

Rev. Lex DeLong / General Adult

Romans Road to Recovery / Romans 12:3–8

Your spiritual gift isn't a trophy to be displayed, but a tool to be used. In God's economy, we only find our true purpose when we stop trying to be everything and start being exactly who He designed us to be for the sake of others

Notes

06/14 Rom. 12:3-8, "The Measure of Faith," Subtitle: Fitting Into the Body, Main Idea: Your spiritual gift isn't a trophy to be displayed, but a tool to be used. In God's economy, we only find our true purpose when we stop trying to be everything and start being exactly who He designed us to be for the sake of others, Scripture: 1 Cor. 12:12-20

Title: The Measure of Faith: Fitting Into the Body

Text: Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:12-20

Main Idea: Our spiritual gifts aren't trophies to be displayed, but tools to be used. In God's economy, we only find our true purpose when we stop trying to be everything and start being exactly who He designed us to be for the sake of others.

Introduction

A. Context

1. Last week, we looked at Romans 12:1-2. In light of the unsearchable wisdom and sovereignty of God (the great Doxology of Romans 11:33-36), Paul commands us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice and be transformed by the renewing of our minds.
2. But what does a "renewed mind" look like in everyday life? Paul answers in verse 3: The very first evidence of a renewed mind is a humble, realistic view of our place within the local church.

B. Illustration: Trophies vs. Tools

1. Imagine walking into someone's house and seeing a hammer displayed inside a pristine glass case on the mantle. We'd think it was ridiculous. A hammer isn't designed to be admired; it's designed to hit nails, build houses, and take a few scratches.
2. Because we still battle the "pattern of this world" (12:2), we are tempted to treat our spiritual gifts like trophies to validate ourselves or simply cherish as our possession.

But the renewed mind understands that spiritual gifts are so much more than trophies or possessions; they are tools meant for the Master's use.

If our spiritual gifts are really tools instead of trophies, how do we take them out of the display case and put them to work? It starts with breaking the glass of our own egos.

Before we can use our tools effectively for others, we have to address the deeply rooted pride that makes us want to put them on a shelf to be admired in the first place. Paul tells us exactly how to do that.

First, we must...

I. Measure Ourselves by God's Grace, Not by Comparing Ourselves to Others (Rom. 12:3)

(Read Romans 12:3) *"3 For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith."*

Paul begins by attacking the greatest threat to a healthy church: the pride of comparison.

This is an enemy of reality that we must watch out for.

It is so important to first...

A. Recognize the Ancient Enemy's most wielded weapon: Delusional Pride Has Been Fracturing Fellowship Since Eden

1. When Paul warns us, "Do not think of yourselves more highly than you ought," he is targeting the oldest sin in the book. This ego-driven desire didn't start in Rome or in our hearts; it started in the Garden of Eden. Satan's lie to Eve was, "You will be like God" (Gen. 3:5). Humanity's original sin was grasping for a status that wasn't ours. Ever since the fall, our default setting is to elevate our own egos.
2. This wielded weapon comes in 2 forms. The first is when we fail to measure ourselves to Christ's standard instead of human standard. But the 2nd one is just as damaging. Even when we see ourselves compared to Christ, we console our conscience by still looking at others and judging their spiritual lives compared to Christ as less than our own.
3. **Historical Context:** That same ancient poison was destroying the church in Rome. We actually have secular Roman historical records of this church split. The Roman historian Suetonius, writing in his *Life of Claudius* (25.4), officially recorded the emperor's decree: "Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus [Christ], he expelled them from Rome." In AD 49, the Roman church

became 100% Gentile for five years. When Claudius died in 54, the Jewish believers' return fractured the church. Paul is addressing this likely snare in the Roman church as he pens this letter to them sometime between A.D. 56 and 58.

4. We will see in Romans 14 that the Jews brought back their kosher diets and looked at the Gentiles, saying, "We are more holy than you." The Gentiles looked down on the Jews' strict rules and said, "We are more enlightened than you." Both sides were echoing Eden—thinking more highly of themselves than they ought because they were using each other as a measuring stick, or at least using each other to feel better about their own standing with Christ.

Once we are aware of the enemy's most deadly delusional weapon, we can look for Spiritual Sanity to overcome it.

B. Pride is Spiritual Delusion, Humility is Spiritual Sanity

- To address this comparative delusion of pride, Paul plays with the word translated as "think" (*phroneō*), which refers to our mind or underlying worldview. He contrasts the phrase "think of yourselves more highly" (*hyperphronein*—meaning to over-think ourselves, to be hyper-minded or arrogant) with the command to "think with sober judgment" (*sōphronein*—literally meaning "a saved mind" or "sanity").
- How exactly do we "think of ourselves more highly" or "over-think" ourselves? Just like the Romans did: we do it by looking horizontally. We find someone in the church whose faith seems weaker to us, whose sins seem messier, whose apathy seems more prominent, or whose gifts seem less impressive or unused, and we use them as a footstool to feel better about ourselves, less conscious of how we measure to Christ. But Paul says this is spiritual delusion.

Jesus called out this exact same delusion in Matthew 7 with the principle of the beam and the splinter. He painted the ridiculous picture of a man with a massive piece of lumber shoved in his own eye, trying to perform delicate eye surgery to remove a tiny speck from his brother's eye. When we measure our spiritual success by focusing on someone else's flaws, we aren't being holy—we are the guy with the plank.

- True humility—thinking with "sober judgment" (*sōphronein*)—isn't about beating ourselves up; it is accepting or embracing spiritual sanity. It is waking up to the reality that we have absolutely nothing we did not receive: no gifts, no abilities, no possessions, no character traits. True humility is not the abandonment of edifying others, but it is a sane or clear view of the source of all of these attributes for each one of us.

(SHARE WHAT I AM YET STILL LEARNING, EVEN AFTER ALL THESE YEARS.....)

- Paul says the exact same thing to the church in Galatia. In Galatians 6:3-4, he warns that if we think we are a "somebody" when we are a "nobody," we are deceiving

ourselves. He gives the antidote in verse 4: "But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor."

(TALK ABOUT GRADING CURVES IN COLLEGE HERE.....)

C. Drop the Curve and Realize that God Evaluates Us by the Specific Grace He Handed Us

- God does not grade on a curve. We do not get spiritual credit for simply outperforming the person sitting in the pew next to us. God evaluates us based on the specific "**measure of faith**" He handed to us, not in comparison to any other.
- Please know that God has given you every spiritual gift and character trait that He knows you need to fulfill His calling in your life. Of course He expects you to use that which He has given you...

Ephesians 2:10 "10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

2 Peter 1:3 "3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence."

...but He will never ask you to do anything beyond what He has equipped you to do.

- God has dealt to each believer a specific, sovereign distribution of spiritual capacity.
- We don't have to manufacture our own spiritual power, and we don't have to beat anyone else's score.
- The God from whom "all things" come (Rom. 11:36) gave us exactly the right amount of grace to fulfill **our specific roles** in the church.
- It is so important that we stop looking at our neighbor's toolset, and start testing what we are doing with our own.

Transition: If we are going to **get real and measure ourselves by God's grace instead of comparing ourselves to others**, something incredible has to happen next. The moment we drop the measuring stick and stop viewing our brothers and sisters as competition or using them to console our own shortcomings, we realize we actually **need** them.

God didn't give us our specific "**measure of faith**" so we could go live on a spiritual island or function on our own. He gave it to us because we are part of something much bigger.

If we are going to fulfill God's purpose for us in His church, we must...

II. Surrender Our Independence Because We Were Built to Belong to the Body (Rom. 12:4-5 & 1 Cor. 12:12-20)

To understand our function, we must understand the unique organism to which we belong. It is important that we know that...

A. The Church is Not a Corporate Ladder to be Climbed: God Gave Us a Function to Perform, Not a Title to Flaunt (Verse 4)

Read Romans 12:4 "4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function,"

1. **The Historical Context:** In verse 4, Paul starts with an illustration from human anatomy: "For just as each of us has one body with many members..." When Paul uses this metaphor of the "body," **his Roman readers would have gasped.**
 - Centuries earlier, the Roman politician Menenius Agrippa gave a famous speech comparing Rome to a human body.
 - He told the peasants they were just the hands and feet, and the Roman Senate was the "stomach" and the "head."
 - His point was: "Shut up, know your place at the bottom, and serve the elite."
 - Roman society was built on the idea known as *cursus honorum*—
 - The ***cursus honorum*** (Latin for "course of honors" or "sequence of offices") was the strict, sequential ladder of political and military offices that ambitious men in ancient Rome climbed to achieve power, status, and glory.

If ancient Rome had a "corporate ladder," this was it—and it was the absolute center of a Roman citizen's public life.

Here is a breakdown of how it worked and why it matters so much to the context of Romans 12:

To prevent any one man from getting too much power too quickly, the Roman Republic (and later the Empire) instituted strict rules. You couldn't just run for the top job; you had to climb the steps in exact order, and there were strict age requirements for each step:

- **Military Tribune:** Started in their early 20s (military service).

- Quaestor: The first official step (age 30). Handled finances and treasury.
- Aedile: (Age 36). Handled public works, games, and the city's grain supply. (This was where politicians threw massive, expensive public games to buy popularity).
- Praetor: (Age 39). Served as judges and military commanders.
- Consul: (Age 42). The ultimate prize. Only two men were elected each year to rule Rome and command its armies.

The Mindset: *Dignitas* and *Gloria*

The *cursus honorum* wasn't just a career path; it was a ruthless, cutthroat obsession. Roman patrician boys were raised from birth with one singular goal: climb the ladder, reach the Consulship, and bring *dignitas* (prestige/status) and *gloria* (glory) to their family name.

If you were on the ladder, you were a "somebody." If you weren't, you were the "feet" of society, merely there to support the elites. Every public interaction, dinner party, and seat in the amphitheater was dictated by where a man stood on this ladder.

- But look at what Paul does next! He hijacks Rome's favorite metaphor. In the second half of verse 4, Paul says, "and these members do not all have the same function." The Greek word for function is *praxis*. It denotes an action, a deed, or a business to be carried out.
- The local church is not like a Roman corporate ladder. God did not give us spiritual gifts to give us a title; He gave us a *praxis*—a job to do, and we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus with everything we need for life and godly living.
- We are not climbing over one another to get titles; we are working along side one another to perform our function.

We must recognize that...

B. We Are Part of a Unique, Spirit-Indwelt Organism (Verse 5a)

Read Romans 12:5 "*5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*"

- Paul moves from the human body illustration in verse 4 to the spiritual reality in verse 5: "*so in Christ we, though many, form one body.*"
- The "Body of Christ" is a distinct entity—a mystery spoken of but unrevealed in the Old Testament, born at Pentecost, and functioning uniquely in this present Church Age. In this dispensation of grace, God is not working through a single physical nation with a temple, but through a spiritual body made up of individual believers

indwelt by the Holy Spirit, each one the temple of God.

- Since we are each the temple of God, each member has equal value, just like spoken of in Romans 8:17 "17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him."

Every part of your body embraces each of its members as equally needed. In the church...

C. We Are to Embrace God's Design to Bear One Another's Burdens (Verse 5b)

- Paul finishes verse 5 with the ultimate subversion of Roman culture: "and each member belongs to all the others."
- Paul speaks to ownership, not just God's ownership of us, but also our ownership of one another.

Our gifts aren't just for us. They belong to the people sitting next to us.

We are not meant to be "Swiss Army Knife" Christians who can do it all.

We are specialized tools designed to work in tandem with others for God's glory.

- Because we belong to one another, our lives are intertwined. Paul clarifies exactly what this belonging looks like in Galatians 6:2 when he commands us to "bear one another's burdens."
- If one of us is a hand, and another's foot is caught in a trap, the hand doesn't say, "That sounds like a foot problem. Poor things."
- Instead, the hand reaches down to free the foot! That is what it means to belong to the body. We use our specific tools to bear the weight of our brothers' and sisters' burdens.

Transition: It is a beautiful, liberating truth to **surrender our independence and realize we were built to belong to the body**. But let's be perfectly clear: belonging to the Body of Christ isn't just a warm, passive feeling; it is an active, sleeves-rolled-up calling.

Now that we know *who* we are and *who* we belong to, Paul shifts us from the theology classroom down to the shop floor.

Here is where King Solomon and the Apostle Paul collide.

1 Kings 2:2 (David's charge to Solomon) As King David is on his deathbed, he gives his final instructions to his young son, who is about to take the throne:

"I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and **show yourself a man**, and

keep the charge of the Lord your God..." 1 Kings 2:2

1 Corinthians 16:13 (Paul's charge to the Corinthian church) At the very end of his letter, Paul gives a rapid-fire series of five imperatives to the believers in Corinth:

"Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, **act like men**, **be strong**. Let all that you do be done in love."

A Quick Exegetical Note on 1 Cor. 16:13: It is important that we appreciate the literal and grammatical Greek deep dives. The word Paul uses here for "act like men" is the Greek verb ***andrízomai*** (ἀνδρίζομαι).

It literally translates to "act manly" or "play the man." In the historical context of the ancient Greco-Roman world, it was a well-known military idiom that meant to be brave, courageous, and unflinching in the heat of battle. Paul is commanding them not to be spiritual cowards or to crumble under the intense pressure of the pagan culture around them, but to stand their ground courageously.

And now, knowing all of this, it then is time to...

III. Take Our Specific Tools Out of the Box and Use Them (Rom. 12:6-8)

Read Romans 12:6–8 "6 Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith;"

Paul shifts from the theology of the body to the practical shop floor.

Here is how we use the tools.

A. Acknowledge the Giver and What is Given: Our Abilities Are Grace-Gifts Demanding to be Deployed

- Paul calls them "gifts" (charismata—literally, "grace gifts"). They are unearned. They are empowered spiritual assignments within the body of Christ, given by the Holy Spirit.
- The grammar in this passage drives us to action. If God has placed a tool in our hands by His sovereign grace, it is a spiritual offense to leave it locked in the toolbox. We are to actively deploy what God has given.

B. Speak Truth Safely: Anchor Our Words to the Objective Blueprint of Scripture (v. 7)

Rom. 12:7 "7 if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; 8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness."

Romans 12:8 "8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness."

Note the descriptions Paul now gives in these last 3 verses.

1. **Prophecy**: Paul says to do this "**in proportion to his faith.**" The Greek here is analogian tēs pisteōs. Analogia means *right relationship or agreement*.
2. If we want to know what it means to prophesy "in proportion to the faith," we can look to solid, literal Bible scholars like Dr. Charles Ryrie and Dr. Douglas Moo. Ryrie points out that the definite article is in the Greek text: it is **the** faith—the objective body of truth. Moo notes in his commentary on Romans that Paul is giving a strict boundary line: "The prophet must not contradict the fundamental truths of the gospel." This means if anyone stands up today claiming a "new revelation" that does not perfectly square with the completed canon of Scripture, they are operating entirely outside the "proportion of faith." We are tethered to the Word.
3. Teaching & Encouraging is explaining the Word so minds are renewed, and urging believers forward in obedience to that truth.

To avoid the weapon of spiritual delusion, we must...

C. Check Our Hearts: The Attitude of Our Service Matters as Much as Our Action (Serving Gifts)

1. **The Historical Context**: When Paul wrote this letter from Corinth, he was currently collecting a massive financial relief fund from Gentile churches to bring to starving Jewish believers in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:25-27). He was literally watching the Body of Christ cross ethnic and geographical lines to care for its own.

With this in mind, Paul attaches precise Greek instructions to dictate how our practical tools must be handled:

- **++Serving**: The Greek word is diakonia (where we get the word "deacon"). It means practical, hands-on, unglamorous assistance. Notice the grammar: Paul doesn't add a fancy modifier here; he just repeats the word: "if serving, in serving." It means: stop overthinking it, stop waiting for a formal title, and just get to work filling the practical gaps by serving one another.
- **++Giving**: Do it with haplotēti (singleness, simplicity). Give without a hidden agenda, just as the Corinthians were giving to the Jews.
- **++Leading**: Do it with spoudē (haste, earnestness, zeal). Spiritual leadership

allows no room for laziness.

- **++Mercy:** Do it with hilarotēti (gladness, joyousness). Show mercy with a joyful face, not a grudging sigh.
- The grammar proves that God cares just as much about the manner in which we use our gifts as He does the gifts themselves.
- A tool used with the wrong attitude becomes a weapon.
- If we show mercy with a bitter or harsh attitude, give with a complex agenda, or overthink our serving, we are misusing the Master's equipment.

Conclusion

Take the Tools Out of the Box

A tool is only valuable when it's picked up by the worker.

- If we've been treating our spiritual lives like a trophy case—trying to look perfect, or sitting on the sidelines because we think our gifts aren't "spectacular" enough—it's time to get to work.

Now, let me share with you the Urgency of the Hour (Reality)

1. As we wait for the return of Jesus Christ, we know our time to serve the Body on this earth is limited. Christ could call His Bride home today. In fact, even before He calls His church home, He could call any one of us home today. Using our tools for the body is going to make us tired. But Paul encourages us in Galatians 6:9-10 to "not grow weary of doing good." We have a limited window—a limited "opportunity"—to serve the household of faith.

Let us not put our tools down. Let us not give up, because the harvest is coming.

1. When the trumpet sounds and we are caught up in the clouds, our very next stop is the Bema Seat—the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). The late Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost, in his masterwork book, *Things to Come*, clarifies exactly what this moment is. He writes that the Bema seat is not a place where God determines our salvation—that was settled forever at the Cross, planned before the forming of this world's foundation. Rather, it is an evaluation of our stewardship. Pentecost notes it is like the judges' stand at the Greek Olympics. We are not going there to see if we are citizens of heaven; we are going there to see what kind of crowns we will be handed to lay at the feet of Jesus. How did we use the tools He gave us? Did we leave them in the trophy case, or did we carry them outside to work at building His church?

The Man in the Shoe Store

"When we think about the Bema Seat of Christ, we tend to think God is only going to hand out crowns to the famous Christians—the Apostle Pauls, the Billy Grahams, the people who stood on massive stages with spectacular gifts. We think, *'My tool is just a regular hammer. It's not a golden microphone. It doesn't matter.'*

But let me tell you about a man named Edward Kimball.

In the 1850s, Edward Kimball was a Sunday School teacher in Boston. He didn't have the gift of preaching. He wasn't a dynamic leader. He was just a guy with the gift of teaching and the gift of mercy. That was his tool, and he refused to leave it in the toolbox.

One day, he looked at his Sunday School class and noticed that a young, loud, uneducated shoe salesman who had been visiting was completely disconnected. Kimball felt the Holy Spirit prompting him to go visit this young man at work.

Kimball later wrote that he was terrified. He walked up and down the street outside the shoe store, arguing with himself, convinced he was going to embarrass himself or get the kid fired. He was tempted to leave his tool in the box. But finally, he walked in, found the young man in the stockroom in the back wrapping shoes, put his hand on his shoulder, and clumsily shared the gospel with him.

Right there in the back of that shoe store, the young man gave his life to Christ.

That young shoe clerk's name was **D.L. Moody**.

D.L. Moody would go on to become one of the greatest evangelists in church history, shaking two continents for Christ and leading literally millions of people to the Lord. And historically, we can trace a direct line from D.L. Moody to J. Wilbur Chapman, to Billy Sunday, to Mordecai Ham, who eventually preached the gospel to a young farm boy named **Billy Graham**.

Millions upon millions of souls in the kingdom of heaven, and it all started because one Sunday School teacher didn't try to be a world-famous evangelist. Edward Kimball didn't look at his specific 'measure of faith' and say, *'Well, I'm not a spectacular preacher, so I'm not going to do anything.'* He didn't compare himself to anyone else. He just took his specific tool out of the box, walked into a shoe store, and went to work on the person standing right in front of him.

When the trumpet sounds and Edward Kimball stands before the Bema Seat of Christ, Jesus isn't going to ask him, *'Why weren't you D.L. Moody?'* Jesus is going to look at him and say, *'Well done, good and faithful servant. You took the exact measure of faith I handed you, and you used it to change eternity.'*

Look around this room. Look at the needs in this local body this week. Let's stop

asking, 'Can we do it all?' We aren't meant to. Let's stop looking around to see who is not doing what we think they should. That's not our calling.

Instead, when we notice what is needed, let's just step in and serve by fixing it. Instead, let's ask, 'How can I be a shoe clerk? What has God equipped me to do for the sake of the person right in front of me?' Take your tool out of the box. Let us be exactly who He designed us to be, until He comes."

Let's stop asking, "Can we do it all?" Instead, let's ask, "What has God equipped us to do for the sake of the person right in front of us and for the sake of His glory?"

Let us be exactly who He designed us to be, until He comes. He has designed you perfectly to fulfill His calling for you.

Now...

Let us all willingly employ the tools that God has already given us.

Remember:

Your spiritual gift isn't a trophy to be displayed, but a tool to be used.