of prophecy mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12. Note how everything since verse 1 is wrapped up in God’s grace. In verse 1, his appeal was based on God’s mercy and grace. His command in verse 3, based on the grace given to him. And the command to use our spiritual gifts is according to God’s grace. God has provided grace in salvation, graciously made us members of one body, and given us gifts and a function within that body by grace. Peter said we dispense grace by using spiritual gifts. Ephesians 4:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:12, teaches us to use spiritual gifts to build up the body. Family, being a living sacrifice involves striving to build up Christ’s church by using the gifts God has given you. And in this, we prove God’s marvelous grace is valuable.

To help us lean into this, Paul shares seven spiritual gifts in verses 6-8 and how to use them. First, in end of verse 6, “if prophecy, in proportion to our faith.” We’ll spend extra time on this gift to share what I am persuaded the Scriptures teach about it. I encourage you to study on your own because there are different views by wise and godly pastors on this gift. I believe we see a significant shift in the function of prophetic words from the Old Testament to the New Testament. As we saw in Acts 2, when the Spirit is given at Pentecost, Peter shares God’s promise through Joel that all kinds of people would prophesy in the last days, young men and old men, male and female servants. This is a shift from only leaders given prophetic words. Later, in Hebrews 1:1–2, we read, “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.” In the old covenant, God’s authoritative words for life and faith were delivered through the prophets. But in the new covenant, they come through the Son. In several passages, like 1 Corinthians 14:36-37, and writings from the early church fathers, we see prophetic words should come under the authority of the apostles’ teaching. The apostles teaching became the authority for life and faith because Jesus spoke through them, with the gift of prophecy functioning in a less authoritative manner. This is why 1 Corinthians 14:29 teaches that prophecies should be “weighed” by all and 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21 says they should be “tested.” What is the function of the spiritual gift of prophecy then? Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:3, “the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.” The gift of prophecy is the reception and communication of a revelatory message from the Lord, not as an authoritative word to establish the faith, but a message for encouragement and consolation to strengthen faith. And, in our passage, Paul says this gift should be used, “in proportion to our faith.” This is traditionally understood one of two ways. Because the direct article falls before faith in the Greek, some say “our faith” means “our common faith.” This would mean any word of prophecy must align with the faith handed down through the apostles’ teaching. The second way this is understood is that only the revelation given should be shared, without adding words or interpretation. This would mean Paul is saying have faith to speak only what is received. I believe Paul is communicating both, saying, “You know you have received a prophetic message from the Lord when it aligns with God’s revealed truth and you should, in faith, only share exactly what you have received.” I am persuaded this gift is still given today and when the gift of prophecy is properly used it will build up the church and strengthen faith. We could say more but let’s continue to the next gifts in our passage. The next three flow well together as Paul says to use them within their activity. Look at verse 7, “if service, in our serving.” The term for service is used to speak of waiting tables, rendering friendly support, attending to a task, and giving relief or aid. So, this gift is the supernatural empowerment of the Spirit to serve others through a variety of activities as a way for them to receive gospel ministry. And Paul says to use it in “our serving,” meaning as you do things like helping ministries get set up, playing games with kids, ushering, cooking for church meals, facilitating small group discussions, use this gift and rely on the Spirit to dispense God’s grace through it. The next gift is at end of verse 7, “the one who teaches, in his teaching.” We must recognize this is not the ability to teach anything, but spiritual instruction in God’s word and ways. In the New Testament, this gift focuses on the gospel of Jesus Christ and what had been taught through the apostles. Paul says, in Titus 1:9, that elders give instruction in sound doctrine (same word as teaching in Romans 12:7) while holding firmly to the trustworthy word as taught by apostles. So, this gift is a unique special ability to think over and understand Scripture in order to impart that knowledge and understanding to others for their growth in the faith. When Paul says to use it in your teaching, he means, if this is your spiritual gift, use it when you have the opportunity to teach the truths of the faith to others. Consider the next gift in verse 8, “the one who exhorts, in his exhortation.” The word for exhortation means to call to one’s side and involves calling someone to action through encouragement or warning, by an appeal or a rebuke. Tom Schreiner sums up the difference between teaching and exhortation well, saying, “Teaching concentrates more on the content of the tradition, while exhortation summons others to actions and stirs them from lethargy.” So, this gift is a Spirit infused ability to stir within others an appropriate action in response to what has been taught. Now, we are all called to exhort one another.

Yet, some are especially empowered to encourage, warn, or rebuke someone in faith and should use that spiritual gift in their exhortations. In the final three listed gifts, Paul encourages certain qualities or motivation in their use. Look at the middle of verse 8, “the one who contributes, in generosity.” The gift of contributing, or giving, is what it sounds like. This is a supernatural empowerment to contribute to the needs of others through the sacrifice of money, time, and talents. Think about this gift with me. Every believer is called to give to the needs of the church and others as a response to grace. Yet, God has specially empowered some to contribute to His kingdom purposes, manifesting His Spirit through their giving. If you have this gift, Paul says to use it with the desire to be generous and no ulterior motive. Continue in verse 8 for the next gift, “the one who leads, with zeal.” Once again, we need to define this in spiritual realities. This isn’t simply a strong and assertive person. “Leads” is the same word used for the elders and deacons in 1 Timothy 3:4 & 12, who need to “manage” their households well. In 1 Thessalonians 5:12, Paul writes, “We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you.” Leading involves laboring to guide, direct, manage, and admonish others in the faith. This gift, then, is a Spirit given ability to lead others in the faith, guiding them on mission, keeping them moving forward well, and admonishing when necessary. Sadly, we treat leadership positions in church as places anyone can be voted into, but God has chosen to give some the spiritual gift of leadership. Not everyone is empowered to lead. For those who are, they should use this gift with zeal, which involves an earnestness and diligence to the task. The last gift Paul mentions is at end of verse 8, “the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.” I don’t think it is an accident Paul ends with the gift of mercy after appealing to God’s mercies in verse 1. While all should show mercy, some are given a supernatural empowerment to walk in the footsteps of our God, showing compassion and extending help to others. Those with this gift show empathy towards someone in need and walk forward in an act of kindness to meet the need. And, to those who have this gift, Paul says it should be exercised with cheerfulness and not begrudgingly. If this is your gift, walk forward in it with joy, knowing God is using you to dispense His grace through that mercy.

Conclusion:

Family, these are only a fraction of the gifts God has given to His church. There are more listed in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4, and most believe these aren’t exhaustive lists. Every spiritual gift has a function in the church. So, let’s pursue the use of them and trust the Lord to dispense His grace through our gifts. As the worship team is coming to lead us in a time of reflection and response, dwell on the importance of using our gifts. They are part of our spiritual worship, ways in which we walk out the calling to be living sacrifices and prove the value of God’s will. If this is the first time you’ve heard of spiritual gifts, seek to understand them. I would love to help you do so. If you are aware of spiritual gifts, but have undervalued them, or haven’t been using yours, hear the Lord calling you deeper in your worship and forward in the renewal of your mind. For all of us, ask God to help you discover and use your gifts to dispense His grace to others, striving to build up the church. As you respond, you are welcome to sit and reflect, stand and sing, or come and kneel before God in humility. We also have people ready to pray with you and for you worshipping with lanyards on in the front rows. Would you pray with me?