

Romans
Gifted to Serve (Part 3)
Romans 12:3-8
February 9, 2020
Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, Texas

So, Romans 12. This morning as you got ready for church, you paid a lot of attention to a lot of aspects of your body. In fact, this week, I'm sure that you have spent, as I have, time ministering to your body, keeping it healthy, making sure it looks decent to go out in public and all of those things. But I can promise you that there is one part of your body you probably given absolutely no thought to this week, and that is your liver. See, I told you, you didn't.

Do you realize it is the largest organ in your body? Consuming a great deal of your abdomen, it weighs about three pounds. And that liver that just goes on functioning without any thought on your part does more than any other organ in your body. In fact, they tell us it does more than 500 different jobs. It provides, for example, muscle fuel to help you with all of your daily activities; it digested, helped digest, your breakfast bacon from this morning; it produces a vitamin that helps your night vision. In fact, your liver produces more than a 1000 enzymes that perform tasks like allowing your blood to clot, providing antibodies to fight disease and infection. It also protects you. Do you realize that if the caffeine in your coffee this morning were to get directly to your heart, it would be a poison, and you would be dead within minutes? Instead, what happened was, you enjoyed that cup of coffee, and it has entered into your liver and about six to ten seconds later, your liver has cleaned out any of the poison that would destroy your body.

The liver is amazingly redundant and resilient. If your liver only had 15% of its cells left, it could still do its job. In fact, surgeons can remove about 80% of your liver, and it will still function. And here's the amazing thing, and it's the only organ in the body that does this. Several months later, it will have regenerated itself and be restored to its full and normal size. Your liver, like all the parts of your body, is an amazing creation of God, and God has put all of the members of your body together, a variety of members, each necessary to make your body work.

In Romans 12, we're learning that the same is true with the Body of Christ, the church. Every member has an important function in the Body of Christ, in the local expression of the Body of Christ, in this church. Just to remind you, we are in the fourth and final major section of Romans where we're looking at, "The Gospel Applied." Chapter 12 begins with, "The Gospel Response to God" We are to present our bodies and our minds to God, verses 1 and 2. Then Paul immediately transitions into, "A Gospel Response to Service" in chapter 12:3 - 8. As Paul lays out the implications of the gospel, he begins by dealing with our service in the church, in the Body of Christ. This is where presenting ourselves as a sacrifice begins. You know, a lot of people get really mystical about presenting themselves as a sacrifice. Do you want to present yourself as a sacrifice to God? It begins with presenting yourself as a member of the body to serve in the body because Paul here tells us that God has gifted every Christian to serve. And as a result of that, we must think about our gifts accurately, he says, and we must use them responsibly.

So really this passage breaks down to two basic sections, two basic instructions. First of all, in verses 3 - 5, "Think About Your Spiritual Gift Accurately."

And secondly, in verses 6 - 8, "Use Your Spiritual Gift Responsibly." That's where we find ourselves so let's read it together, Romans 12. Let me read verses 6 - 8.

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; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

We are to use our giftedness responsibly. But, that's only possible when we're learning together, when we understand the New Testament spiritual gifts. It's only as we understand them that we can use them responsibly in the church.

Now this text, as we've just read it together, gives us a list of spiritual gifts. Almost all of the permanent spiritual gifts are here in this passage because the Holy Spirit wanted us to understand the spiritual gifts that are available to us in the church today.

Now, I need to do just a little bit of review because it's been a couple weeks since we've studied it together, so you have context. So, let me do that; and for those of you weren't with us, let me just say that I'm covering in a couple minutes something that took me a message to cover last time and is very important, so I encourage you to go back and catch up. But last time, we began by assembling a comprehensive New Testament list of the spiritual gifts. There are four New Testament lists of spiritual gifts.

First of all, there's the one here in Romans 12. Here there are seven spiritual gifts outlined for us: prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, and showing mercy.

The second list we looked at last time is in 1 Corinthians 12:8 - 10. There, there are nine spiritual gifts listed: word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, distinguishing of spirits, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues.

The third list comes in 1 Corinthians 12 as well at the end of the chapter in verses 28 - 30. There, there are nine gifts listed: apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, healings, helps, administrations, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues.

Now, as I pointed out to you, this list, the second list in 1 Corinthians 12, is a blending of the first two lists of Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12:8 - 10. In fact, the end of 1 Corinthians 12 only adds one new gift and that's apostles.

The fourth list comes in Ephesians 4:11, and this list only adds two new gifts and that is evangelists and pastor-teachers.

So, when you look at those gifts, when you consider the lists that I've just given you, there is a comprehensive list of the New Testament spiritual gifts. Now, last time we also began to

organize those gifts into the basic New Testament categories, the basic New Testament categories of gifts. The New Testament identifies two overarching categories of spiritual gifts.

Last time, we identified the first category and that is temporary sign gifts. Now, let me just say that what I had to say about this last time is absolutely foundational. I'm not going to repeat all of that, so if you're unsure of this or unsure that there is such a category as temporary sign gifts, please go back and listen to the last time we studied this together.

But just to give you an overarching summary, we learned that the primary reason that God gave men the ability to work miracles was always to confirm the credentials of the messenger and his message. The miraculous gifts that accompanied the apostles were intended to confirm that they were God's genuine instruments of revelation, just as was true with Moses, with the Old Testament prophets, and even with our Lord Himself. For example, of the apostles, we read this in Acts 14:3, "[Paul spent a long time in Iconium] speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying [notice that word; the Lord was testifying ...] to the word of His grace, [spoken by Paul], granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands." So, this was the reason for the miracles that the apostles were able to perform. It was to confirm their message just as the miracles had always been when they had been given to men the capacity to perform them.

So, in the New Testament era then, once their message, the apostles' message was accepted as from God, the capacity to work miracles began to die out as we saw, and eventually left entirely. In fact, as we discovered last time, the one New Testament gift most frequently associated with miracles, the gift of apostleship ceased clearly and entirely. So, the evidence is clear. The evidence, by the way, also shows, as we noted last time, that the other miraculous gifts declined even during the New Testament era.

So, just to remind you of the categories, the temporary, miraculous sign gifts for revelation, that is God revealing His truth to the church, were these: apostle, prophecy, distinguishing of spirits, word of wisdom, word of knowledge. All of those provided primarily revelation, revelation of God's Word in the New Testament era until the Scripture was complete.

The second set of miraculous gifts were primarily for confirmation. These were: miracles, healings, faith, tongues, interpretation of tongues. These gifts, as we noted, primarily confirm the apostles and prophets and the message or the revelation that was received through them.

In the New Testament then, there are ten temporary, miraculous sign gifts, and all of those things were there to confirm the ministry of the apostles and to provide the message that is the New Testament. That's what we have in our hands. It has been confirmed to us. And by the way, that's an encouragement for us as believers to put our trust and confidence in what God has revealed. He confirmed it through the apostles with miracles, so we know this is God's message to us. And if you're here this morning, and you're not a follower of Jesus Christ, understand this. God has done everything necessary to prove to you that this is His Word, that the message of the gospel that was preached through the apostles is His message, and He invites you to accept that message. As we sang this morning, "No matter how many your sins are, His mercy is more." On the other hand, if you refuse to accept that message as Hebrews 2 says, "How much greater will be the judgment since it has been confirmed to us through the Son of God and His apostles." So, the temporary miraculous sign gifts.

The second category of New Testament spiritual gifts and where we begin afresh this morning is the permanent, edifying gifts; the permanent, edifying gifts. Here in Romans 12, as Paul addresses spiritual gifts, he focuses almost entirely on these permanent gifts. In fact, as we saw, he includes only one temporary miraculous gift, a gift of revelation; that is the gift of prophecy. The remaining six gifts here in Romans 12:6 - 8, are not sign gifts, and they are not miraculous gifts; instead they are permanent edifying gifts. Now, in Ephesians 4:11, we have two additional permanent gifts and that is: evangelism and pastor-teacher. So, put those together, the six permanent gifts here in Romans 12, with the two that are remaining in Ephesians 4:11, and we have the permanent gifts.

Now, just as we did with the miraculous sign gifts, we can divide these permanent gifts into two groups or two subcategories. And we do that biblically because Peter does. In 1 Peter 4:10 and 11, Peter takes all of the gifts available to us today, and he divides them into two groups. Listen

to what he writes, “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” And then he says there are those who have speaking gifts, and there are those who have serving gifts. So, with the permanent gifts then, there are teaching gifts and there are serving gifts. Those are the two basic categories. So, let’s combine the six permanent gifts in Romans 12 with the two remaining permanent gifts in Ephesians 4 and put them into these two groups just so you can see them together.

First of all, there are the teaching gifts that are permanent. There’s teaching, mentioned in two places both Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12; there is exhortation, there is evangelism, and there is the gift of pastor-teacher.

Then you have the serving gifts. In the list of serving gifts, you have service, or it’s also called helps in the two different passages, you have giving, you have leading, or it’s also called administration in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, and then finally, you have showing mercy here in Romans 12. So, take a look at that list; there are the eight permanent edifying gifts.

Now let me just say that it is possible that those eight permanent gifts are not exhaustive. That is, that merely illustrate the potential diversity that’s available to the Spirit of God. There are good men, good Bible teachers we respect, who teach that. I’m inclined to believe, however, that this is a comprehensive list of eight; because when you consider the nature of the eight permanent gifts that are listed in the New Testament, as we will in just a minute, they really cover the full gamut of potential service in the church remarkably well.

Regardless, understand this, that to each one of us, if you’re a believer, to each one of us the Spirit has given a special capacity to serve Him in the church. If you are a Christian, you either have a speaking gift, or you have a serving gift, or you have a combination of several. Think of it this way, the eight permanent gifts that we just went through together that are listed in the New Testament, serve as a kind of divine pallet.

I love to dabble in oil painting, I have one going right now although finding time to work on it is a little hard, but I have one that I’m working on, and it’s amazing what you can do when it comes

to color and to blending from a pallet. I think the point is, most Christians are a blended mix of several of these gifts. That's why I think it's better to speak of your spiritual giftedness than your spiritual gift because gift implies one simple gift, whereas giftedness is broader and allows for a mix of several of them.

Now, this diversity, in terms of the gifts, shouldn't surprise us when we think about the creativity of our God and the number of ways that He can blend these together. As you know, and this is not a new illustration to you, but it's my favorite illustration of this diversity, it's the principle of color. Scientists tell us that our eyes, the human eye, can distinguish about 10 million different colors. But a painter, someone who wants to take that color and reduce it to canvas, he can re-create all 10 million of those colors from a combination of just the three primary colors: red, blue, and yellow. And those primary colors can't be mixed from other colors; they can only be derived from substances in which they are inherent. And yet the entire range of 10 million colors and millions of tones can be re-created from those three primary colors.

Now, just think about that for a moment. If a painter can reproduce 10 million different colors using only three primary colors, imagine the diversity when God has eight permanent gifts with which to paint. In fact, think of it this way. I'm not a math major, but I double and triple checked this. If there are eight permanent gifts, then there are 40,320 possible combinations at God's disposal, and that doesn't consider the limitless possibilities when you consider God differing the amounts of those eight permanent gifts and mixing them into unique combinations. And when you look around this room, you see that diversity, you see that variety. When you watch what goes on here in a given week in the functions of people who serve, and they use their gifts, you see that variety and that diversity. I love the fact that our church is a serving church, that so many of you serve faithfully and use the gifts God has given you, and we just look around and watch that diversity demonstrated. No two of us are exactly alike. That is the reality of these permanent gifts.

Now, as we continue to try to understand New Testament spiritual gifts, I want to address, thirdly, some basic definitions of the gifts. I've never done this here at Countryside in the almost seventeen years that I've been your pastor, and I think would be helpful; so, I just want to

provide you some basic definitions of these gifts. I have taken these in some cases directly; in other cases, I have adapted them from a very helpful book by Robert Thomas, Dr. Robert Thomas, entitled *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*.

So, let's just look at definitions. Now, you're not going to have time to write these down as I go through them, I understand that, but they will be available on the website in conjunction with this message in the days to come.

So, first of all, let's start with the temporary sign gifts and the revelatory gifts. Let's take "apostle". What is the gift of an apostle? Well, it is "an office in the early church of Jesus's official representatives through whom God provided inspired authoritative revelation." This was what it meant to be an apostle and clearly this was a gift to the church.

Now, as I noted for you before, to be an apostle, you had to be a witness of the resurrected Christ, Acts 1:22. By the way, in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says he was the last one to meet that qualification.

Secondly, you had to be personally appointed by Christ, Acts 1:24.

And thirdly, you had to be able to work miracles, 2 Corinthians 12:12. Paul talks about the signs of a true apostle that were performed by him and he goes on to speak of miracles. So, apostle, then, is something that is no longer a gift for us today, but it served a foundational purpose to the church.

In the same way, so did the prophets or New Testament prophecy. What is that? New Testament prophecy is not, I have to disagree with some of my brothers; it's not preaching, and by the way, I'll look at this in more detail next week. But it's not preaching; instead prophecy is "an ability to be a direct channel (or I should say a channel) of direct revelation from God, primarily in local churches," which of course was crucial until the completion of the New Testament.

Apostles also provided revelation, but they tended to provide revelation for the church at large for all believers in all places, and you see them writing letters to groups of churches across large regions and the people receiving those letters. Prophets, on the other hand, while bringing genuine revelation from God, tended to be assigned to local churches. You see this in Acts 13:1 where there were prophets in the church in Antioch. Again, in chapter 15 of Acts, verse 32, you see prophets in the church in Antioch. The prophets tended to be more localized, more specific, for a given church, but they were channels of direct revelation in an era when the New Testament church existed but didn't have the New Testament. So, God was teaching His people through the prophet, the New Testament prophets.

The third miraculous gift, sign gift, was distinguishing, or it's also called discerning of spirits. This was "an ability to pass immediate judgment on the validity of prophecy given in the assembly." So, this is a check for those who said they had the gift of prophecy. This was a group of people who were gifted to say, "That's right," or, "No that's not right; that's not from God." By the way, this is implied by the fact that this gift immediately follows the gift of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 12:10.

The fourth miraculous sign gift is word of wisdom. This is "an ability to receive and pass on to others a revelation of the mysteries of God." So, how does this differ from prophecy? Well, prophecy seemed to emphasize you received revelation from God, and then you publicly proclaimed it to the congregation. Whereas the person with the word of wisdom seems to be one who simply received that revelation from God, and the focus is on the reception of that revelation, perhaps communicated in a more private setting or shared with others who would teach it publicly as opposed to communicating it publicly.

A fifth miraculous gift is the word of knowledge. The word knowledge, "an ability to grasp the content of special revelation connected with the word of wisdom, to systematize it, and extend its implications to new situations." So, here is someone who can take special revelation that's given in these unique ways and is able to systematize it and to use it to apply to life.

So, those are the revelatory miraculous gifts. Why were they important? Well in the early church, there was no New Testament, and yet God's people needed to know what God was saying in the new era, the New Testament era until the revelation of the New Testament was complete.

The second category of miraculous gifts, those that are for confirming the apostles and their message are defined like this. First of all, miracles. Miracles is the "ability to perform supernatural acts such as raising the dead in Acts 9:40 and blinding Elymas in Acts 13:8 - 11," miraculous abilities, supernatural acts.

Related to that but different is number seven, healings. Healings is "a supernatural ability to physically cure illnesses and congenital issues, not indiscriminately but when the person was conscious that it was God's will." In other words, they didn't walk around with the power to heal everybody they saw the moment they saw them. Instead, just as Jesus, in the working of His miracles, was led by the Spirit, these people seem to have been led by the Spirit as well in a given situation in a given setting.

Number eight, faith. There are those by the way, I mentioned last time we don't believe that this gift of faith was a temporary miraculous sign gift but is an ongoing gift. However, it is embedded right in the middle of other obvious miraculous gifts in 1 Corinthians 12. So, I think the implication of this gift is that it is also miraculous. And here's a definition of this miraculous ability. It's "an ability to believe God to the point that He would miraculously remove hindrances in the spread of the gospel." I think this gift seems to have been operative with other gifts. For example, the gift of faith probably went along with and supported gifts such as miracles. You had the faith to work, then, a miracle if you had those two gifts and as well the gift of healing. You had the faith to believe that God would, at that moment, use the gift He had given you to accomplish healing in this person,

Number nine is tongues. Tongues is simply "an ability to speak a foreign language not learned by normal human methods." Now, I don't have time to develop this fully, but just turn with me

to Acts 2. There are many in our church to have come from more charismatic backgrounds and this has been a struggle; what is the gift of tongues?

And I just want you to remember this. When you look at the book of Acts, there is a foundational occurrence of what tongues was; it happened shortly after our Lord's resurrection. It was the first manifestation, and let me show you what the gift of tongues was. Acts 2:4, it says, "[On the day of Pentecost,] they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues [or other languages], as the Spirit was giving them utterance." Now what was this? Look at verse 6:

... when ... [the] sound occurred, the crowd came together, and they were bewildered [Now notice this.] because each one of them was hearing [the apostles and the others] speak [Notice this.] in his own language. They were amazed and astonished saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ... how is it [verse 8] that we each hear them in our own language [notice this] to which we were born?"

And then it lists a series of places they're from, where the languages would have been different, and then notice verse 11 ends, "... we hear them in our own tongues speaking the mighty deeds of God."

Folks, that is the New Testament gift of tongues or languages. It is "the capacity", as I've defined it here, "to speak a foreign language, a real existing foreign language that you have not studied and learned by the normal human methods." That's what happened at Pentecost, and there is no indication that there was anything other than that that happens in chapter 10 with the conversion of Cornelius, or later in chapter 18 in Ephesus. In fact, what Peter says is, "What has happened here with Cornelius is exactly the same as what happened to us at the beginning." And so, this is the gift of tongues.

There is one confusing passage in 1 Corinthians 14 that many people stumble over. That's a different message for a different time, but the gift of tongues is a consistent gift and it's what it was at the very beginning.

Number ten, the interpretation of tongues relates obviously to that; it is “the ability to interpret or to translate into your own language from a foreign language not learned by normal human methods.” So, here’s a person who can translate.

You know, when I was in Italy, I had a translator, stood next to me, and I preached for hours with Johnny Gravino standing next to me, and I would speak a couple of lines, and he would repeat them. He was able to understand what I said and translate it for his own people. The difference was he studied English. The interpretation of tongues is the ability to do that without having studied it and processed it the normal human way. The gift of tongues, along with the gift of interpretation, was at times a partner to the gift of prophecy in that both could include revelation.

Now, that brings us then to the permanent edifying gifts. Now let me just say that today I’m going to give you an overview of this. Before we leave this passage, we’re to examine these more carefully because these are the gifts for today. But let me just give you an overview.

First of all, the teaching gifts. The first category of permanent gifts is teaching gifts, and number one on that list is teaching. What is teaching? The gift of teaching is “an ability to grasp, arrange, and present revealed truth effectively and in an organized manner so that those who hear gain an enhanced understanding of the Scripture.” And this can happen either publicly, as it did in Acts 18:11, Paul’s public teaching in Corinth for eighteen months is there called teaching. Or, it can happen privately as happened in Acts 18:26 with Aquilla and Priscilla, taking Apollos aside and teaching him more thoroughly in the Scripture. That’s teaching. It’s what I’m trying to do this morning, and hopefully I meet that definition by the time I’m done. Don’t tell me if I didn’t!

Number twelve, exhortation. Exhortation is “an ability to explain and apply the truth to believers and to persuade them to believe and obey it.” The key word here is, certainly there has to be explanation, but the key word is “to persuade them”. There is in exhortation not only a teaching

but the ability to persuade them, to bring them along, and to give them the desire to believe and obey it.

Let me show you what this looks like. Look at 1 Thessalonians 2; 1 Thessalonians 2:11. Here's Paul's ministry among the Thessalonians. He says, "... you know how we were [Here's our word.] exhorting and encouraging and imploring each of you as a father would his own children." There's a picture of exhortation. It's yes, there's some explaining that needs to happen at times, but it's more than that. It's exhorting, it's applying the truth, it's pleading, it's imploring, it's encouraging, and it's doing so as a parent does their children. So, it happens privately, clearly he says each one of you here, but this same exhortation, if you're a teacher, exhortation needs to be a part of your gift of teaching as well because in 2 Timothy 4, Paul says, "... preach the word," 2 Timothy 4:2. "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, [Here it is.] exhort, with great patience and instruction." So, if you have the gift of teaching at any level in any capacity, then and even as parents as we do our own children, then you need to be exhorting them; you need to be imploring them, encouraging them, pleading with them. That's what someone with exhortation does.

So, it can happen privately. It can happen as part of the public ministry of the Word. By the way, the gift of exhortation often goes along with music in the church. You know, as I was here after being away couple of weeks and enjoying our worship together in music, my own heart was stirred and moved by you, by those who were leading us and by you as we sang together. We were exhorting one another even in the singing with the truths that we were rehearsing together. So, if you participate in the music here, "Thank you!" And know that that's part of what you're doing; you are exhorting us with the truths that you're singing; and as we sing together, we're exhorting one another; we're imploring with one another. My own heart was moved profoundly this morning in some of the songs we moved. In fact, it was a two-handkerchief morning, and I only had one, but so it is.

Number 13, evangelism. Evangelism is "an ability to persuade lost people to put their trust in Christ, either publicly or personally." Now, all of us are responsible to evangelize; don't look at this and go, "Oh, well I'm off the hook because I clearly don't have the gift of evangelism." No, we're all called to be evangelists, but there are those who are uniquely gifted by God to do this.

In fact, in Acts 21:8, Philip is called “The Evangelist”, and you see that working out back in Acts 8; because in Acts 8:25, Philip evangelizes publicly. He preaches the gospel; and in Acts 8:35, he evangelizes privately when he comes alongside the Ethiopian eunuch and shares the gospel with him. Evangelism.

Number 14, pastor-teacher. This is simply “an ability to teach and to shepherd God’s people primarily exercised as an elder in a local church.” Teaching and shepherding are the primary duties of an elder. This is the office of an elder. This is the duty of an elder. This is the gift of an elder that is provided to the local church.

Now, let’s go on to the serving gifts. Many people have serving gifts; what are they? Number 15 in our list here is service or it’s also called the gift of helps in the other passage. So, what is this gift? It is “an ability to know how best to meet people’s temporal needs and an unusual skill in meeting those needs.”

You know, I’m always amazed at this when I visit someone, and I visit them in the hospital, or I visit their home where maybe the family member is in a hospice care. It happened to me just this week, and to see what the people in our church who have this gift do. They think of things to help those people that I would never think of. It’s like, “Wow, that was a great idea; I wish I’d had it.” But that’s because they have the gift of service and helps. This gift is evident in the New Testament in the seven men selected in Acts 6 to serve the widows. It’s evident in Dorcas in Acts 9:39 and in other people that we’ll look at when we get to this gift in the list here in Romans 12.

Number 16 is giving. Giving is “an ability to effectively invest one’s material resources for spiritual and kingdom purposes.” Now, again we are all responsible to give. If you’re a New Testament believer, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 16, “On the first day of the week, each one of you.” This is a requirement; there’s no New Testament requirement for how much, the requirement is, “As God has prospered you and as you determine in your heart.” But each one of us is commanded by God to give to the Lord’s work through the ministry of the local church primarily.

But there are those who have the gift of giving. They have an unusual ability to effectively invest their resources for spiritual and kingdom purposes. We have some of them here in our church who enable the ministry here and around the world to take place. This is a special expression of the gift of helps. Sometimes those with this gift have large resources. God has blessed them with significant resources at their disposal. Other times, those with this gift have limited resources, but they find a way to use the limited resources they have for amazing ministry benefit. An example of this gift is Barnabas in Acts 4, and we'll look at him when we get into giving in this passage as well.

Number 17, leading or as it's also called New Testament, administration. This is "an ability in leadership and administration within the context of the New Testament church." By the way, the same word is used as a qualification for the office of Elder in 1 Timothy 3:4 and 5. So, not all those who have the gift of leading and administration should be elders, but all elders should have the gift of leading and administration.

And then finally, number 18, showing mercy. This is "an ability to help assist and relieve those experiencing distress, misery, or pain." And again, I have known people in my life who just are uniquely gifted in this way. They're always around people who are hurting, who are suffering, and they are always helping them in ways that I wish I could. This also is a specific expression of the gift of helps. Dorcas is described in Acts 9:36, as "abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did." So, there they are. Those are the basic gifts and the basic definitions of those gifts.

Now, in the few minutes we have remaining, let me do one last thing and that's consider the practical steps for identifying your giftedness. How do you know what your gift is? A lot of Christians wonder that. How can you identify your spiritual gift? First of all, let me make this really clear. God is not in the business of trying to hide that giftedness from you, okay? So, you're not trying to overcome His hesitancy. You just need to follow the practical steps that are available in Scripture to help you discern what your unique spiritual capacity is; and if you're Christian, you have one.

Number one. Here are these practical steps. Number one, study what Scripture teaches about the gifts. You've got to understand what the gifts are. You've got to be convinced that every Christian has at least one gift, and many Christians have a combination of several. You need to understand what gifts are still available today, what they are, how they function, what their purpose is. That's why I'm taking time with this. You need to accept the fact that the Spirit chooses, sovereignly, to distribute the gifts as He will and not be longing for some gift you don't have or disappointed with the gift you do. And also, you've got to accept the fact that the Spirit gives differing degrees of those gifts. If you're a teacher, don't be longing to be Charles Spurgeon. You know, God the Spirit has assigned not only the gifts but the levels of gifts.

Secondly, pray for God's direction. Once you really study what the Scripture reveals about this, pray, ask the Lord to help you understand and discern your giftedness. Again, He's not hiding this from you.

Number three, assess your desires, natural abilities, experience and circumstances. Why do you do that? Because while it's not always true, often the Spirit will match your spiritual giftedness to your natural abilities.

Number four, seek the wisdom and confirmation of others. In the end, listen carefully, it is not your role to definitively determine what your gift is because we can all be deceived. Instead, the church, as a whole, and the leadership of the church are responsible to evaluate a person's giftedness. In fact, in 1 Timothy 3, the entire church is called along with the elders to affirm not only an elder's potential character, but also his giftedness. So, if you think that you're gifted in a certain way, usually it's that a person thinks they're gifted to teach, you need to follow the lead of the church and the leadership; and if they don't affirm that gift, then it's unlikely that you have that gift. Instead, focus your attention and service in other ways until you find a ministry that is affirmed, the church does affirm that you're gifted to do.

And then finally, number five, begin to faithfully serve. Frankly folks, the first and most practical step to discern what your giftedness is, is just get involved in the life of the church. It's a whole lot easier for the Spirit to steer a moving vehicle than one that's parked.

Just as you've heard me say many times, your liver, I started there, your liver didn't have to complete a personality assessment to discover its gifts. God placed it in the body, and it just does what it does, and the same thing is true in the church. If you want to know what your gift is, just get involved, get to serving in the life of the church; and over time, you'll end up filling the role God designed for you.

Next time, Lord willing, we'll look in greater detail at verses 6 - 8. Let's pray together.

Our Father, we are amazed at Your creativity, at Your wisdom, that You have designed not only our physical bodies in such an amazing way, but You have designed the Body of Christ, the church and even this local expression of it in such an amazing way. Lord, help us to value that diversity, help us to pursue the use of our own giftedness.

Lord, thank you for the countless people in this church, so many who serve You faithfully, using their gifts. But Father, for those who may be here who don't, Lord, help them see that they are really missing out on what You have designed them to do, and they're causing us to miss out on what You have designed them to do; and more than that, they're really disobeying You. Lord, help them to take what we've studied seriously and to begin to get involved in the life of the church so that they can love You by loving and serving others.

We pray in Jesus's name, Amen.