

Hope Church South Haven September 13th 2026

Romans 12:3-8

Life is better together: REACH

I want to start today by putting something on the table that may be a little uncomfortable. And I want you to HEAR MY HEART before you **hear the challenge**.

- I'm not trying to shame anybody today.
- I'm not trying to make you feel guilty because you missed something or didn't sign up for something.
- And I'm definitely not standing up here pretending I get this right. Because I don't.

But there is something that has been bothering me. And I don't think I can preach this passage honestly without saying it.

I am sold out to Jesus. I've given my life to this. I believe with everything in me that Jesus is alive. That the *gospel is true*. That GOD'S KINGDOM is breaking into this world. And I believe the **local church** is one of the **primary ways God has chosen to make that Kingdom visible**.

- I believe we need to be the people running toward the BROKEN and the LONELY and the STRUGGLING.

- We need to care about the POOR and the VULNERABLE.
- We need to be unashamed of the GOOD NEWS OF JESUS.
- We need to be bringing hope into DARK PLACES and grace into MESSY LIVES.

That's what I want my life to be about. **And that's what I want Hope Church to be about.** I'm not interested in simply packing this room on Sunday mornings. I'm not interested in building something that makes me look successful. And as important as budgets are, I don't want our greatest accomplishment to be that we paid all the bills.

I want us to make a difference. I want SOUTH HAVEN to be different because this church is here. Because you are part of us.

And here's the part where I need to be honest. Sometimes I get frustrated. Because when I look at my own life. When I look at the life of this church. I wonder whether we actually believe **this is as important as we say it is**. Because we are busy.

We have *jobs* and *kids* and *practices* and *tournaments* and *dance* and *golf* and *vacations* and the *cottage* and the *lake* and the *lawn*. A thousand good things competing for our time. And none of those things are bad.

But good things can still **become unhealthy things**.

And sometimes I wonder whether *we've built lives so full of good things* that there's simply no room left for the things Jesus told us matter most.

- We'll check the sports schedule **before we commit to serving.**
- We'll make sure nothing else is happening **before we say yes to helping somebody.**
- We'll give God whatever is left **after everything else has had its turn.**

And I'm including myself in this. Faith can slowly become a side hustle. Something IMPORTANT to me but not something that **actually rearranges my life.**

And that bothers me.

Because JESUS didn't give us his leftovers. JESUS didn't squeeze us into an opening in his schedule. **He gave himself. He gave everything** to RECONCILE us to God. To FORGIVE us. To BRING us home. To CALL us sons and daughters.

And then somehow we convince ourselves that *following him* should cost us almost nothing.

- An hour on Sunday when we're in town.
- A little money if there's enough left.

- Serve if it fits the schedule.
- Help when it's convenient.

You need to hear the grace in this:

- Jesus does not love you because of how much you serve.
- You **cannot earn his love** by volunteering more.
- You cannot make God more pleased with you *by exhausting yourself*.

The gospel IS NOT: Do more so God will love you.

The gospel IS: Because of Jesus **you are already loved beyond anything you could earn**.

But grace does something to us. When I begin to understand what Jesus has given me, *I start asking: Jesus, what can I give?* Not to pay him back. But because **a life overwhelmed by grace eventually becomes a life poured out for others.**

And that brings us to the last word in our DNA.

- We BELONG.
- We GROW.
- And we REACH.

Because LIFE IS BETTER TOGETHER but it was never supposed to stop with us.

Let's read from **ROMANS 12:3-8**.

Before we jump into verse 3, here's what you need to know.

- PAUL is writing to Christians in Rome. Incredibly *diverse faith community*. Gathered in **different locations**. Jews and Gentiles. Rich and poor. Different backgrounds and *different stories* and **different ways of seeing the world**.
- For the first eleven chapters Paul explains the gospel. What God has done for us in Jesus.
- And then chapter 12 begins with *one massive sentence*:

Therefore...in view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as a living sacrifice.

- Paul is saying: Look at EVERYTHING God has done for you. Look at the mercy He has shown you.
- The *only reasonable response* is **to give your entire life to Him**.
- And the very first place Paul takes that? How we see ourselves and how we see each other.

Verse 3:

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.

- Paul's FIRST MOVE isn't a volunteer signup sheet. It's an **honest look in the mirror**.
- There's a *wordplay in the Greek*. Paul keeps repeating the word THINK – **φρονεῖν** (phronein).
- His point is simple: HUMILITY isn't thinking less of yourself. It's **thinking accurately about yourself**.
- And we usually get this *wrong in one of two directions*.
 - ⇒ **We think too much of ourselves** – I'm the important one. I need the platform. I need the recognition. I need people to notice what I bring.
 - ⇒ **We think too little of ourselves** – I'm not a leader. I don't know the Bible well enough. Somebody else can do it. They don't really need me. I'm not important.
- Paul challenges both. Whatever GIFTS or ABILITIES or TALENTS you have, **God gave it to you**.
- *REACH starts with an honest look in the mirror*: What has God given me? And what am I doing with it?

Verses 4-5:

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.

- Paul says we are one body in Christ. That little phrase matters.
- **Our unity isn't something we manufacture.** We aren't one because we all *agree on everything* and *vote the same* and *worship the same* and *like the same things*.
- We are ONE because we belong to Jesus.
- And then Paul says something even stronger. We don't just belong to Jesus. **We belong to each other.**
- That pushes against the way we tend to *think about church*. We tend to think: My FAITH. My RELATIONSHIP with Jesus. My CHURCH. What am I getting out of this?
- Paul says Christianity is deeply personal, but it was **never meant to be private**.
- We are part of a body. But I am not the whole body and you are not the whole body.
- I need you. And whether you realize it or not, you need me.

Verse 6a:

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.

- Now Paul MOVES to **what you bring to the body**. To His church. To GOD'S KINGDOM.
- And I love his language: **your gift and talents and abilities is connected to grace**.

You didn't earn it. You didn't manufacture it. God gave it to you.

⇒ Which means I *can't be arrogant* about what I have. I have it because of grace.

⇒ But I also *shouldn't dismiss* what I have. I have it because of grace.

- God INTENTIONALLY put different gifts in **different people**.
- You are *not supposed to be good at everything*. You are not supposed to look like the person next to you. You don't have to do what somebody else does.
- **But you do have something to offer.**
- REACH means realizing that somebody may be missing what God has given you to give. Not because you have nothing to offer. **But because you're still wondering if you do.**

Verses 6b-8:

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.

- Then Paul gives us a list of gifts FUNCTIONING in the church. And honestly, most of them don't sound **very impressive**. Most of that just looks like *ordinary people showing up and being useful*.

⇒ **Serving**: see a need and do something about it.

⇒ **Teaching**: help someone understand truth and live the truth.

⇒ **Encouraging**: come alongside someone with the words they need.

⇒ **Giving**: share what you have without needing something back.

⇒ **Leading**: take responsibility and do it faithfully.

⇒ **Mercy**: notice hurting people and care for them.

- Paul isn't DESCRIBING **Christian celebrities**. He's DESCRIBING ordinary people using what God has given them for the sake of someone else.

- It's not just about using my gifts, *it's about how I use it*.

⇒ Give generously.

⇒ Lead diligently.

⇒ Show mercy cheerfully.

- Because you can **do the right thing with the wrong spirit**. You can SERVE resentfully. You can LEAD lazily. You can CARE FOR SOMEBODY while making them feel like a chore.

- People can always tell the difference between being loved and **being handled**.
- That's Paul's picture of the church:
 - ⇒ **Ordinary people.**
 - ⇒ With different gifts.
 - ⇒ *Using them* faithfully and graciously *for each other*.

Two things we need to take away for Hope Church:

#1 Stop saying: I have nothing to offer.

- DIFFERENT doesn't mean unnecessary. Not useful.
- Not everybody gets a microphone. We already have *enough podcasts* and *pastors* and *influencers*.
 - ⇒ Somebody teaches. Somebody leads. Somebody gives. Somebody encourages.
 - Somebody notices the person sitting alone. Somebody shows up with a meal. Somebody fixes the thing the rest of us have been walking past for three months.
- And here's what I love about the KINGDOM OF GOD: **most of it happens where nobody applauds.**
- Paul reminds us that we notice the platform. **God notices the whole body.**
- And I know some of you struggle with the idea that you don't have anything to offer.

- *Paul doesn't leave much room for that excuse.*
 - ⇒ You don't need a theology degree.
 - ⇒ You don't need to be outgoing.
 - ⇒ You don't need a platform.
 - ⇒ And you don't need to have your life perfectly together.
- Stop looking at what somebody else has and ask: **What has God already put in my hands?**
 - ⇒ Maybe you've walked through grief, and now you know **how to sit beside somebody** without trying to fix them.
 - ⇒ Maybe you've raised teenagers and **lived to tell the story**. That's basically a spiritual gift.
 - ⇒ *Maybe you can fix things.*
 - ⇒ Maybe you have a truck. Which means in church language you're part of the staff.
 - ⇒ Maybe you're simply the **person who notices the person** everybody else walks past.
- Even some of the *hardest things you've lived through* may become something **God uses to love somebody else**.
- FREDERICK BUECHNER said:

The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's
deep hunger meet.

- Maybe we've made calling way too complicated.
⇒ **Stop asking:** Is what I have good enough? Impressive enough?
⇒ **Rather ask:** What has God put in my hands? And where is there a need in front of me?
⇒ *Then bring the two together.*
- Because the KINGDOM OF GOD doesn't move forward because a **few gifted people**
do spectacular things. It moves forward when *ordinary people* take whatever God has
put in their hands and say:

Jesus, you can use this. Jesus, you can use me.

#2 STOP WAITING TO FEEL NEEDED.

- Paul says something in verse 5 that is easy to miss: *Each member belongs to all the others.*

- That changes belonging completely.
 ⇒ Belonging isn't just: **These are my people when I need them.**
 ⇒ Eventually belonging becomes: **I am one of their people when they need me.**
- And then Paul gets almost annoyingly clear. He doesn't say if your gift is serving:
 ⇒ *Pray about serving.*
 ⇒ Wait until life settles down.
 ⇒ **Check the kids' sports calendar** and see if there's **an opening sometime in 2029.**
- He says: If it is serving, then serve. If God gave it to you, use it.
- Because the tragedy isn't that you *have nothing to offer*.
- The tragedy would be getting to the end of your life and realizing God put something in your hands that could have blessed somebody.
- And you SPENT FORTY YEARS WAITING for a **better time to use it.**
- And then that time never comes.
- When I say use your gift, don't immediately think church building. Yes, we need you here.
But GOD'S KINGDOM needs you out there.

- Your gift is needed at school and at work and on your team and around your dinner table and across the fence from the neighbor whose name you barely know.
- REACH was never supposed to mean: How do we get everybody in South Haven to come to Hope Church?
- It means: **How does the love of Jesus get out of Hope Church and into South Haven?** And the answer is: through you.
- Every Sunday we gather. And every Sunday God scatters us again. In a couple of minutes, this room will be empty. The lights will go off. The doors will close.
- **But the church won't be empty.** Because the church isn't this room.
 - ⇒ The church will be driving down Phoenix Street.
 - ⇒ The church will be standing on soccer fields and golf courses.
 - ⇒ The church will walk into classrooms tomorrow morning.
 - ⇒ The church will clock in at work.
 - ⇒ The church will sit beside somebody in a hospital room.
- **This room will be empty. But the church will be everywhere**
- And maybe somebody in SOUTH HAVEN is going to experience the love of Jesus this week because **you finally used what God put in your hands.**

And maybe that's the picture I want you to remember from this whole series.

*Belong somewhere. **Grow with someone.** Reach someone.*

That's the kind of church I want us to be. Not simply a church with a full calendar and a full building. **A church full of people so overwhelmed by the grace of Jesus** that we start saying:

Jesus, everything I have comes from you. My time. My story. My abilities. My house. My table.

My money. Even the painful parts of my story I never would have chosen.

It's yours. Use it.

And that's why we're putting this pamphlet in your hand today. Please don't throw it on the floor of your car where church pamphlets go to die. Take it home. Look at it.

- And don't ask: *Which of these things should somebody else do?*
- Rather ask: **What's my next step?**

You don't have to do everything. **But you can do something.** Because you are part of this body. You have something to offer.

MARTIN LUTHER said:

God does not need your good works, but your neighbor does.

- We BELONG together.
- We GROW together.
- We REACH together.

Because life really is better together.