

Harris Creek Baptist Church  
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Series: Ecclesia  
February 14, 2021

The Gift That Keeps on Giving

Romans 12:1-8

**“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.”**

Happy Sunday. Thank you, guys, for faring the icy roads and being here. I know that there are lots of folks snuggled up on their couch at home, with a cup of coffee. We are glad that you are able to be with us virtually. Then there are some of you who moved here from the north and you don’t get it. You have chains for tires, you have the snow tread, all-wheel drive. You have been waiting your whole life for this moment. We are glad that you are here. Welcome. Thank you for being here with us.

I do know that I say “I do know” I don’t know anything in regard to the future; but it seems that the precipitation that we were expecting this morning is going to come around 3:30 or 4:00. The temperatures are expected to drop below 19 degrees. For those reasons, we are going to cancel the 7:00 pm service and you can watch it online. I am saying that here so that those of you watching can share that with any students or young adults in our city who planned on driving here tonight, you can spread that message.

But Happy Valentine’s Day! Some of you just said, “Oh Shoot!” It is Valentine’s Day. It’s a holiday, I know invented by Hallmark, I get it. If for no other reason than for us to spend money. It was something crazy on how much we spent last year. Scott Kedersha told me it was

something like – I don't want to miss quote - like \$42 billion. What? Maybe \$16 billion. I don't know, it was a lot of billion dollars. I'm not sure, but it was some crazy amount that we spent on Valentine's Day last year.

Gift giving is my love language. Usually you do what you desire, so I enjoy giving gifts. My wife, Monica, her love language is acts of service, which is really unfortunate. Because I don't like acts of service so much. I like to give gifts. So, through the years I have given her different gifts. There was one Valentine's Day where we were in that season where everyone around us was having babies. It felt like we were constantly giving embroidered gifts where you put the baby's initials and baby's name on blankets. That stuff is expensive, man! You go to the store to buy a blanket and its \$15.00. You put a baby's initials on it and now its \$1,500. And you are like, what happened?

So, I asked what she wants for Valentine's Day. She said, "I want an embroidery machine." I asked, "Oh, do you know how to sew?" She said, "No, but I'm going to learn." "Great, that's awesome." I just killed three birds with one stone. One, we can stop spending all this money on embroidered blankets. Two, I'm thinking she may get this side hustle, open an Etsy business. Maybe I can retire, and she becomes the bread winner or something. There's no telling where this goes. It's going to be amazing. Three, I have my Valentine's Day present all planned out.

I like to do the research. So, I look at embroidery machines, look at the brands, find the best one for the money. Put my heart and soul in it. Purchase it, get it, wrap it up with the Valentine's Day paper. I give it to her. I'm excited. She's excited. Everybody's excited. It never came out of the box. We don't even know what color the embroidery machine was. We never saw it. It became this joke. I'd ask, "Hey, when are you going to start embroidering stuff?" She'd say, "Yeah, I'll watch a YouTube video." "Cool!"

Six months later, I'd ask, "Hey, you want me to find a place to set that up?" She'd say, "Yeah, we need to get to that." Two years in, I sold it for pennies on the dollar on eBay. We no longer have the embroidery machine. Nothing says unappreciation quite like a gift not used. Right? If you give someone a gift, there is this expectation that they are going to open it and use it as it was intended to be used. That sets up perfectly where I want to go today.

When you become a Christian, the Holy Spirit illuminates in you, a gift given to you by God, for God, for you to use in the church. This is a biblical idea. It is sound theology, sound doctrine. You have received a gift from the Holy Spirit that you are to use for God. The most unloving thing that we can do with that gift is to set it on the shelf and not use it. When I say "gift" don't think material good. Think talent. Think skill. Think wiring. Think ministry. Something that God has illuminated in you, not for you, but for Him; for you to deploy within the local body.

We are in this series called Ecclesia, subtitled "A People Not A Place." Talking about the Church, which is a people, not a place. Week one we looked at Matthew 16, the beginning of this movement that has taken over the world that Jesus started on a hillside. Week two, last week, we looked at Acts 2:42-47 and really peeked inside the window of the first gathering that we said was about the same size as Harris Creek. What do they do? What do they think about? What are they like? This week, I want to talk about the church. It is a people who are given gifts from and

for God. The church is a gifted people. Everyone in the church is gifted. And so, let me ask you a trivia question. What percentage of Christians are given spiritual gifts? One hundred percent is the correct answer. One hundred percent of Christians are given gifts.

There was a survey Life.com did a couple years ago. What percentage of people, do you think, use their gifts in church? That means to serve in the church. Think about that for a second. The answer, nationwide, nationally – done by Tony Morgan - is 45%. 45% of people are using their gifts in the church. What do you think it is at Harris Creek? What percentage of people are using their gifts to serve at Harris Creek? The answer is 35%, we are below the national average. Some of that is because we just added about 400 members to our body, right. We have to be people who are deployed in the local church and by the local church.

What is exciting about this, before the end of the message today, everyone who is a resident of the Waco area, we will give you an opportunity to be serving before you leave this building. You can be on a team. You will hear more about that in the moments to come. We are talking about a people who are given gifts from and for God. If someone gives you a gift, you want to use it. You don't leave gifts wrapped under the Christmas tree. You don't get birthday gifts, set them on the shelf, and leave them in the package. The hope is that we would receive them and use them. The Holy Spirit has the same expectation of us when God gives us a gift to be used to build His kingdom.

In fact, there are four major mistakes we can make as it relates to gifts in the church. The first one, this is a big one in America, is that you would use that gift for your own selfish gain. You would say, "Look at me. I'm really gifted. I'm gifted in administration and numbers. I'm really smart. I want to build the biggest kingdom that I possibly can. I want a giant house, a fast car, nice clothes, good brands. Everybody looks at me. I am accessorizing this character in a movie that is all about me." And the church is neglected. This is one of the worst things you can do. This leads to the second thing: neglect your gift. That is to not identify it, not know what it is, not use it, not deploy it. The third bad outcome as it relates to gifts, would be to resent them. This is a big one here. I'm going to spend some time talking about it. What is it to resent other people's gifts? Lastly, the mistake that you can make as it relates to gifts is to covet them. So, neglect your own gift but want someone else's. "I wish I could teach like them. I wish I could sing like Drew. I wish I could have this skill that they have." Therefore, not really realizing and unleashing your own. Every week in the past two weeks of this series, as a supporting verse I have used Romans 12:1-2. If you have been in church long, you have heard this verse.

It says, **"Therefore, in view of God's mercy..."** Whenever you see "therefore" you must ask "What's it there for?" Romans chapters 1 through 11 is the Gospel. That you have been a sinner separated from God, running from God. God who is rich in mercy, has reached down, changed your heart, has saved you. He has purchased you with the blood of His son Jesus Christ. Into His kingdom, He has covered your sins. He sent His son Jesus to die for your sins. He has raised Him from the dead so that you can be adopted children and heir to a kingdom. And **"Therefore, in view of God's mercy..."** God did this mercifully for you. I urge you, please listen, **"Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy to present your bodies as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God."**

When you hear “**present your bodies as living sacrifices**” you think “Great.” Here’s the thing, you don’t know a lot of people who have done that. There’s not a lot of people in your life that when you look at their life they say, “Here I am Lord, take me, use me, send me. I will live where you want. I will say what you desire. I will dress how you want. I will have the relationship that you want. I will use my time how you want. My life is yours.” **“Present your body as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. This is your true and proper worship. Do not conform...”** So here is the opposite of what He is asking. The opposite would be to conform to the patterns of this world. **“Do not conform to the patterns of this world, but be transformed...”** To be transformed is to be different. **“...by the renewing of your mind...”** hat is setting your mind on the things above. **“and then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is. His good, pleasing, and perfect will.”** Then you will know how God desires for you to live. He says all of this instead of talking about gifts. Because surrender for the Christian looks like service in the church. True surrender for the Christian, looks like service in the church. A surrendered Christian is focused on serving.

We are going to be in Chapter 12 verses 3 through 8. We are going to talk about how to identify your gift, understand the diversity of gifts, and then I’m going to use my gift of teaching and exhortation to exhort you to use your gift. That’s how we will end. It’s really an asking for you to use your gift. Verse 3, **“For by the grace given me...”** Paul is going to use his gift to say, **“For by the grace given me, I say to every one of you: ‘Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought. But rather think of yourself with sober judgement in accordance with the faith God has distributed each of you.’”** Where he says, “Don’t think,” it’s the Greek “prónao”, this juxtaposition that happens here where he says, “Don’t think about this, but rather think about this.” He says, **“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought.”** What’s a word you put on that. What’s he calling you to? **“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought.”** Humility is what he’s absolutely saying. “Be humble. And in your humility, you can operate with the faith that is distributed to each of you as a sovereign act of God. There are gifts that have been given to you to use with faith.” That’s where he is headed. This is all building up for him to talk about gifts.

Let me just give you a list of gifts real quick. So, when I say that, you have things in your mind so that you know what I am talking about. Gifts like prophecy. Prophecy is foretelling, having a sense of what is going to happen. Also, forthtelling, which is expounding upon the word of God. This is what it says, and you call people to it. That is what the prophets of old would do. Serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, mercy; all of those are in this passage. Then these come from 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4. The Bible talks a lot about gifts. Administration, discernment, exhorting, evangelism, faith, hospitality, knowledge, shepherding, wisdom. I don’t know that that is exhaustive. I don’t know that God listed every possible gift out there. Like computer programming, it wasn’t around at this time. There may be something that the Holy Spirit illuminates when you become a believe that God desires to repurpose for His church. So, my first point and summary of this passage.

1. *Your Gifts are Hidden by Pride and Used with Faith*

He says, **“Do not think of yourselves more highly than you ought...”** You probably know somebody who’s like, “I should be singing up there with Drew. Have you heard him?” Or “Why am I not teaching? I was given the gift of teaching.” They always feel slighted by the church. I have seen this over the years. They always feel like they are in the backseat. Some of them, there may be a couple of reasons: they may be thinking of themselves more highly than they ought. A good example of this would be, remember the show American Idol? That show was popular for two reasons. One, the amazing display of incredible gifts that people had to sing in tune and melodies and the ability to move our hearts in amazing ways. That was one way it was entertaining. Then the other way, every season about a dozen people who went to that audition, believed with all of their heart that they were gifted, and they were not. They would get up there like, “Amazing...” (JP sings off key). We think, “How did nobody tell them?” They thought of themselves more highly than they ought.

The other mistake that people make here is: “It is the church’s job to give me a place to serve.” No. Gifts create spaces for themselves. Right? If I have a gift of teaching and leadership, when I became a Christian, it wasn’t like someone said, “Oh, the Church heard you got saved yesterday. Teaching and leading? Great. We want to give you a church.” That’s not how it works. It starts to show itself in small groups, small settings. We have people who serve on our parking team with the gift of teaching. So, when those parking volunteers show up, they say, “Hey guys, before we go out and find our spots, I read this in God’s word today. I want to encourage you with this.” They give a word. They share from the Bible and they teach something, and they use that gift. As people affirm that gift and the sovereign God creates space for that gift.

People leave the church frustrated all the time saying, “They didn’t use my gift.” Well, there’s a lot of you. The responsibility is on you to be faithful. Walk in faithfulness to use those gifts and trust God to create for you those opportunities to use them as you walk in faithfulness. Even the word “gift” is interesting. You ever thought about that? If someone is good at basketball, we call them “gifted.” Or someone is really smart, “She’s really gifted.” That is an interesting word. Gifted. We aren’t saying, “She’s really worked hard to be smart.” No, we are saying she was gifted smarts, intellect. That someone gave that to her. This removes all of your ability to be puffed up with pride. God in His sovereignty, mercy, and grace determined where you live, the family that you grow up in, your surroundings, your journey that has shaped you. He did this.

It’s kind of like when a seven-foot-tall basketball player dunks the ball then pounds their chest saying, “Look at me. Look at me.” What did you do to be seven-foot-tall? Nothing. Nothing. God did that. He brought you into the world that way. So, we walk in faithfulness with humility. If someone has to create an opportunity for you to use your gift, it may not be a gift. That is something to consider. I also want to tell you something about your giftedness. Your giftedness will not develop godliness. Only you, remaining close to Jesus, will do that. As you serve Jesus faithfully with your gifts, godliness may be produced, but your giftedness will not produce godliness in and of itself. We have to remember that our gifts are not for us. I said one of the greatest mistakes that we can make is to use them for selfish gain.

Here is the illustration I use to expound on this, I’ve used it before. You guys know my affection for Tesla. I want a Tesla. I am saving to have a Tesla one day. My kids know they are going to

community college so I can have a Tesla one day. But let's just say you give in the offering back there and when this is done, I just go back and I'm like "Oh this is enough for a Tesla." And I take that offering and I buy my car. You need to be outraged at that. That is where you leave the church. You say, "Hey, that's scandalous. Because the emotion would be, "that's not why we gave that gift! That's not what that was for!" I think that is how the Spirit of God must feel toward some of us as we take our gifts and we use them to try to make a bigger, happier, more comfortable us. It's like, "That's not why I gave you that gift. That was for the Church. That was for the body." So, this should be your posture: I have been given gifts, by God, to be deployed for His church. The impact for God's glory should match the gift that I use in faith. I should use my gift in accordance with the faith given me, for the glory of God. When you walk by faith, when faithfulness marks you, humility marks you. Then our gifts flourish.

He says this in verse four, **"Just as each of us has one body with many members and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts according to the grace given to each of us."** He expounds on this again. He says the gifts belong to the body. There is an illusion here to the importance of membership. There is a baked in illustration here. He uses the human body. He says as the body moves forward, it goes, with the members of itself functioning together, so does the church. You could imagine if I had a dismembered arm up here that is sitting here, bloody with a bone hanging out. Some of you winced and vomited in your mouth a little bit. "Ew! That's grotesque. Yuck." As it is with someone outside the body. That was never God's intention. It was that we would be members of the local expression of the church, certainly the universal Church, but also under the authority of the local expression of the church. This is God's design, His vision that He cast for us here.

I know that there is a school of thought out there, an old – actually I should not say old, it is a modern thought that, "The Church exists for me. You need to feed me. I'm just not getting fed. I'm not growing. The church exists for me." This is what I want to say to that, "you have never been a part of the church. And, if you keep that way of thinking, you will die, placed in a casket, buried six feet underground having lived your entire life never having been a part of the church as God intended. That is an unbiblical way of thinking, an antibiblical way of thinking, a satanic way of thinking."

The church does not exist for you. You are a member of the church that exists to serve the greater body. Here is how the Bible Knowledge Commentary says it. I love the Bible Knowledge Commentary if you want a great commentary, it is a great one. It says, "Each member exists to serve the body, not the body to serve the members." That is a biblical view of church. Now you have heard me say that consumerism church, or cultural Christianity, is one of the strongest satanic forces in our land today. I believe that. Many of us are victims of that, it is the air we breathe, but this paints a picture of diversity among the gifts.

## *2. There is a Diversity of Gifts Among the Church*

There is a picture of this today (holds up a heart-shaped box of candy). "Monica, if you are watching, this is for you, but I needed to borrow it this morning. As soon as I get home, I will

give it back to you.” So, a box of chocolates, right? “Church is like a box of chocolate” (Forrest Gump impression). Thanks for humoring me, I tried to dial that in, but it wasn’t happening. We have all kinds, the squishy ones, the creamy ones, soft ones. We have the hard ones, the hard pieces, the nutty ones are here. You know who you are. Maybe you don’t, but we know who you are. We all come together with one common love for Jesus Christ. We sit here all together, different, diversity. But what we have in common is a common love and affection for the bridegroom, Jesus Christ.

We can think about those things that keep us from using our gifts, like coveting someone else’s gift. What if I gave Monica the sewing machine, I’m excited and I did my research, but she opens it up and she says, “Oh, I really wanted her sewing machine. This isn’t really the one I wanted.” That’s not grateful. I wouldn’t feel loved in that. Another one is neglecting your gift. You receive the gift and you put it in the closet and you never open it, never use it as it was intended. That would be a tragedy. But this third one, this is a big one. You’re going to learn something in the next two minutes, I want you to lean in on this – that is resenting someone’s gift.

In the past two years I have seen this a lot. So right now, I know it is a little bit of a mystery, but it is about to become crystal clear here in just a moment. Typically, what this looks like is you have a wiring and someone else in the body has a different wiring. And because of your wirings and your giftings from the Holy Spirit (God given gifts) - because you are different and handle situations differently - you begin to resent each other. Typically, this is two ends of the spectrum. Someone has the gift of mercy (that is a spiritual gift, mercy) and compassion, they feel deep empathy. And someone else has a gift of exhortation, truth telling, teaching, prophecy. Those two handle situations differently and they begin to resent each other. One person says, “You’re enabling them. Stop enabling.” The other person says, “Wow. You’re really mean. That’s unkind. Why would you be unkind?” And in reality, they are both operating in their spiritual gifts.

Let me paint the picture like this: Let’s say this week, there is someone downtown asking for a dollar for food. “Excuse me sir? Can I have a dollar for some food?” They appear to be homeless, present like they are homeless. “Excuse my may I have a dollar for some food? I’m hungry. It’s cold outside.” And four Harris Creek members walk by him. Let me show you four different responses. The first person says, “Oh, you need a dollar for some food? Hold on, I’ll be right back.” They go inside, they get a hamburger, they get some beef jerky, a bag of pistachios, two bottles of water, and a blanket. They return outside and say, “Here. I got this for you.” That was their response. That was their effort to be the hands and feet of Jesus. That was “Person One”.

“Person Two” - the homeless man says, “Excuse me sir can I have a dollar? I’m hungry.” They respond, “You’re hungry? You know I’m having my Life Group over today in our backyard. We have a fire, and I was going to grill some burgers. Why don’t you come over and hang out with us? Now that I think about it, we actually have a backhouse that is empty right now. Why don’t you come in from the storm, stay in our backhouse, and hang out with our Life Group? Today you can eat with us. I got you.” That was “Person Two”.

“Person Three” - “Excuse me ma’am, sir, may I have a dollar? I am hungry.” “You’re hungry? It’s so cold out here. Let’s sit down for a second.” They put their arm around him and ask, “Tell me, how did you get here? What are you doing out here?” They are moved to tears and feel so deeply for them. “Let me pray for you right now.” They pray for the man and go on about their day and it just sits heavy on their heart. They are thinking about ministries that they can start to care for people on the streets. They are moved to tears multiple times that week as they think about that person. They have prayed for them more than any human being has ever been prayed for. They constantly pray like, “God please!” They feel so deeply for them. That was “Person Three”.

“Person Four” - “Excuse me? Can I have a dollar? I’m hungry. I’d like to get some food.” “What are you doing out here? Hey, you can’t just be out here asking people for money. That’s not safe for you, that’s not safe for them. Do you understand you are going to make people uncomfortable in the way that you do that? Do you have a place to stay? I know of some shelters. Can you get a job? What skills do you have? Let’s talk about how you got in this situation. I heard about a company that is hiring. Come with me and I will give you the number of the company that I know is hiring. We need to get you a job and get you out of this situation.” That was “Person Four”.

Who is God pleased with? Who used their gift? All of them. They all used their gift in accordance with the faith that was given them. It wouldn’t be right to say only the person who wept and cried and prayed, or to say only the person who gave them an appropriate path forward - they have different gifts. We have all kinds of different people in here. All kinds of people make up the body of Christ. We can appreciate different people’s giftings without resenting them. There is a person who coddles, and cries, and cares for, and shows mercy. Then there is a person who is courageous, and bold, and speaks truth. The person who coddles also has to share truth. The person who is courageous also has to be kind. We learn that from each other. It is a sanctifying work, church is.

God is in the process, by the power of His Holy Spirit, conforming us to the image and the character of His son. And He uses those around us. There are some of us that can’t stand somebody wired differently than us. You need to beg God for more grace, a softer heart, that we would be able to lock arms and be the most powerful force the world has ever seen. In our diversity we can experience unity under the one love of Jesus Christ. That is when the world is confused. That is when they say, “That’s power. What is going on over there?” Because what typically happens is all the mercy people group up together and go to one church. They say, “No, we can’t stand those people. They are so prophetic and hard and courageous and bleh. Let’s group up over here and love people.” It’s like the body trying to walk with two left feet. It’s clumsy.

Then you get the prophets. The exhorters, the admonishers. They all group up. If they started a business, it would be successful because they are driven, they don’t need sleep. “Let’s go, we’re smart, let’s go!” They all group up. And they will pound you with their two right hands. It would be a total beating in the long term. The real church, the real church, is made up of all the giftings. There is an appreciation. The prophet can look and say, “I love the way you love people.” The



merciful person can say, “I love the way that you share truth.” Everybody can use their gifts together. It’s diversity. We must pursue unity in our diversity.

There are so many people that move this mission forward, I want to thank you. The parking team and the AV team. There are people that woke up this morning and thought, “Should I go to church?” It’s a great question. There’s no shame in what I am saying right now. And there were people that woke up this morning that weren’t able to ask that question. They were like, “We have to get a message into the hands of the people, so I have to figure out a way to get there.” I showed up and I am like the twenty-seventh car in the parking lot. How great is that? My boy, Drew, texted me at 5:30 this morning about the road conditions. There is a team of people making this happen and they are not staff people. Morgan in the back woke up this morning at Baylor and drove in her car here to make this happen. I am so thankful!

Bud Wilkinson, anyone know who Bud Wilkinson is? Yes, one of you. This is for you. He was a coach at the University of Oklahoma back in the day. He was interviewed and the journalist asked him, “What do you think America can learn as it related to health and wellness from college football?” Bud Wilkinson didn’t pause. He said, “Absolutely nothing. College football is twenty-two guys in desperate need of a break and fifty-thousand people watching in desperate need of exercise.” As you think about that, that could be a picture, an example, of the church. You have twenty-two people in desperate need of a break, caring kid’ s ministry forward; life-group; re-gen; other ministries; Sunday morning; AV/technology team. They carry the ministry forward while so many others show up just to be a spectator. There was no spectator church in Jesus’ day. That would not make sense to the apostles.

Verse 6: **“If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith. If it is serving, then serve, if it is teaching, then teach. If it is to encourage, then give encouragement. If it is giving, then give generously. If it is to lead, do it diligently. If it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.”** He says you could have the gift of prophesy, of serving, of teaching, the gift of encouraging, the gift of giving, the gift of leading, the gift of mercy. But everyone, every believer has a gift and should use it in the local church. No one here, using the metaphor of the human body, no one here is the appendix. You know what I mean by that? I don’t even have mine. They removed it. They don’t know what it does. Nobody is the appendix. You cannot be a part of the local church and say, “I don’t have a function. I’m just hanging on here with other people.” His admonishment is to identify your gifts and use them.

### *3. Identify Your Gifts and Use Them*

Our mission statement is, “Empower members for service.” We want to help. We have a team of people that would love to meet with you. And people have asked me about spiritual gift tests. They ask, “How can I find out what my gift is?” Here is a powerful question. As you exist in a Life Group, as you have been with that group at least six months, simply ask them this question: “How could you see me benefitting the body of Harris Creek?” I guarantee that those people who love you and have come around side you, that God has provided to you, will have an answer to that. “How could you see me benefitting the body of Harris Creek?”

There is also this aspect of where are the needs. What are the needs that are here? What are the gifts that you have? Everybody is given different gifts. But here is what I know, you will only be held accountable to using the gifts that you have been given. But you will be held accountable to using the gift that you have been give. My wife says this, and she has given me permission to say this, she would say this if she were here, “I am a two-talent person. I have been given two gifts.” But can I tell you something? She makes a bigger impact than many ten-talent people that I know because she faithfully uses her two talents. She encourages people, she cares for little ones, and she loves the elderly, faithfully. You have to use the gifts that you have been given. Your giftedness won’t produce Godliness. Using your giftedness to serve Jesus is faithfulness.

So, let me show you the service opportunities here at Harris Creek, there are eighty-five service opportunities here. Each of those commas represent new service opportunities. The bold letters represent areas: kids and youth, college and community, frontlines, worship, production, creative, Sisterhood – our women’s ministry, Re: gen, our marriage ministry, our men’s ministry, and miscellaneous. This makes eighty-five individual service opportunities. Some of those eighty-five are actually teams, so there are hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of opportunities to serve here at Harris Creek.

But maybe you are like, “But I am already serving in this other ministry in Waco. Does it count?” The reason I say, “Does it count?” is because in order for you to be a member of Harris Creek, you have to be serving. If that sounds to you like a high bar, let me explain that that would not be a thing in the first century church. To be a member of the first century church would mean to serve. Those two things would be synonymous. No one would have to make that distinction. We make that distinction because somewhere along church history there has been a vision leak, there has been a drippage.

There is a thinking now, a modern thinking, that I can just go to church. No, no, no! If you are going to be a member here, then you’re going to be a part of what God is doing here and use your gifts here. That is the most loving thing that we can do. You might be like, “I serve outside the church with this ministry, does it count?” I would say, probably. There are six ministries in Waco that we have built partnership with. We know the leadership there, they come here, we work and train together.

And so, if you are passionate about human trafficking you can serve with Unbound Ministry. If you are passionate about homeless, hunger, and basic needs, you can serve with Compassion or Caritas or Mission Waco. These are ministries that we work with. If you are passionate about family, foster, and orphan care you can serve with Arrow. If you are passionate about sanctity of life, you can serve with our ministry partner Care Net. All of these passions are biblical. They are good, they are things that God cares about. The last thing I want to do is create drudgery for you. I don’t want to create high barricades that you have to jump over. If you are like, “I’m serving in this other great ministry that you didn’t mention.” Well awesome. Let’s talk. Let’s have a conversation. I am sure that we can figure something out. The last thing that I want is to pull you off the mission that God has you on. But if you are not serving, remember that number, 35% are. If you are not serving, there is something that you can do.

Here is something that I want everyone to do. If you are here or at home. If you are in Waco and surrounding areas, if you are part of Harris Creek and you can come here, what I want you to do is pull out your phone. Would everyone pull out your phone. I appreciate it. Before I tell you what to do, I will tell you what it is. What we have done is we have created this system where we can right now, simultaneously get everyone in the game. We have created a first serve opportunity that is our prayer team. This is not every prayer request we receive. These are those 911 prayers that are appropriate to send to a team within the larger body. What you can do right now, is sign up to be on that team. Even if you serve on another team, you can sign up right now to be on that team if you would like to pray for those. When they come to you, all you have to do is stop what you are doing and say a prayer.

Prayer is powerful, it is effective, it is important. It is an important area of ministry. Also, that allows for us when we have unique service opportunities to let you know through this same line of communication. We can say, “Hey, we really need someone to come help build this booth.” Or “We need four volunteers for kids’ ministry.” Or “Hey, today, there was ice on the road, and we are really short-handed in this area. If you are going to be here, is there any way you can jump in with us in this area?” We can communicate that to you, and you can jump in with us where appropriate, where your gifts match the need or opportunity. It can be something around graphic design. It can be legal, or something around mechanical engineering. It can be software engineering. All kind of things. We may send those needs out and as you see them you can sign up. Of course, you can opt out at any time by texting “Stop.”

I would love for you, if you are willing, to jump in on this service opportunity with us, especially if you are not currently serving. This is how we can communicate more about that to you. The way you do that is by texting two words, all together, no space, “startsserving” to 97000. You put in the number 97000 and you text “startsserving” and you will get a response from us, thanking you for joining such an important team. Immediately we get those four-hundred people, who are not serving, in the game.

Maybe you are serving, and you say, “I want that too.” That’s great too. We can communicate with you in that way. Thank you.

In summary, your gifts are hidden by pride and used with faith. There is a diversity of gifts among the church. So, the admonishment is to identify your gifts and use them. Identify your gifts and use them.

Last week I was at a dinner with my Life Group. Kids were there. Families were there. My friend, Kyle Laroe, asked me this question – you know we are just sitting around the table, “Hey, Mr. Pokluda, what’s your biggest fear?” Just been raised well, He knows when he is around adults to ask questions. “What is your biggest fear?” I think he was expecting snakes or spiders or heights or something. I just said, “Missing out on my purpose is my biggest fear.” He said, “What do you mean by that?” I said, “Not using what has been given to me faithfully. Not faithfully stewarding what God has entrusted to me.” That is a real fear of mine. Especially in the church, as you begin to write. And that not-for-profit world can begin to overlap for the for-profit world. It gets weird. I just want to be faithful. I told him that is my biggest fear that I would not

be faithful with whatever God has entrusted to me to steward. If that seems like a weird answer to you, I think Jesus would connect with that. I think in a way Jesus would agree with that. Because there is this story.

When I say, Monica says she is a two-talent person, that comes from this story – The Parable of the Talents. It shows up in Matthew 25. The story, if you have been in church long you have probably heard it, one person was entrusted with five talents. One person was entrusted with two talents. And one person was entrusted with one talent. The person who was entrusted with five talents, doubles it and gathered ten talents and is told **“Well done my good and faithful servant.”** The person who was given two talents, used those talents to double their kingdom work and the master said, **“Well done my good and faithful servant.”** The person who was entrusted with one talent, buried it, did nothing with it, put the gift on the shelf. They left the gift wrapped and didn’t use it. They didn’t put in the time to identify it. This is what Jesus said to them, I am reading to you the words of Jesus, **“Take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. For whoever has, will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them, and throw that worthless servant outside into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”**

Jesus, who has the gift of compassion and mercy and kindness, seems to say, “If they don’t, send them to hell.” It’s just like WHAT? You should feel right not that that is a really weird way to end this message. But that is how Jesus ended the message. That is what Jesus said. I am literally just reading to you. When Jesus talked about this, that is how He ended His message. Here is why. He has come so that you may have life and have it to the fullest. He knows this is where life is. I cannot tell you; experientially, how many times people have started to serve for the first time using their gifts in the local church and they say, “JP, I have never felt so alive.” And I always think, we that is because this is the first time you are living. Without that, you will have a thin layer of sadness. A thin layer of missing out on your purpose. A thin layer of aimlessly wandering through life. But when you plug in and you begin to use your gifts as they were intended, even if you think this is not all that important, God uses it and begins to save lives through you. And you think, “I’ve never felt so alive.”

Very rarely, in fact I can’t think of an example of someone who has come up to me and said, “When you preached this, when you said these words, my life was changed forever.” It has always been, “You said that sermon and then I bumped into one of the people who was serving there. They helped me understand. They prayed with me. They showed me what to do next and my life was changed.” That’s the simple church. Let’s go! My heart for you, that you would get in the game and that you would find life as Jesus intended.

Let me pray for you. Father, would You help us do exactly that. To get in the game and to find life as You intended. I am reminded that You started that whole section with humility. We have to walk in humility. I think sometimes there are insecurities, God, that keep us from walking in humility. You know better than I can say or articulate here, if that is true, would you show it to us. Help us to walk in humility. To know You. To do as You have said. To love You. Father I am so thankful for all that You have given us through your son. The ways that you have gifted us

through your son. As we just reflect on that now, would You open our hearts and minds. Open our hearts and minds to that reality. To the Gospel. To the new life we have in Jesus. To the purpose that You have given us through the Holy Spirit. In His name, Amen.