

VII. Spiritual Gifts in Biblical Perspective  
*Discovering, Developing and Deploying our Spiritual Gifts*  
“Spiritual Gifts – Three Essentials”

Romans 12:1–8

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This is God’s Word for the people of God to the glory of God. It is inspired, inerrant, infallible, reliable and sufficient. Romans 12:1-8 says *[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. [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.*

*[3] 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. [4] For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, [5] so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. [6] Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; [7] if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; [8] the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of our God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

In this series we are looking at two authors – Peter and Paul – and four texts – I Peter 4:10-11 and I Corinthians 12 we have already looked at. We are now at the third text in Romans 12 and the last text we’ll look at is Ephesians 4. In I Peter 4 we looked at the five framing principles of spiritual gifts for you can’t build the house without the framework. Paul gave us ten understanding principles on spiritual gifts from I Corinthians 12. Discipleship has a cascading effect in the mission of the church and Paul had to disciple the church at Corinth after he left because pagan practices began to creep back in. Discipleship starts in the pulpit and then goes down to the Sunday school communities to small groups to one on one. Spiritual gifts must be embraced with Biblical discipleship because every great gift of God as a spiritual gift is given to every believer, becomes an attack point by Satan. Satan wants to bring confusion and distortion and make things not of unity but of division.

Here is a summation of what we have already covered. A spiritual gift is a God designed and God delivered ministry resources to be used for God’s glory in concert with other believers, enabling Christ’s church to effectively exalt Christ. Spiritual gifts are never to function independently. When everyone shows up using their gifts then Christ’s church can be on our mission of making disciples of all the nations through worship, evangelism, assimilation and disciple making as the church stays on mission, on message and in ministry for the glory of God by the strength which God supplies to us.

Now we come to Romans 12 and particularly in Romans 12:3-8 the Apostle Paul is teaching us about spiritual gifts which is very similar yet much shorter than I Corinthians 12 but it’s worthy to look at for its own content and application. Like every text of Scripture, I want to

give you context to the text of Scripture we are about to look at and there are three issues of context that goes with this content. Here are the three things.

The first thing is, it is a premiere example of how Paul writes the epistles. This is right at the point to grab our attention to the Pauline pattern of writing holy Scripture. Paul gives us a clue to this when he talks about the profile of God's Word. II Timothy 3:16-17 says *[16] All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.* Preachers must not speak to the conscience of life without first establishing with integrity the doctrine from the Sacred Text. Disciplers must not speak to the consciences of how you live your life without rooting first what is spoken demonstrably with integrity from the doctrine that comes rightly from the text. We need to incarnate this in our way of life for Christ.

This is exactly what Paul does in every single epistle. Paul's opening chapters are always doctrinal. He gives us foundational teaching. Ephesians 1 through 3 lays out what it means for us to be in Christ and he says 'in Christ' 28 times in those three chapters. Paul gives us our blessings in Christ here. Ephesians 1:3-4 says *[3] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, [4] even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him.* In Ephesians 4 through 6 is how you are to bless Christ in your walk. Ephesians 4:1-3 says *[1] I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, [2] with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, [3] eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* He doesn't get to your life without telling you who you are in Christ, then he tells you what you do for Christ lest we think what we do for Christ saves us or enables Him to save us. No, it is because He has saved us and enabled us and that's why we live the way we do.

Paul has 13 epistles and every one of them except the personal ones – Philemon, Titus, I and II Timothy – all are set in that pattern as he writes to the church. Romans is no exception. What is Romans about? It is an exposition of the Triatic Gospel of God in Jesus Christ. For 11 chapters Paul extols the majesty, magnificence, supremacy of Christ through the Gospel to the glory of the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit. The greatest chapter on the Holy Spirit is Romans 8. At the end of Romans 11 Paul ends with a doxology. Romans 11:33-36 says *[33] Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways!*

*[34] "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counselor?" [35] "Or who has given a gift to Him that He might be repaid?" [36] For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen.* Now we are ready for application as we go into Romans 12. Doxology in gathered worship leads to worship in life that's lived.

Romans 12:1 says *[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 it says 'by the mercies of God...' and not 'for the mercies of God...' This is not what you do to get mercy but this is what you do because of grace and mercy. Spiritual worship is life worship flowing from the doxology of our saving relationship with Christ undergirded by gathered worship, but you didn't get a new mind. We still have stinkin' thinkin' and we wake up with it every morning.

Romans 12:2 says [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.*

Why would Paul tell us not be conformed to this world if the world wasn't trying to conform us? I want you to know and love Jesus. I get about 40 to 50 minutes of your time but how much time does Fox News get of your time, or any other news media or social media, twitter or FaceBook or the computer or TV get of your time? This is such a challenge because you can't do right for God's glory by God's grace unless you know what's right. That's why the preaching of the Word and discipleship is so crucial. That is why Paul begins application with the Spirit enabled Word transformation. Transformed is another word for metamorphosis which is how an ugly caterpillar becomes a beautiful butterfly – a metamorphosis in the cocoon – and that's what happens to us in discipleship. We are legally perfect and beautiful before Jesus but we are being transformed by the means of grace for Jesus. When people see how we conduct ourselves verbally and visually in life, God gets the glory. That's what He calls us to be and to do, but you can't do it without this transformation.

Secondly, what is the first application in the context? Romans 12 through 16 tells us how we are going to live this beautiful Gospel as we have renewed minds transformed by the Word of God and the Spirit of God through the preeminence of Christ through the grace of God. The first transformation practice priority Paul gives to us is spiritual gifts. Once we have a renewed mind Paul takes us right to spiritual gifts in Romans 12:3-8.

The third context issue is it not only has to fit in what goes before, but it also has to fit into what comes after. Romans 12:3-8 ends with 'let love be sincere (genuine, real).' It's interesting to note that Peter wrapped up spiritual gifts similarly when he said 'let love of the brethren continue.' Paul followed his exposition on spiritual gifts in I Corinthians 12 with I Corinthians 13 which is known as the love chapter. He will do the same thing in Ephesians 4 as he again will follow up there on spiritual gifts with 'let love be genuine.'

So, the first slice of the bread is a renewed mind, followed by the meat of spiritual gifts and the next slice of the bread being a true and sincere love of the brethren and the ministry of those gifts – those who minister and those whom we minister to. With those three contextual points in your mind, let's now take a look at the text itself.

Romans 12:3-8 says [3] *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. [4] For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, [5] so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. [6] Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; [7] if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; [8] the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.*

Some people when they are teaching you about spiritual gifts verbally, they are actually showing you how to do spiritual gifts visually. Paul's gift is preaching and teaching. His ministry is as an Apostle. Paul received his gift the same way any believer gets them and that's through God's grace. That is why they are known as 'charismata' for it means gift of grace. What is the first thing we learn here about spiritual gifts? We cannot minister spiritual gifts if we are self-obsessed. Humility is absolutely crucial for stewardship, whatever it is. We own nothing. Everything we have has been given to us. We cannot use any of our resources

including spiritual gifts, unless step one – it is no longer I who live, do not think more highly of yourself than you ought. To rightly possess and engage our gift, humility is crucial.

Paul would get canceled in today's time for what he just said in Romans 12:3 for we live in a culture today where you cannot violate the culture of self-esteem. You might say you believe in self-respect but that's not good enough. It all has to do with self-esteem and that's people can't say anything about sin, depravity or needing a Savior – because all of those are assaults upon the cult of self-esteem that comes from self-obsession that is seen in self-promotion. Not only at our conversion do we have to die to ourself, but everyday we cannot think more highly of ourselves than we ought. Paul is not removing self-examination or self-assessment, he is corralling it (directing it) and we need to do self-examination and self-assessment but what we can't do is promote ourselves and be obsessed with ourselves. Once that takes hold it's just a matter of time for gift and ministry envy of others. That is why Paul says don't separate as an ear because you're not a mouth or as a foot because you're not an arm. Every gift is crucial and everyone is uniquely gifted. We have to say 'no' to the culture that would conform us into the obsession of self-esteem and self-promotion. We can hear the echo of I Corinthians 12 as we see this.

Here is a second thing from this text is the call to being sober minded. What is the opposite of sober? Drunk. What is the opposite of sobriety? Intoxication. Paul is telling us to be Spirit-led sober. Don't be self-obsessed intoxicated. If I can't get this right, then deep down I shouldn't want my spiritual gift because I will misuse it, abuse it and non-use it. This is something we have to get right. Do not think more highly of yourself than you ought. Be sober minded by the gift and fruit of the Spirit, not intoxicated as a work of the flesh. Each believer has a unique gift and do not let it become a matter of pride. No one has a gift like yours.

What you have is a constellation of gifts that have a lead gift so your spiritual gift is actually a constellation of gifts and it shows up with a passion for that thing that God has laid upon your heart. God is also uniquely working in you to use that gift but the uniqueness is not about our gift and us but about the grace of God that is uniquely working in us for His glory which is unique for none gets the glory that He gets. He alone is worthy. Our spiritual gift is not for us to be promoted or self-absorbed.

I have tried to think of illustrations of this. I think it's like a fingerprint. My fingerprint has changed throughout my life but no matter how it changes it's unique to me so I can't get away. If they get my fingerprint, they get me. No one else has my fingerprint but it doesn't stay the same throughout all my life. Our spiritual gifts are unique and dynamic. They are developing in life for they don't just say like they are. They are being developed even as you use them and God is working in your life. Philip moves from a diaconal ministry to being an evangelist.

Another illustration of this is a snowflake. Don't be a snowflake in life where you melt in a moment but you're like a snowflake in your spiritual gift. Every snowflake is unique. Think of that myriad of snowflakes falling – none of them are the same. As science says, as the snowflake is falling it is changing its design continually and it's still unique all the way to the ground. That's the way your life is. You have a unique gift and He is constantly developing it, morphing it, moving it and by the time you get to glory then it will have changed multiple ways dynamically but that gift that was unique was always unique every single time along the journey of ministry for Christ, but it can't become a reason for us to get intoxicated with ourself or our gift.

Number three, unsurprisingly this representative list of gifts falls into two categories – speaking gifts and serving gifts. I Peter 4:10-11 says [10] *As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: [11] **whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—**in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.* They all fall into two categories that are interdependent of one another. I will go through in a later study the 19 gifts identified in the four texts of Scripture we are looking at on spiritual gifts. Let's look at the list in Romans 12 and the categories.

Romans 12:3-8 says [3] *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.** [4] *For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, [5] so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. [6] **Having gifts that differ** (unique) according to the grace given to us (our gifts originated by God's grace), let us **use them:** if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; [7] if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; [8] the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.**

Each one of us can be faithful but we're not full of faith – we have a measure of faith. I want to encourage you here especially for those who want a lot of faith – a measure of faith the size of a mustard seed can move a mountain. The question isn't so much as to how much faith we have measure to us but how much are we using it. Faith is focused upon Christ and it's not our faith that we put our faith in, but our faith is in Christ so whatever measure of faith you have keep it focused on Christ. God is sovereign in the gift of faith. Ephesians 2:8-9 says [8] *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

We are to use our unique gifts within concert with God's people in the body of Christ. I need the other gifts and they need my gift. So, we have unity through diversity and we have diversity that comes to many according to Romans 12:4-5. Our country has a wonderful motto that it needs to seek achievement all the time but it ought to be true in the church of Jesus Christ, whether it is either Jew or Gentile in these matters. That motto is *E pluribus unum* and that means "out of many, one." Here are many gifts but one body functioning on mission, on message and in ministry.

All the gifts listed in Romans 12:6-8 all fall into the speaking/serving categories. We will eventually study the gift of prophecy (small p) and Prophecy (capital P) but this gift falls into the speaking category. As a preacher I do prophecy but Elijah did Prophecy and prophecy. I don't ever do Prophecy. Then Paul moves to a serving gift which is the gift of service. Then back to a speaking gift of teaching and another spiritual gift of exhortation. The spiritual gift of contribution (giving) is a serving gift and so is the spiritual gift of leading for leadership is servanthood and the spiritual gift of mercy. There are more serving gifts than there are speaking gifts but again servants speak and speakers serve. Notice the list here in Romans start off with the Peter's categories in I Peter 4:11. Paul reflects the two categories by the two gifts he mentions first. So, there are speaking and serving gifts that are interdependently developing in life.

The fourth things from this text in Romans is membership is essential. The local church is a manifestation of the body of Christ. Covenantal commitment in the local church is not on

the a la carte menu of life for the Christian. It is essential. My friend Alistair Begg says that membership matters. You cannot glorify God effectively using your gift disconnected from the body of Christ. Now, you can be a member and not use your gift but you cannot develop your gifts apart from the one institution that is headed to eternity and that is the body of Christ manifested in His church.

Romans 12:4a says [4] *For as in one body we have many members...* Are you a member of the body of Christ? Is it on paper or is it seen seven days a week (participatory)? Do you have an arm that says you will show up on Sundays or an ear that says you can be counted on for Wednesdays? I love my dad so much but he was the master at this. I told my dad one time 'There is a three day two night function to play golf in Maggie Valley, would you like to go?' He told me he'd like to go and I then I said 'It doesn't cost much for even I can afford my part.' He said 'Son, we need to do this.' I said 'Are you really going to do it?' He said 'Write that down for it's a definite maybe.' There are a lot of us in terms of our engagement in Christ's church that are a definite maybe and we treat the church more like a specialty store than actually God's family, the body of Christ. This is just a Biblical principle. You cannot do the stewardship of the spiritual gifts without a functional membership in the body of Christ. We can't be a part of a living organism if we're a parasite living off the organism. We have to be a part of that organized organism – the body of Christ.

Number five, discover, develop and deploy (DDD) leadership. You don't do this by passive contemplation but by intentional implementation – if prophecy then prophesy, if teaching then teach, if leading then lead, if serving then serve, if giving then give. It is in the intentional implementation that the discovery, the development and the deployment happen. Is it easier to turn a car when it is moving or sitting still? Some of you are not old enough to remember when a car with power stirring was an unbelievable luxury. We pretty much all have it now. I remember having to strong arm the stirring wheel to get it to turn and my mother was the best at it. When something is sitting still it doesn't move well for it's when it is moving and has that momentum that it then begins to move. Ships move better when they are moving than when they are sitting still.

Here is the takeaway. Spiritual gifts are God designed and grace delivered resources to be stewarded by deployment through Christ's church in Word and deed ministries. What is our motivation? We have five motivations. One is, we steward these gifts for God's glory through the mission, the message and the ministry. We want people to see the beauty of the body of Christ at work. Two, Not only is my salvation of grace and my stewardship of grace, but my spiritual gifts are of grace and the effects of my spiritual gifts are of grace. The gifts are given by the Spirit for the ministries of Christ to the effects and glory of the Father. So I want God to be glorified and God's gifts to be obvious and proclaimed. I want it proclaimed in Word and deed as the deeds affirm the Word and the words are manifested through the deeds. Thirdly, I want it to be a blessing to God's people for the gifts have been given for the common good. Four, for God's world to be impacted – we need the salt and light for the church through the discipling of God's people into the world. So, there are spiritual gifts to be ministered in the church and spiritual gifts in the church to be ministered outside of the church. Five, is God's stewardship affirmation – God's steward affirmed. I want to use my gifts so that God one day will affirm 'well done, good and faithful servant.'

I want to give you an example of this person. People I could use as an illustration would be people like Dr. Frank Barker, R.C. Sproul, Jim Boice but I kind of felt like I was falling into a trap because we all tend to go to the more visible yet the most important part of our physical

body is the internal, the parts we don't see working rather than the external. Remember, if your heart, kidneys or liver fall out you're in trouble but if you're hair falls out that doesn't depend on life or death. So, I didn't want to use an illustration of one more visible, although I value all these people.

An example of this person who wasn't visible is my maternal grandmother, Lois. She was the greatest example of someone not thinking more highly than you ought of yourself. There are cat people and there are dog people. When you come home your dog wags its tail and acts as if you are the greatest thing in the world. I want to be everything my dog thinks I am because your dog looks at you and says 'there's my master, he washes me, feeds me, clothes me, he must be God.' With a cat that is not the case for they could care less. We think they are our master and we are on their staff because the cat says 'I'm the master and you're on my staff.' The cat thinks 'they feed me and care for me so I must be God.' You don't see dogs standing next to witches at Halloween. Don't think more highly of yourself than you ought.

We have been so blessed by God's grace but it's not about us. Do you see what Jesus did? He saved us not to make much of us, but to free us to make much of Him and that was my grandmother. I still have the stuffed dog on my bed the same dog she gave me when I was five years old. Every time I touch this stuffed dog I think of her meeting me, teaching me the song 'Isn't He wonderful, Isn't He wonderful, Isn't Jesus my Lord wonderful.' Also, the song *Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus*, she sang with me almost everyday I came home. When I would go visit my grandmother, I could not leave her house without her giving me something and that continued after I was married and until the day she died. One time we road away with her dining room table. My grandfather and grandmother never owned a house their entire life or a single thing but boy did they give. That is what I think Paul is calling us to.

It's not about us and we don't own anything. We are not obsessed with ourselves. We are stewards. We are His – for His glory, the blessing of His people, the impact of the world, the display of His grace. We want to be a vital part of the body of Christ with the gifts He has given us and we say 'no' to gift envy, gift in ministry envy and jealousy and 'no' to pride and arrogance and 'yes' to Jesus. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. Please Father be at work in the lives of Your people. Take just a moment in silent prayer and talk with the Lord about these matters. Watch what He does in your life and anticipate it. God, please deliver us from self-obsession and self-promotion. Father, give us the joy of dying unto self and living unto Christ for His glory, using our gifts. Father, if Christians are to use their gifts in the context of Christ's church, then how much should we as a church make a way for them to discover, develop and deploy those gifts in and outside of the body of Christ. Please help our elders, deacons, pastoral staff and the various lay men and women who lead here at Briarwood to create pathways for Your people to use the gifts You have given them for Your glory by Your grace, in Jesus' Name, Amen.