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## Romans 12:6-8 “What Is Your Spiritual Gift?”

Intro. We all have a need for a sense of significance and purpose, that our life matters. What is *your* purpose in life? Quite a few seem to think they have no higher purpose than to seek happiness. Yet I believe that God created us first for His own glory, and then to bless others. We have a role to fill to benefit our families, our church, our community, and at work or school.

Today we are going to talk further about what role each member can have in our church. In our last message from Romans, we began a teaching about the Church as the Body of Christ. Like a body, the church is made up of many individual members. The individual members of the Church should not carry out the same function within the church. Rather, we have different roles and responsibilities. And we also learned that God has supernaturally enabled each of us to carry out some aspect of the work of the church. Then, as one body in Christ, we are to work together under the Lordship of Jesus Christ to fulfill our common mission.

This morning we will learn more specifically about spiritual gifts, which are divine enablements for service. God has placed you in the Body of Christ to serve others, and to build up His church, all to the glory of God. As members of the body of Christ, we depend on the interchange that occurs between us. That involves using our gifts to serve one another. In your affiliation with the church, your main concern should not be what your church can do for you, but what you can do for your church. You have a function, a role within the Body of Christ.

So I hope that you will desire to learn how you can be a blessing to your church and to others. The way you can be most effective is to learn about spiritual gifts. Some of you still need to discover your gift. So I will share with you some of the key spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament. The list of gifts that Paul gives here is only a representative sampling of gifts. First Corinthians 12 adds other gifts, including the gift of faith, the gifts of giving words of wisdom or knowledge, and discerning of spirits. Because the lists are somewhat different in each listing, we can conclude that they are not rigid, all-inclusive lists. They are but samples of the dimensions of ministry within the Body of Christ. I consider them to be general categories of giftedness in which there could be many different variations.

Others of you already know what your spiritual gift is. You just need to utilize your spiritual gift, and do so in the proper way. As we saw last week, you are not to neglect your gift (1 Tim. 4:14) but stir up your gift, like stoking a fire (2 Tim. 1:6).

I read about a man in Saskatchewan, Canada, who has a hobby of collecting rare violins. Unfortunately, many violins in his collection aren't likely to be used any longer. Wouldn't it be marvelous if the great violinists of the world were able to play beautiful music on those violins? As it is, they are only on display.

Some churches are similar to that man's collection of unused violins. They have a collection of gifted Christians, but too many are merely on display. Let us not be that way. Let us use the gifts that God has given us.

Spiritual gifts fall into three categories in the New Testament: speaking gifts, serving gifts and sign gifts. The Apostle Peter is responsible for the designation of the first two in 1 Peter 4:10-11. The sign gifts, such as tongues and gifts of healing, are not mentioned here or in any other list of spiritual gifts with the exception of 1 Cor. 12, which was an early epistle. I believe

the sign gifts were unique to the time of the apostles as the church was being established. According to 2 Cor. 12:12 & Hebrews 2:4, they authenticated the teaching of the apostles and the subsequent writing of Scripture.<sup>1</sup> So I am going to limit our discussion of spiritual gifts to the two main categories given here in Romans that are still clearly relevant to the church today.

So first of all:

## I. CONSIDER IF YOU HAVE ONE OF THE VERBAL GIFTS

Just because you have a natural ability to talk a lot does not mean that you have one of the verbal spiritual gifts. On the other hand, just because you are quiet and reserved does not mean you do *not* have one of these speaking gifts. I know of quite a few preachers who are quiet and reserved in their personalities, and yet very gifted at public speaking.

So what are the speaking gifts listed here? Heading the list is:

A. Prophecy – This gift is mentioned in the last of v.6. When many people hear the word “prophecy,” they think of foretelling the future. Yet even in the Old Testament, while prophets did foretell the future, their major role was to tell forth God’s message to their own generation. A prophet was considered a spokesman for God.<sup>2</sup> Thus, a prophet speaks with authority (Mt. 7:29). In the New Testament era those with this gift received new revelation directly from the Spirit of God (cf. 1 Cor. 14:26, 30). Their role was especially important because the Bible was not yet completed, and the people often needed to hear a new word from God. In Ephesians 2:20 Paul said the Church as been “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.” I found at least 12 other references to the ministry of prophets in the New Testament church.<sup>3</sup>

In our day, this gift is different. That’s because all of God’s Word that we need has been written down, completed and preserved for us in the Bible. The prophet of today does not give a new revelation from God, but is able to take God’s Word that has already been revealed, and proclaim just the right message from God that is needed. They are especially gifted at applying God’s Word to current situations in penetrating and convicting ways. The best definition of the prophetic gift is found in 1 Corinthians 14:3, “the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.” Such preaching is to build up believers, challenge them to obedience and comfort them in sorrow. The one with the gift of prophecy may also have a message from God that convicts and evangelizes non-Christians as well (1 Cor. 14:24-25).

Now notice *how* we are to prophesy. The one with the prophetic gift is to exercise that gift “in proportion to our faith.” The word translated “proportion” (*analogia*)<sup>4</sup> also means “in agreement with, or conforming to a standard.” Furthermore, “faith” has the definite article. So it probably has the idea of “in agreement with the faith.” Jude referred to the body of Christian doctrine as “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3 NKJV; cf. Gal. 1:23; 3:23; 1 Tim. 1:4, 19; 3:9; 4:1, 6; 6:21). That is why the ESV translates it “our faith.”

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<sup>1</sup> In 2 Corinthians 12:12 Paul says, “Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.” Hebrews 2:4 says that God bore witness to the apostles “both with signs and wonders, with various miracles...” (Both verses NKJV).

<sup>2</sup> In Jer. 15:19 God said to Jeremiah, “...you shall be as my mouth.”

<sup>3</sup> See Acts 2:17-18; 11:27; 13:1; 15:32; 19:6; 21:9; 1 Cor. 11:4-5; 12:28-29; 14:1-5, 29, 31, 39 for the ministry of prophets in the New Testament church.

<sup>4</sup> The verb form, *analogizomai*, means “to think over, ponder, consider by weighing, comparing” (Heb. 12:3; Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon).

1 Thessalonians 5 says, “Do not despise prophesyings.” Yet Paul immediately went on to say, “but test everything...” (vv. 19-21; see also 1 Jn. 4:1; Gal. 1:8). We are not to despise those who say they have a word from God, but we are not to be gullible either. We are to “test” such proclamations, comparing what is preached with what the written Word of God says. If a man has a word from God, it will not contradict the rest of Scripture. For example, when some suggested that Israelites “inquire of the mediums and the necromancers,” the reply from God was, “To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn (light)” (Isa. 8:19-20; cf. 1 Cor. 14:37). In 1 Cor. 14:29 Paul says, “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.”<sup>5</sup> The others were to make sure that what the prophet was saying was true to God’s Word.

Oh, how we need men who are called to preach and enabled with the gift of prophecy to use this gift! That is what Paul exhorted Timothy to do in 2 Timothy 4:2-4: “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth...” Is there someone here today that has been called to preach, and yet you still haven’t answered the call? Then say Yes to God. For those who do answer the call, be sure to follow the guideline Paul has given here for your preaching. It must conform to the standard of truth in God’s Word.

The next speaking gift we will consider this morning is:

B. Teaching – In the last of v.7 Paul mentions the gift of teaching. The office of teaching differs from the prophetic. The teacher is to study God’s Word and then expound and explain the meaning of what God has revealed in His Word. The teacher’s work is directed particularly to the understanding. Teaching involves the ongoing process of systematically taking people from one point to another in their understanding of the Word of God. Teachers help people discover principles to live by. Acts 2:41 says that the early church “continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine” (NKJV) or “teaching.” Teaching God’s Word is a vital ministry of the church, and God has gifted certain people to teach.

Paul was an excellent teacher. The epistle to the Romans shows his genius at systematically imparting truth. Jesus certainly was even known as “the Teacher.” He could help people see truth with mental images through stories and analogies. Luke 24:27 tells us that as He walked on the road to Emmaus with two disciples “he expounded unto them, in all the Scriptures, the things concerning himself” (NKJV). I believe all pastors or elders should have the gift of teaching. In fact, 1 Timothy 3:2 says that elders are to be “able to teach.” They *must* have the gift of teaching. In Eph. 4:11 Paul refers to the office of pastor-teacher.<sup>6</sup> It’s not unusual for a pastor to be both a teacher and a preacher, but he must at least have the gift of teaching as a basic requirement for being an elder. We need others who have the gift of teaching in Sunday School, and in other small group Bible studies. We have many fine lay teachers in our church.

Paul says how this gift is to be exercised, “in his teaching.” In other words, Paul states the obvious. The one with the gift of teaching is to teach! There is no other way to develop this gift, or to determine if you have this gift, than to teach!

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<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, according to some commentators (Murray), the idea of proportion is the preponderant one. The Prophet who speaks God’s Word is not to go beyond what God has given him to speak. Nor is he to withhold any truth from the people. Both interpretations are relevant.

<sup>6</sup> Based on a rule of Greek grammar, pastor and teacher refer to the same office in that verse.

Teaching is somewhat like swimming. Just as you must commit yourself to the water to learn to swim, so you must learn to teach and develop your gift by teaching.

So try as soon as possible to communicate to someone else a truth that you have learned. When you learn something from a sermon or Bible lesson, explain what you have learned to two or three other people at the earliest possible opportunity. You may discover that you have the gift of teaching. I also encourage you to study and learn God's Word, to be better prepared to teach when given the opportunity.

C. Exhortation – Paul mentions the gift of exhortation in v.8a. Whereas someone with the gift of prophecy proclaims the truth, the one with the gift of exhortation presents and applies God's truth and calls for a right response. And as teaching is directed to the understanding, so exhortation appeals to the heart, conscience, and will. The Christian needs someone who will give encouragement and exhortation along the way of their spiritual development. It could involve a call and encouragement to trust more in the Lord and walk by faith.

The broad scope of the ministry of exhortation is reflected in 1 Th. 5:14, where Paul says, "And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak...." Thus, exhortation could involve encouraging people to stop sinning and live righteously. If someone is fainthearted and afraid, you need to remind him that God is in control and that since no enemy is greater than He, His victory is assured. If you're weak and defeated, then someone needs to come to you and say, "Let me encourage you to take your eyes off your problems and focus them on the Lord; be strong in the Lord and the power of His might." The word also refers to comforting in times of trouble or sorrow. So if you find someone in sorrow, you might gently encourage him with a promise of Scripture, or a testimony of how God has helped you in such a time (2 Cor. 1:4).

Bible commentator Donald Barnhouse told of young girl who was taking skating lessons from an experienced skater. As the young student was skating around, every now and then she would begin to stumble and fall. But her teacher was always close by, and she would quickly come over and keep her from falling.

Even so in the church today we need people with the gift of exhortation and comfort, who can come to the side of someone who is falling due to fear, or discouragement, or temptation. They have a special ability to say just the right words to keep them from falling.

If you have this gift, Paul once again says in v.8 that you are to use it. You are needed in the Body of Christ. You could use this gift especially to others in your Sunday School class or small group. Keep up with who is on our prayer list and take steps to encourage or comfort those who have special needs. There will always be some in the church who stop attending. Especially those with the gift of exhortation should reach out to them. You can encourage people with a phone call, a visit, a special card or even a text or email. you encourage someone who seems down with a well-timed and sincere complement, In my previous church I had a secretary who had this gift as expressed through her timely and well-written cards and emails.

D. Leading – According to the last of v.8, some have the gift of leading.<sup>7</sup> It is a speaking gift because speaking effectively as one of the ways we lead others. "Leads" is from a verb (*proistemi*) that literally means "to stand before." So it means to be at the head of, to direct, manage, or oversee. It involves the multiple skills of organizing, administrating, and motivating

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<sup>7</sup> The gift of leading is the same as the gift of governments (*kubernesis*-lit., the act of being at the helm) mentioned in 1 Cor. 12:28.

people to accomplish a task. When you have a group of people, someone needs to stand up, take some initiative, and give direction to the group. Otherwise, nothing will be accomplished.

God has designed the church to have leaders (Heb. 13:7, 17; 1 Tim. 5:17). In Acts 6 the apostles were certainly the leaders of the church, but they requested that the church find other men to carry on the administrative task of providing for the widows. So the church also needs lay leaders, such as elders and ministry directors, and not just paid staff leaders. There are not enough hours in the day for a pastor or even the elders to personally lead every aspect of the ministry of the church.

If people tend to look to you for leadership, then you probably have this gift. And if you have this gift, we need you to accept leadership responsibilities in our teams, organizations, and other ministries. The church needs people who are willing and qualified to serve as leaders. [Share about any leadership vacancies?]

Furthermore, Paul tells us in the last of v.8 that such leaders are to lead with “zeal” (*spoude*, not *zelos*). The word literally refers to one who makes haste to a task. So it refers to eagerness, intense effort and dedication. Leadership can be hard and time-consuming and it requires such earnestness. I believe this is reflected in v.11, “Do not be slothful in zeal (*spoude*), be fervent (*zeo*) in spirit, serve the Lord.” Too many potential leaders would rather take the pathway of ease. So leaders, don’t face your leadership assignments with reluctance but with zeal and eagerness. After all, if the workers are to have diligence, then the leaders must set the example. Have any of our leaders lost their zeal and earnestness to lead? If so, perhaps those who are being led need to express more appreciation and support for their leaders, as stated in 1 Th. 5:12-13.<sup>8</sup> Such leaders also need to reflect on leaders in the Bible and other leaders who inspire zeal and earnestness.

So I ask you, do you have one of the speaking gifts? If not:

## II. CONSIDER IF YOU HAVE ONE OF THE ACTION GIFTS

A. Serving – The Greek word translated “service” in v.7 is *diakonia*, from which we get our word “deacon.” The word was often used of those who wait upon the need of others, as a waiter provides service to those who are dining. It’s a common word in the New Testament that is used more than seventy-five times for various dimensions of serving.<sup>9</sup> The gift of ministry is a support gift of practical help or service. People with this gift have a clear inclination to recognize a need, and then offer to serve and help out.

The flexibility of the term is apparent from 1 Cor. 12:5 where Paul speaks of “varieties of service.” Yes, there are different kinds of ministries or services that the church is to engage in. God may call you to help us minister to physical needs. I believe deacons should have the gift of service, and they help with physical needs. There are many support services in the church where this gift can be exercised. Some with the gift of service came out yesterday to help clear off our new church property. Some will gladly serve in the upcoming fall festival. We also need nursery workers and other workers in our various ministries, such as the sound and video operations. Those who host our community groups are providing a vital service.

The church is dependent on the helpers. If people with the gifts of helps or ministry don’t use their gifts, the church has to find other people who will perform the basic but important tasks

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<sup>8</sup> “We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work....” (1 Th. 5:12-13).

<sup>9</sup> It is equivalent to what is referred to as “helps” in 1 Cor. 12:28.

that keep a church functioning properly. At times churches end up paying people for what could and should be done by volunteers with the gift of service.

I have already observed quite a few people in our church with the gift of service. They often volunteer when something needs to be done. You learn that they are the ones you can count on to help out.

So if you have the gift of serving, your church needs you to serve. Follow what Paul says in v.7 and utilize your gift. Volunteer. Use your gift to support the ministries of this church. This gift is high on the list for a reason. After all, Jesus said in Mt. 20:26, "... whoever would be great among you must be your servant."

Next, Paul mentions the gift of:

B. Giving or Sharing – Paul mentions this gift in v.8. "Contributes" (*metadidomi*) is from a word which means "share with" or "to impart one's earthly possessions" to meet the needs of another. Paul says in v.13 that we are to "Contribute to the needs of the saints...."

How do you know if you have this gift? First, you have a God-given inclination to give. No one has to pressure you to give. 2 Cor. 9:7 says that we are not to give "reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." Those with the gift of giving are glad to give. Whenever you hear or see a need, you tend to *want* to respond by giving to meet that need. Furthermore, a person with the gift of giving is usually blessed with an ability to acquire money. As they give, God just blesses them with more.

Notice that the person who has this gift is to do so "in generosity." The word (*haplotes*) has two basic meanings; sincerity or generosity. The former meaning would refer to giving with single-mindedness of motive and purpose. Giving must not be with the ulterior motives of securing some advantage for oneself, such as gaining influence or recognition.<sup>10</sup> The man who is not willing to give unless his name is carved in wood or engraved in stone has not understood the spirit of Christ that gives without thought of return. The latter meaning, liberality, would also apply, but perhaps less so, for the one who has the gift of giving is by nature generous. Perhaps Paul is just reminding those with this gift that generosity of giving must be practiced with regularity by those with this gift.

I thank God for those who have the gift of giving. If you have that gift, then use it. If your heart is prompted to give generously when needs arise, and you can do so joyfully, then you can know you have that gift.

Last of all, some have the special gift of:

C. Showing Mercy – This gift is mentioned in the last of v.8. Those with this gift have an extraordinary ability to sense the need of those who are hurting. Seeing the need, they have compassion toward people such people – the poor, the downtrodden, the imprisoned, and others who are faced with hardships. You find people with this gift participating in jail ministries, hospital visitation, and rescue missions. They will work in the church food closet or community soup kitchen. Jesus had all the spiritual gifts, and He certainly showed mercy and compassion to the poor and needy.

But notice how you are to exercise that gift. Paul says in the last of v.8 that this is to be done with cheerfulness (*hilarotes*). If you're going to minister to people who are miserable, you had better not be miserable yourself while you're doing it! Such people need some good cheer. So as you minister to those in need, you should carry sunshine, not gloom. Greet them with a

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<sup>10</sup> See also 2 Cor. 8:2; 9:11, 13; 11:3; Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22.

smile. You want to encourage them in their misery, not add to it! Nothing affords more consolation to the distressed than the sight of helpers full of cheerfulness. The reason Paul gives this exhortation is because often times the work of mercy is disagreeable and so it is liable to be done grudgingly.

This reminds me of a story of a certain layman who went to his pastor. He said, "I want to serve God. Tell me what I should do." So the pastor suggested that he go down to the rescue mission and volunteer there. He went there and said to the superintendent of the rescue mission, "I want to serve God. Tell me what I can do?" So he suggested that he go out to the sidewalk and invite people to the worship service that was about to take place. Well, he had a sour disposition and he began to confront people with a demanding attitude, telling people they ought to come into the rescue mission for the service. Not surprisingly, no one accepted his invitation. Finally, someone helped him see what was wrong with his approach as he looked at the man's solemn face and said, "No thank you. I have enough problems of my own." [Barnhouse, pp. 58-59].

So as you show mercy to people in need, to people who are troubled, do so with cheerfulness, not grudgingly, though there may be occasions when you should follow what Paul says in the last of v.15, "weep with those who weep."

Do you have the gift of mercy, or want to find out if you do? I encourage you to get with Barry and volunteer to help with the Liberation Veterans ministry. Or volunteer to help with the Fix ministry or the local Pregnancy Support Center. Or sign up to be trained in the SBC Disaster Relief ministry.

Conclusion: So Christian, you not only need to discover your spiritual gift, but also use it on a regular basis in the right way. Your eternal commendation and reward are not going to be determined based on whether you had the same impact that Billy Graham did on the world. Your eternal reward is going to be based on whether you maximized the gift God designed for you to use (cf. Matt. 25:14-30). It's going to be based on how faithful you have been to exercise your gift in the right way. So give heed to Paul's exhortation to Timothy, "stir up the gift of God which is in you" (2 Timothy 1:6 NKJV). Will you dedicate yourself to serving God and others by employing your spiritual gift? Perhaps you will let an elder or other leader know of your willingness to work in a particular ministry. You are needed in the ministry of this church. You are gifted for ministry. Now use your gift in ministry as one expression of fulfilling v.1, "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service of worship" (my translation).

If you are not yet a Christian, I want you to know that you are missing out, not only in having a spiritual gift, but you are missing out on the gift of eternal life (6:23), the gift of forgiveness, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and so much more. Repent of your sins and place your faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior!

Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letter to the Romans* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957); Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 4, "God's Discipline" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964); F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Bruce Corley & Curtis Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); Hershel Hobbs, *Romans: A Verse by Verse Study* (Waco: Word Books, 1977); Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint); John MacArthur, Jr., *A Living Sacrifice: Study Notes on Romans 12:1-8* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1987); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 5 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Douglas J. Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary: Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the*

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