

Romans
Gifted to Serve (Part 5)
Romans 12:3-8
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Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, Texas

We have been studying together Paul's letter to the Romans, and specifically, we've been studying the paragraph, Romans 12:3 - 8. Let's read it again together for one last time; I hope to finish this passage this morning; so let's read it, you follow along in your copy of God's Word, Romans 12 beginning in verse 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. For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 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.

This passage reminds us that God has gifted every individual Christian to serve Him in His church, and out of that grows two basic instructions. In verses 3 - 5 we learn that we're to think about our spiritual gift accurately; and then in verses 6 - 8, use your spiritual gift responsibly.

Now we're learning that to use that gift that we've been given responsibly, we must, first of all, understand the New Testament spiritual gifts. Over several weeks, we surveyed all that the New Testament teaches about spiritual gifts. In my seventeen years here as pastor of this church, we never really had the opportunity to do that in such detail, so we took that opportunity and I hope, if you weren't here, you'll go back and catch up a little bit. It's important, if you're going to use your gift, you understand all that the New Testament has to say about giftedness.

Last time, we learned from this passage that you must use your giftedness as your primary ministry in the context of the church. Notice verse 6, “Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly.” Now the words in italics there were added by the translators to help us understand the flow of Paul’s thought. That’s because the phrases that are attached here to all of these gifts imply more than a list, this isn’t just a list of spiritual gifts. This is, at its heart, an exhortation to use your giftedness and to use it as your primary ministry in the context of the church.

Now, last time, we examined just the first of the gifts in this list because it is a very confusing one, and we looked at it at great length. If you weren’t here, you’re still confused about it, then I encourage you again to go back and catch up with us. But we examined the gift of prophecy. Verse 6, says, “...if [you have the gift of] prophecy, [then use it] according to the proportion of (your) faith.”

We discovered that true biblical prophecy in both the Old Testament and the New Testament is always revelation directly from God. And so, we defined prophecy in this way, the New Testament gift of prophecy was “an ability to be a channel of direct revelation primarily in local churches, and of course this was crucial until the completion the New Testament.” The teaching of the New Testament prophets, along with the teaching of the apostles, was the foundation of the church, according to Ephesians 2:20. But once the New Testament was complete, there were no more apostles, and there are no more prophets because God has provided His complete revelation in this Book that you hold in your hand. So prophecy then, as we have learned throughout this series, was a temporary miraculous gift.

That brings us to the other six gifts that Paul lists here. And the rest of the six, or the other six, are all permanent edifying gifts. But let me just mention that there only two other permanent gifts in the New Testament; both of them are found in Ephesians 4:11. There’s evangelism, and there’s the gift of pastor-teacher. That means, when you put it all together as we’ve discovered, there are a total of eight permanent spiritual gifts from which God can sort of blend together, a unique and individual blending for every believer.

Now, let's examine the other six, the permanent edifying gifts that are here in Romans 12. Again, let me just mention that the definitions that I will share with you are either taken from or adapted from Robert Thomas's excellent book, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*.

After prophecy comes, secondly, the gift of service, service. Notice verse 7, "... if service [if you have the gift of service, then use it] in ... serving." This word "service" is from the same root and family of words as the word "deacon". Originally, it meant to wait on tables, and it's used that way in Luke 17:8, but eventually it came to be much broader than that. The word "service" became the normal way to describe any service to others that was of a personal nature. In fact, our Lord Himself used this word "serve", or "service" to describe His own ministry when He was here on the planet. In Mark 10:45, He says, "... the Son of Man ... [came] ... to serve." He says, "That's what I'm here to do, to serve you like a deacon serves. That's the point of my ministry." So, service then, understandably, became the normal way that Christians came to describe all that they do for other Christians. It's service.

But as is true with many of these gifts, although all of us, as Christians, are to serve one another, nobody here is exempt from service. Like our Lord, we're to serve one another. But there are some of us who are uniquely gifted to serve. Those with this gift respond to all kinds of temporal or physical needs of people. In fact, in Matthew 25:44, this word "serving" is used to describe several very practical things. For example, it's used to describe feeding the hungry, giving something to drink to the thirsty, showing hospitality to strangers, providing clothing for those who don't have sufficient clothing, visiting the sick, or even visiting those who are imprisoned for their faith. All of those things are called "serving" in Matthew 25.

So, let's define then what this spiritual gift is. The spiritual gift of service (it's also called the gift of helps in 1 Corinthians 12:28), is an ability to know how best to meet people's temporal needs and an unusual skill in meeting those needs.

I'm always shocked at how people who have this gift see what needs to be done in very insightful and remarkable ways and just move to do it. It usually happens behind the scenes. I

show up to visit a family and people with this gift have already been there, and they've already served that family in ways that I marvel at and am surprised by. This gift, the gift of service, is evident in the New Testament in several occurrences. For example, it's evident with the seven men who were appointed to oversee the distribution of food to the widows there in the early church in Jerusalem, in Acts 6, the apostles said, "It's not good for us to desert our primary ministry which is the study of the Word and prayer in order to serve tables. But that is exactly what these seven men were appointed to do. Not just to serve, but to oversee the service, to oversee the distribution of the service to those widows so that none were neglected.

The same thing is true of Dorcas in Acts 9:39. You remember, she died and Peter's there, and it says, "... all the widows stood beside [Peter], weeping and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make." Dorcas devoted herself, before her untimely death, to caring for the needs of other people. She served them in very practical ways.

Another New Testament character who manifests the gift of service is Onesiphorus. Onesiphorus [his story is found in 2 Timothy 1:16 – 18], and there Paul describes Onesiphorus' ministry to him while he was in prison. Paul says, "... [he] was not ashamed of my chains; but [instead] ... in Rome, he ... searched for me and found me—[and he took care of me. He cared for me; he served me in very practical ways while I was in prison.]" And then he says, "... and you know ... [how he cared for me in] Ephesus." Onesiphorus was a man who served the Apostle Paul.

Another example is Onesimus in Philemon 13. Paul writes and says to Philemon, "... I wished to keep [him] with me, so that on your behalf he might minister," [same root word,] he might ... [deacon] ... me, he might [serve] me in my imprisonment. And so, there are these people who just are able to serve, they know in very practical ways how to meet the needs of others, the temporal and physical needs of others.

Today, the gift of service is used in so many practical ways. In fact, I almost hesitate to start a list because I'll leave so many out; so, don't feel like I've intentionally left you out. I just want to give some examples. In our church, those with the gift of service do things like prepare this

worship center for us to meet every week, those who greet, those who usher, those who serve in the nursery, those who serve in the kitchen preparing meals or cleaning up, those who provide refreshments, who fix and repair the homes of those in need or even the church facilities, those who answer the phones in the church office, those who design and duplicate materials like the church bulletin you picked up this morning, those who handle the landscaping, and our audiovisual needs, and on and on and on the list goes. Countless ways those with the gift of service cause the church to function. Thank you! If you have the gift of service and you employ it here, thank you, because that's how the church works.

But notice what Paul says here, he says, "If your gift is service, then serve." He's saying, "Get busy, use that gift in the context of the church for the good of the Body of Christ. Use serving as your primary ministry in the church." That's what he's saying.

The third gift he highlights here is teaching. Verse 7, "... or he who teaches, in his teaching." The gift of teaching is also mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:28 and 29. I gave this definition to you several weeks ago. Let me remind you of it. "Teaching" in the New Testament sense of a spiritual gift, and don't miss one of these words; they are all important, "is an ability to grasp or to understand, to arrange or organize, and to present revealed truth effectively and in an organized manner so those who hear gain an enhanced understanding of Scripture." This can happen either publicly, as I'm doing this morning, and it can happen privately. But teaching is what I'm doing. A teacher has the capacity to understand the truth, then to organize that truth in a clear way, and then to present it to others to enhance their understanding of the truth.

This gift, by the way, is required for those who will serve as elders in the church. First Timothy 3:2 says, "... [an elder] must be ... able to teach." Why? Because it's so much an important part of his responsibility; it's a crucial part of his role. That's why in 1 Timothy 5:17 Paul says elders must labor at teaching and preaching. And in Ephesians 4:11 Paul says that elders can be described as "pastor-teachers", hyphenated, one title. I am, and the elders of this church, we are shepherd-teachers, that's our responsibility and our role.

Now, why is it that teaching is so important in the church, that even the leaders of the church, the

elders, have to be able to teach? It's because, listen very carefully, the path to spiritual growth, the path of your spiritual growth is always by growing in your understanding of the truth of Scripture.

Now, you can grow in your understanding of Scripture and do so purely academically and not grow in your likeness of Jesus Christ. Sadly, that happens often, but you cannot grow in your likeness to Jesus Christ without growing in your understanding of Scripture. The two go together, and you will not grow more like Christ without a deeper understanding of the truth of God. That's why back in Romans 12:2, we learn about "the renewing of [the] mind." That's how this process unfolds.

This is why teaching, by the way, and the doctrine, the body of truth that comes from that teaching, was so important in the early church. There are a lot of places we can look, but just turn with me to 1 Timothy 4. Paul's writing to his young son in the faith, Timothy, who is pastoring a little church in Ephesus, and he says to him, I say "little", there were several elders, so it wasn't too small, but we don't know exactly the size of it, but he says to him in 1 Timothy 4, he's already said, "I'm writing this letter in case I'm delayed so that you'll know how to conduct yourself in the church, in the household of God." And here's, at the heart of it, what you're to do, here's your job description, Timothy 4:14, "Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you." What is this gift? What does it relate to? Go back to verse 13, "Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, and [to] teaching."

You know what Paul tells Timothy and tells all elders, all leaders of the church? Here's what you're supposed to do: Read the text; explain the text; that's teaching; and apply the text; that's exhortation; read the text, explain the text, apply the text. That's my job. That's what I'm up here doing this morning; read the text, explain the text, apply the text. And any elder, any leader of the church, that's what he should be doing. If you go to a church where that's not happening, then that's not a biblical church. this is what we're to do. Why? Because, notice verse 16, he says or let's start at verse 15, he says,

Take pains with these things; be *absorbed* in them, so that your progress will be

evident to all. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, [Now, watch the end of verse 16.] for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

He says, “Listen, in the teaching of the Word of God, salvation comes, spiritual rescue to those who are not in Christ and sanctification comes to those who are.” So, that’s why teaching is so important. Teaching, and the doctrine that results, is the very essence of the Christian faith. That’s why the Gospels refer to Christ as a teacher forty-five to fifty times. Acts refers to teaching or doctrine some twenty times. The epistles refer to teaching around sixty times. Teaching is a part of what the church is to do when it gathers. This teaching, by the way, can be public as in the little definition I’ve given you, it can be public. Acts 18:11 says, “... [that Paul] settled ... [in Corinth for eighteen months] teaching the word of God among them.” That is, he taught them publicly, he taught the church.

But teaching can also happen privately. In Acts 18:26 we read that Priscilla and Aquila, when they heard Apollos, you remember the story, they took him aside and explained to him privately the way of God more accurately. They taught him the Scripture and how better to understand it in a private context. So, teaching can happen publicly; teaching can happen privately. But this is at the heart of what a church is to do.

Robert Thomas writes, “Efforts to impart the essence of biblical thought, otherwise known as Christian doctrine, should permeate everything a local church does. Teaching is a crucial gift to the life of the church.”

There are those here in our church who have the gift of teaching. There are those who do so, obviously all of our elders are able to teach, gifted to teach. That’s a requirement for an elder. Then, as you come down, there are others across this auditorium and across our church who have the gift of teaching from the very youngest children all the way up to our adults. There are those who are gifted to understand, to organize with clarity, and present the truth in a way that causes the growth of others in their knowledge of God and His Word. I’m grateful for that.

The fourth spiritual gift, listed back in our text in Romans 12, is the gift of exhortation. Verse 8, "... he who exhorts, in his exhortation." The Greek word here, in its family of words, occurs 107 times in the New Testament. It's translated with words like, "urge, comfort, entreat, implore, console," so it's a broad word with a number of different meanings. But here, the clear intention is this idea of exhortation.

Now, what is the difference between teaching and exhortation? Well, the primary purpose of teaching is to instruct the mind; the primary purpose of exhortation is to persuade the will to obey. Now these two gifts often come together in combination with each other because all good teaching includes some exhortation; and all exhortation includes some instruction. So, they tend to come together as a package but with a different emphasis depending on what your primary gifts are.

Let me give you a definition of exhortation. It is simply "an ability to explain and apply the truth to believers" and, here's the key word, "... persuade them to believe and obey it." This is exhortation. Yes, there is some instruction involved, but primarily it's an appeal to the will, helping them to apply that, urging them to apply it and to put it into practice in their lives.

Now, I hesitate to do this because I'll leave something out, but I just want to give you a sketch of what exhortation is trying to do. Exhortation is primarily trying to persuade someone to think biblically about an issue. Titus 1:9, "... exhort [others] in sound doctrine." That is, get them to think biblically. Exhortation is also trying to persuade someone to grow, to be strengthened in their faith, 1 Thessalonians 3:2. Exhortation is trying to persuade someone to make something that is not in Scripture, to make a biblically wise, or something that is in Scripture, a morally right choice. And then it's also trying to persuade someone to find comfort and assurance in God and the Scripture. In 2 Corinthians 1:4, this word is used and translated, "comfort". We comfort others with the comfort with which we ourselves have been comforted by God. We persuade them to find their comfort in God and who He is and His sovereign power over all things.

Now, this gift of exhortation, appealing to the will, must be accompanied by the reading or reciting and the explanation of Scripture as we just saw in 1 Timothy 4. In fact, turn with me to

1 Thessalonians; let me show you an example from the ministry of the Apostle Paul. First Thessalonians 2, Paul is here recounting his ministry among those in Thessalonica, and he says in verse 1 of 1 Thessalonians 2, “For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain.” And he talks about his coming, and then he talks about his ministry in verse 3, and he describes his ministry among them as “exhortation”. Now notice how he describes the right kind of exhortation. He says, “For our exhortation does not *come* [first of all] from error.” In other words, the message I gave you was true, it wasn’t error.

Secondly, it wasn’t “from ... impurity.” In other words, my life was pure. My message was true; my life was pure. This is how I came to you exhorting you.

And then finally he says, “... [without] or ... [not from] ... deceit.” Not only was my message true, not only was my life pure, but my methods were authentic; they weren’t deceptive, they weren’t questionable, they weren’t manipulative.

And so, this is what exhortation is to be, and therefore go down to verse 11. He says, “[In light of that], you know how [when] we were [there], we were exhorting [there’s our word], and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children.” There’s the spirit of exhortation, so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. There’s a great example of exhortation. This is what it looks like.

Now, exhortation can be accomplished publicly through preaching as we saw in 1 Timothy 4:13 where Paul says, “Timothy, in your preaching, make sure you exhort.” It can happen publicly through writing, I mean the word is used in 12:1 of Romans, “I urge you.” There’s the word. I implore you. But it can also be used privately in private counsel that’s given. This is what Barnabas did with the apostles when he took them aside and explained to them what had happened with Paul and brought them along to accept him.

Now, as I shared several weeks ago, let me just mention again that this gift of exhortation often accompanies the use of music in the church. If you’re involved in our music ministries in this church, if you play an instrument, if you sing, if you’re Seth, and you lead the church in music,

although singing itself is not a spiritual gift, and if it is, I don't have it. The gift of exhortation uses the message of the music to persuade others. That's what you're really doing when you lead us in music. You are using your gifts through the message of the music to persuade us either to believe or to obey what we're singing together. So, if you're engaged in our music ministry, you are really exercising the gift of exhortation.

That brings us back to Romans 12 and to the fifth gift that he mentions, and it's the gift of giving. Verse 8 says, "... he who gives, with liberality." The Greek for "gives", could refer to someone who distributes the churches resources, like a deacon who takes the resources given to the church and distributes them. That's what Calvin believed this was teaching.

The other possibility, and I think the more likely one here, is that the word "gives", is simply referring to a member of the church who uses his or her own resources and gives to the work of the kingdom. And I think that modifying expression "with liberality", makes it clear that this person who is giving is giving his own or her own resources.

Now, all Christians are commanded to give, 1 Corinthians 16, 2 Corinthians 8 and 9; there are a number of passages where we are commanded to give out of how we've been blessed for the work of the kingdom. But certain believers have a unique spiritual ability in this regard. Let me define it for you this way. The spiritual gift of giving is an ability to effectively invest one's material resources for spiritual and kingdom purposes. I think this is a specific expression of the gift of service or helps, and those who have the gift of giving, sometimes, they have large resources from which to give. Other times those with the gift of giving, honestly have meager resources like the Macedonians who gave generously in spite of their poverty. An example of someone in the New Testament with the gift of giving may very well be Barnabas in Acts 4:36 and 37. We read,

Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles, [which translated means Son of Encouragement], and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet [in order to advance the kingdom, to care for the church].

It's also true that those with the gift of giving personally funded the ministry of our Lord. You can read about them in Luke 8:1 - 3. There were women who supported Jesus and the apostles out of their own private means. They funded His ministry. Those are the unsung heroes. Those are the ones who made it possible for Christ and the apostles to travel and teach and be engaged in ministry.

And this still happens today, the advancement of Christ's kingdom is made possible by the giving of us all, as we're commanded to, but especially by those who have this gift; they have supported the ministry of local churches, they build church facilities, they print Bibles, they print other literature, they support missions, nationally and internationally. They're like the Christians in Philippi who seem to have a lot of this gift. Do you remember in Philippians 4:15 and 16, Paul writes, "You yourselves ... know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the manner of giving and receiving but you alone?" And then he says this,

For even [while I was] in Thessalonica, [and Paul was only there for a few weeks as even we were reminded last time. He was only there for a short time, even in Thessalonica.] ... you sent *a gift* more than once for my needs ... I have ... everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied [by you].

That's how the gift of giving manifests itself.

Sheila and I have some friends who inherited some money and I think who have this gift. They work hard, and they try to multiply what they have been given, but they are very wealthy, and yet they will do everything they can in order to trim their own expenses so they can give more for the kingdom. I remember we were with them one time, and we were having a meal together, and they were going to prepare, Sheila and the wife, were going to prepare a meal and we were going to have chicken, chicken breasts. Well, Sheila would have typically gone to the store and bought chicken breasts because that's simpler; its time saving, we're on vacation. But no, our friend bought whole chickens, and she says, "Well, why didn't you just buy chicken breasts?"

And she said, “Well, you know, those are more expensive.” I mean, it wasn’t like money is an issue, why? She said, “Oh listen, every dime we save, we can invest in the kingdom.” That’s just how people with this gift think. And there are people here in this church who have the gift of giving.

The sixth gift that Paul lists is leading, leading. Verse 8, “... he who leads, with diligence.” The Greek word that’s translated “leads” here means “to exercise a position of leadership to rule, to direct, to be at the head of something.” By the way, leading is also called administration in 1 Corinthians’s 12:28. So, the gift of leading, then, is “an ability in leadership and administration”.

Again, to qualify to serve as an elder in a church, you must have this gift. In 1 Timothy 3:4 and 5, it’s translated “to manage”. You’re going to manage the church of God, you’re going to lead, you’re going to administrate the church. And so the test of whether or not you have the ability to do that is how you lead and administrate your own family, your own household. That’s because leading, administrating is such a crucial part of the elder’s role. In 1 Peter 5, we’re told that “elders exercise oversight,” leadership.

But there are many people in the church who are not elders who have been gifted with leadership abilities. Sometimes, they’re the deacons who organize and lead ministries. Other times, there are those in the church with this gift who don’t hold the office, who aren’t elders, who aren’t deacons; they’re merely members of the church, but they have this gift; and their leadership may involve a ministry of the church, it may involve a part of a ministry, it may involve one small aspect of the ministry, and yet they’re providing administrative oversight to that responsibility. The gift of leadership is absolutely essential to the proper functioning of the Body of Christ.

I’m often told by people, “You know, Countryside, everything is just run so well, it’s done with such excellence.” And they look at me like I’m responsible for that. It’s like, look, the reason that happens is because the Lord has blessed our church with a lot of people who have the gift of leading and administration, and they use those gifts in the church.

The seventh gift listed here in Romans 12, is showing mercy, showing mercy. Notice verse 8, “... he who shows mercy.” Again, all of us, as believers, are to show mercy to those in need, but

there are those among us with a special unique capacity to show mercy. This gift is, I think again, an expression of the gift of helps or service. The Greek word, “show mercy”, here is always in the context of those who are in trouble, those who are in difficulty. In fact, most often, this word is used of God showing mercy to us as human beings. In fact, you remember back in chapter 9, our salvation was described as God showing us, what? Showing us mercy. God showed us mercy.

In fact, let me just say if you’re here this morning and you’re not a follower of Christ, what you need from God is His mercy. You were created by God to glorify Him, to obey Him, to listen to His voice, to follow Him, to worship Him, to serve Him. But you, like me, haven’t done that with your entire life. Instead, you’ve lived it for yourself. You’ve rebelled against your Creator, and you have earned the just punishment for that rebellion. That rebellion, by the way, is simply called sin by the Scripture, and the punishment is eternal judgment according to Jesus Christ Himself. That’s what’s coming, that’s what you’ve earned, that’s what I’ve earned.

But God is merciful, and in His mercy, He sent His only Son from heaven to become one of us. He became a full human being just like you are, and He lived a perfect life of obedience to God. For thirty-three years, He obeyed God’s Law perfectly; and then at the end of His life, He died as a sacrifice, giving Himself as the way to satisfy the justice of God against the sins of everyone who would ever believe in Him. In fact, Peter puts it this way, “He Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree so that we might live to God.” That’s what Jesus did, and then God raised Him from the dead.

What you need is that mercy that Jesus purchased for you. How does it become yours? You throw yourself on the mercy of God. You want to see a beautiful picture of it? Jesus told the story of a tax collector who went up to the temple to pray, and he went up to the temple and this is what he said, he wouldn’t even lift his eyes to heaven when he prayed. He looked at the ground, and he beat his chest and he said, “God, show me mercy. Be merciful to me the sinner.” You know what Jesus said about that man? “He left the temple justified,” right with God. This morning, if you will simply acknowledge your sin and throw yourself on the mercy of God, He will be merciful, and He will make you right with Him through the work of Jesus Christ. That’s

what we need is God's mercy.

So, it's usually God who shows mercy. In fact, here in Romans 12, this is the only time Paul ever uses this expression "show mercy" for the action of human beings. But there are those in the church who have this spiritual gift. What is it? The gift of showing mercy is "an ability to help, assist, and relieve those experiencing distress, misery, or pain".

In 1 Timothy 5:10, Paul says those who are widows indeed are those who (listen to this), "assisted those in distress," that's showing mercy. In Acts 9:36 Dorcas is described as, "abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did."

Showing mercy has so many contemporary expressions. People with this gift in our church, people who have the gift of showing mercy, these are the people who prepare meals for the families of those recovering from surgery or families after a funeral. They visit people in the hospital, they care for shut-ins, they reach out to those battling cancer or other life-destructive illnesses. They minister to those with special needs; they care for widows and orphans. This is such a vital gift for the function of the Body of Christ. These are the permanent edifying gifts Christ has given His church.

Now, look back at Romans 12 because I don't want you to miss the main point Paul is making in this section. With four of the seven gifts, Paul says if you receive this gift, use it. That's what he's saying. If you've got the gift, use it! God expects you in the context of the church to wholeheartedly use the gift the Spirit has given you.

Lloyd Jones writes, "It is the business of each person to use his or her gift and to exercise it to the full and to the glory of God and to the benefit of the church. Whatever your gift may be, concentrate on that." By the way, look again at that list in verses 6 - 8. Do you realize that our Lord demonstrated every one of those gifts in His earthly ministry? So, it's no wonder that when He starts distributing gifts to His Body, guess what He gives.

If we're going to use our giftedness responsibly, then you need to understand you need to use the

gift you've been given, use it! And use it as your primary ministry in the context of the church. So, my question to you this morning, if I can step away from teaching for a moment and exhort you, are you doing that? Are you using the giftedness you've been given in the context of the church? Let me say it as bluntly as I can, "If you're not, Christian, you are disobeying your Lord. So, get with the program. Paul says, 'Use it in the church.'"

If we're going to use our giftedness responsibly, there's one final priority, and that is, use your giftedness with the right attitude; use it with the right attitude. Did you notice the change with the last three gifts? With the first gift, prophecy, Paul told the first century believers who had that gift to exercise it according to the proportion of his faith. But then with the next three gifts, he said with service, teaching, and exhortation, focus your ministry in the church on using that gift. If you have the gift of serving, use it in serving; if you the gift of teaching, use it in teaching; if you have the gift of exhortation, use it in exhortation. But with the last three gifts, Paul tells us to use them with the right attitudes.

Notice the fifth gift. He says, give with liberality, verse 8, "He who gives, with liberality." The Greek word translated, "liberality", means "single as opposed to two-fold". So, Paul could be saying, "Give with integrity," or we could say it, "Give with sincerity." In other words, when you give, don't give for something you're getting out of it, your reputation, or anything else. Give for the need of the others and for the glory of God. If you have the gift of giving, give from your heart to the Lord, not to impress others like the hypocrites in Matthew 6, "Don't let your right hand know what your left hand is doing." Jesus says.

But this Greek word "liberality", can also mean just that, "generosity", and that's why it's translated that way here. I think that is what Paul means. It's like the Macedonian believers in 2 Corinthians 8:2, who, although they were poor, gave generously. Paul says, "Listen, if you have the gift of giving, then give generously, give with liberality. If you're one who has the gift of giving, here's one of those occasions when it's okay to be liberal. Be generous! Be liberal!

The sixth gift is, "Lead with diligence," lead with diligence. This word "diligence", the Greek word, is a complicated word. It includes the concepts of "eager, earnest, willing, wholehearted".

And so, the closest English equivalent is the word “diligence”. It’s like, 1 Peter 5: 2 says, “[The elders are to exercise] oversight [or lead] not under compulsion, but voluntarily ... not for sordid gain, but with eagerness.” If you have the gift of leading or administration, fulfill that responsibility with diligence.

And then the seventh one, notice he says, “... [show] mercy, with cheerfulness”. It’s the opposite of doing it under compulsion. Don’t do it because you have to. If you have the gift of mercy, do it because you want to, wholeheartedly. Never do what you do with the gift of mercy as if you’re merely determined to get through an unpleasant task.

Leon Morris writes, “Mercy is not a grim duty but a joy and a delight.” If you have the gift of mercy, how can you remain cheerful in that? I mean, you’re dealing often with hard things. How do you remain cheerful? The answer is, you remind yourself who you are really serving when you’re serving that Christian. Do you remember Matthew 25:40? Jesus lists all of these really practical things, and then He says, “... Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, *even the least of them*, you did it to Me.” Do you realize when you show mercy to a brother or sister in Christ, if you have that gift, Christ says, “It’s like you’re doing it to Me; that’s how I see it. You’re taking care of Me at the hospital; you’re taking care of Me as a shut-in.” That’s how you can remain cheerful.

So, what about the other gifts, the other four? What are the right attitudes for the previous four gifts where he didn’t list an attitude? Well, let me just show you from other places how he teaches us to exercise these gifts. First of all, in the first century, if you have the gift of prophecy, he says prophecy with carefulness. Verse 6, “... if prophecy, [then make sure you only prophesy what is] according to the proportion of ... [your] faith.” That is, only tell people what God is saying if that’s what God revealed to you. So, in the first century, if you had the gift of prophecy, you were to prophesy with carefulness.

Secondly, serve; serve with dependence on God. First Peter 4:11 says, “Whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies.” You know, it’s so easy if you have the gift of serving to say, “Look, I mean, I can make this meal with my hands tied behind

my back,” and to depend solely on yourself. But you are to exercise the gift of service, realizing this is not a natural ability, this is a spiritually given ability and you are to depend on God as you exercise the gift of serving, whatever that serving may be.

Teaching, teach as if you were speaking God’s utterances, 1 Peter 4:11, “Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God.” That defines what you teach. Listen, don’t get up and share all of your opinions. Instead, you read the text, you explain the text, you apply the text. Stick with the utterances of God.

With exhortation, exhort with patience and instruction. Second Timothy 4:2 says, “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.” Keep teaching as you exhort, but don’t give up.

You know, we can be so impatient with people. And yet remember the apostles; think about this. They had the best teacher, the best exhorter that ever lived, and He had them with Him for the better part of three and one-half years, teaching them day and night, and yet after three and one-half years with Jesus on the night before the Crucifixion, they are arguing about who’s the greatest! So, be patient with people. Let the Word have it’s time and work in their lives just as you want God to allow it to have with you.

So, don’t miss the big picture. God has gifted every individual Christian; that includes you. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit has gifted you to serve in this church. So, think about your spiritual gift accurately; don’t think too highly of yourself and your gift. Nor are you think badly of your gift. Instead, you’re to think, literally what Paul says, is sanely. Have a sane view of yourself and your giftedness. How does that happen? Well, remember that your unique ability to serve is a gracious sovereign gift of God. Look at the end of verse 3, “... as God has allotted to each.” And remember verses 4 and 5 that you’re just one member of Christ’s Body, and you’re there to serve the rest of the members. If you’ll do that, if you’ll think like that, then it’ll keep you sane in your thinking about your gift. It’ll keep you accurate in how you think.

And then, use your gift responsibly. Make sure you understand the New Testament spiritual

gifts. But then, use it; use your giftedness as your primary ministry in this church. Get busy, get involved! And as you use it, make sure you use it with the right attitude, with the right spirit, so that it honors our Lord even as you carry it out.

Understand that as we each use our giftedness, as you use yours and I use mine, Paul says in Ephesians 4, “The result is the entire body is built up together.” That’s the goal until we all increasingly resemble the moral character of Jesus Christ. Let’s serve Him together.

Let’s pray.

Father, thank you for the clarity of your Word. Thank you as well for the Holy Spirit who teaches us. And, Lord, thank you for the fact that You have, through Your Son, given gifts to every believer here, Lord, a package of giftedness which includes one or more of these gifts in differing measures.

Oh, God, help us to be obedient, help us to do as we’re admonished here, to understand them appropriately and then to use them responsibly, to get busy in the context of the Body of Christ, this local expression here at Countryside. Father, I pray that the result would be we would grow up together into Christ who is the Head.

Lord, I also pray for those who may be here this morning who have never experienced Your mercy. Oh, Lord, help them to see, help them to see their terrible condition, help them to see their coming end, help them to see they’re going to die, and they are going to stand before You, their Creator, having refused Your Son. Oh, God, help them to throw themselves like the tax collector on Your mercy even today, knowing that You will extend mercy to them because that is who You are. Oh, Lord, save them, I pray, for Your sake, for the sake of Your Son who is worthy to have a people who will praise Him forever!

We pray it in His name, Amen.