

**Sermon Title: Many Gifts**  
**Biblical Text: Romans 12:6-8**  
**Teaching Series: Justified by Love**  
**Preaching Date: November 20, 2022**  
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## **Romans 12:6-8**

*Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.*

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Paul wants his readers to do something very hard. He wants them to offer their whole self in worship. Of course, they type of worship is more than being mindful of God in so called spiritual moments. Worship does not simply happen when we open our Bibles or gather as a church or when we pray. Worship happens all the time. And so he tells them, *Read Romans 12:2 ... "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind."* That's worship. Worship is, as one writer puts it, resisting being *"squeezed into the shape of this present age"* (N.T. Wright, *Paul For Everyone*, 67).

The present age is the here and now. It's today. Specifically it's the age when the kingdom of Jesus is breaking in but not yet fully revealed. The present age pressures and pushes us into a particular form that is contrary to our God-given design, meant for our flourishing. Paul goes on to tell us this present age wants to squeeze you into thinking about yourself too highly or too lowly. But, he says,

don't be conformed; don't be squeezed. Rather be transformed into humility. This present age squeezes you into isolation and self-reliance ... but don't be conformed. Be transformed into one body, members of one another. In our primary passage today, he'll tell us that this present age wants to squeeze you into using your powers and abilities to advance your own glory and platform, to only meet your own needs ... but don't be conformed. Be transformed into a member who blesses others with their gifts.

As we've considered, worship is about giving ourselves to God (vv.1-2). But the outflow of that worship is a life of worship that learns to give ourselves to ourselves (v.3), and give ourselves to our brothers and sisters. (vv.4-5), and give ourselves to our calling which blesses the world and ushers in the coming kingdom (vv.6-8).

That's what I'd like to talk about. You've been uniquely blessed with gifts, in order to bless others. It's an ancient calling, buried within the covenant God made to the patriarch of our faith, Abraham. God tells Abraham, ***Read Genesis 12:2 ... And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.*** The Church is not an organization meant simply to meet personal needs. Nor is she simply a group of rule makers and keepers. The Church is the Body of Christ, who bears witness to the reality of Christ. And we bear witness by blessing one another and the world with the gifts he's entrusted to us. That's what Paul is going to tell us today from Romans 12:6-8. Here's how the text will shape our time ...

- The ***giver*** of gifts. *What kind of God gives gifts?*
- The ***purpose*** of gifts. *Why does God give gifts?*

- The *discovery* of gifts. *What gifts has God given us?*

[Prayer]

## **Movement 1: The Giver of Gifts (v.6, James 1:17)**

God, of course is the *giver* of gifts. James famously has said, *Read James 1:17 ...*

*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*

When we say that God is a giver, we have to be careful to avoid a couple misconceptions. In his book, *Free of Charge*, Professor Miroslav Volf identified two primary misconceptions about God when it comes to his giving nature. Volf talks about God the Negotiator and God the Santa Claus. In different seasons and situations we employ one of these fallacies to serve our own interests. These are misconceptions of the present age which (perhaps unwittingly) squeeze us into it's shape.

Essentially God the Negotiator is someone we make deals with in order to get gifts from him. We see this kind of approach to God in films, books, and in our own lives. We vow obedience, charity, or some form of sacrifice in exchange for a second chance, or skill, or relationship, and so on. But Volf points out, *"even if we could entice God into making a deal with us we would have no way of enforcing compliance. Since God doesn't need anything and divine power infinitely exceeds human, God can break any contract—give us a bit of 'cash' as compensation, and leave us out in the cold"* (25). God as Negotiator is all about seeing God as someone with whom we can make deals. But God doesn't make deals. God gives because he loves us, not because we have something valuable to give us in return.

The other fallacy is God the Santa Claus. This is a concept of God who simply showers us with gifts, ostensibly without any strings attached. Volf says, ***"God is an infinitely rich, always available, and unfailingly generous giver—or at least, that's what we feel a god worthy of divinity ought to be. God gives without conditions or without demands"*** (27). This version of God is one of cosmic manipulation. Though from one vantage point Santa gives without conditions and demands, his generosity comes with veiled threats and fear tactics. After all, he's making his list and checking it twice. To see whose naughty and whose nice. But ultimately those are hollow threats. He's gonna give us whatever we want and expect nothing in return. God as Santa Claus doesn't shape our character and transform our hearts. He may get us to "act right" for a bit, but his generosity is not transformative. But God does shape our hearts. God gives to love and transform us.

Paul flows out of his teaching about Christian unity, especially at the local church level, into an explanation about how we are to live together. It's based upon the generosity of God. God gives gifts, to love and transform us. Notice, ***Read Romans 12:6 ... "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us ..."*** We have been giving gifts. And they differ according to grace. Grace is what has been given to us. Grace is the impetus to give us gifts. God gives gifts because he's gracious. That's what we learn about God through this passage and his habit of generosity. God gives because he's gracious. Not because we gave something valuable to exchanges in return. Grace is not a fair trade. Not because we don't need to change and be transformed. Grace is not passive and unaffectioning.

The ***giver*** of gifts is gracious.

But, *what's his purpose?*

## **Movement 2: The Purpose of Gifts (v.6b, Ephesians 4:12-14)**

We've hinted at the *purpose* of gifts already. Within God's character, we realize he gives primarily out of love and to demonstrate that love for us. He's not making a deal. He's not feeding our consumerism. Paul highlights something specific about the *purpose* of gifts which informs the rest of the passage. It may seem obvious but I think there's an important lesson here for us. *Read Romans 12:6b ... **Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them ...*** The *purpose* of gifts is to use them.

Again, this might seem obvious but I think it's easy to not use our gifts. It's easy to be unaware that we even have them to use. This is most apparent to me when I speak with many of you about church attendance and participation in your groups. Fundamental contexts of discipleship and community. Many of us have had a hard time staying faithful to establish the weekly rhythm of being at church on Sundays and being with our groups during the week. I get it. Often, we feel a sense of guilt or even shame for this because we know it's good for us to be with God's people. That's true. I do think it's good for you. But what I often don't hear is that it's good for God's people when you're here too. Because when you're not here, when you're not with us ... neither are your gifts that God has entrusted to you. To be sure these are not simply used at groups and gatherings, but these contexts are fundamental to our development. I'm not trying to gas you or just make you feel good to manipulate your participation. I'm simply conveying the truth of God's Word and the truth of who we are as a body. Paul told the church in Corinth, *Read 1*

**Corinthians 12:12 ... For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.** When you aren't here, we're missing our arm. When you're not here, we're missing our eyes. When you're not here, we're missing our hands.

When the Body is not fully assembled we all suffer. *Why?* Because one of us is not here to use our gifts, and therefore all of us miss the blessing of your gifts. You see, within this illustration of the Body Paul has been employing here, we are meant to function and be known within and as a community. Our gifts are meant to bless, encourage, equip, and help our brothers and sisters. You have been blessed, to bless us. Paul puts it this way to the church in Ephesus. He tells them they've been given different gifts, **Ephesians 4:12-14 ... "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes."** As cliché as it may sound, we are not us when you are not with us.

And each of you contributes something powerful and beautiful to our church family.

*Do you see?* That's the **purpose** of gifts, to bless. God has entrusted each of us with unique and powerful ways to be used to bless our community ... within and outside of our church family.

So, *how do we discover our gifts?*

## **Movement 3: The Discovery of Gifts (Romans 12:6c-8, 1 Timothy 3:1, 1 Corinthians 1:10, John 15:16, 2 Corinthians 1:24)**

Well, we've hinted at this a bit already. One of the primary ways we *discover* our gifts is that we live as a community, as a Body. In fact, if we are a body you can not discover your gifts without the Body, that is without being in true community. Before Paul lists seven different gifts here in Romans 12, he says we all have gifts that differ but all come from grace (v.6). So part of the maturation process of every Christians is by grace to discern the specific ways God has blessed them to bless the Church and world.

Again, this goes down in community, as a Body. When we're in community, we discover our gifts because a few things are happening below the surface of our interactions ...

1. First, we see others use their gifts. We're blessed by others and we discover more about ourselves and the impact others have on us and the community.
2. Second, we see needs and opportunities to use gifts. When we live closely with others, we get to know their desires to grow in wisdom, or their need for childcare, or their dreams to build an app that organizes the needs and resources of a neighborhood, or we discover a shared pain or heartbreak. Simply being in community exposes us to ways we can bless.
3. Thirdly, living in a community invites us to try out different ways of blessing and see what fruit is produced. We try to serve a particular way. We try to meet a need. We try to see if we really do have a particular gift.

Dr. Russell Moore explains, *“In the New Testament, we don't find our gift through self-examination and introspection and then find ways to express it. Instead, we love one another, serve one another, help one another, and in so doing we see how God has equipped us to do so”* (*Adopted for Life*). We see gifts. We see opportunities. We give it a shot.

The New Testament has four primary lists of spiritual gifts: Ephesians 4:11, 1 Corinthians 12:8, 1 Corinthians 12:28, and this one, in Romans 12:6-8. Some gifts are about leadership and teaching the Bible. Others are about meeting various spiritual and practical needs of the community. Some gifts are reserved for offices of the local church. Others are for anyone and everyone who loves and follows Jesus. But they are all given by grace and all by the Holy Spirit, with the express purpose of serving others. They are not meant to puff up and separate. They are meant to humble and build up. The gifts are diverse, but unifying. We are many, yet one. Spiritual gifts celebrate our diversity and foster oneness. We are blessed to bless.

Through the years, many specific methods and systems have been developed to help the Church discover their gifts. Many can be really helpful. In my experience most share four touch points for *discovering* our gifts. Desire. Affirmation. Fruitfulness. Joy.

- Desire. Paul tells Timothy, *Read 1 Timothy 3:1 ... If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task*. In other words, what we aspire to or desire to do is important. But it's not the only barometer to our gifts.



- Affirmation. It's also important that our community affirm our gifts. To the church in Corinth Paul said, *Read 1 Corinthians 1:10 ... "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you."* There should be affirmation, agreement, and unity in the ways we are serving.
- Fruitfulness. And there should be fruit. Jesus told his disciples, *Read John 15:16 ... "I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit."* When we use our gifts, God's power is evidenced through the fruit that's produced in our serving.
- Joy. Having desired, affirmed, and seen fruit from our gifts we experience joy. In his second letter to Corinth Paul explains, *Read 2 Corinthians 1:24 ... "Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith."* Our gifts, used within community and for the good of the community should bring joy, to us and others.

All these things being equal, *what gifts are there?* Well, Paul focuses on seven. *Read Romans 12:6c-8 ... "if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness."* Notice, there's an implication for many of these, how these gifts are exercised and experienced within community. In fact, exercising these gifts requires community. *What's serving, if there's no one to serve? What's exhortation, if you don't know the one you're exhorting? What's leadership, if it's not out of love and passion for others?*

- Prophecy is about speaking the word of God with authority. And Paul says these messengers should speak within the boundaries of the faith, not contradicting Christian doctrine.
- Serving is about practical service. Perhaps you are skilled at administration, order, excel, or seeing the needs of others. By using this gift you can bless a lot of people.
- Teaching is about explaining the word of God with truth and clarity. This could be in a class room or in a small group or with your family. The gift of teaching comes in many different forms.
- Exhorting is about coming alongside someone with encouragement, whether in what you do or say, or simply in your presence. This gift is demonstrated in those who write loving notes and those who are professional counselors.
- Generosity is about giving. This gift is often about resources and money, but it doesn't have to be. People with this gift love giving in unusual ways and portions; they do it with wisdom and joy.
- Leadership is about getting people to follow. Whether that's overseeing a family, group, ministry, or church, the gift of leadership helps paint a picture of a preferred future and helps people take steps to make that a reality.
- Mercy is about seeing and responding to the needs of others. In particular, the person with the gift of mercy has disproportionate compassion for the poor, the disenfranchised, and those with material and basic life needs.

As you hear these gifts, perhaps you desire one or a few. *Has it been affirmed by others? Have you seen fruit produced in doing that work, or serving in that way? Does it bring you joy?* If so, there's good reason to believe God has uniquely gifted you to serve your church family in that way. These are not the only gifts, but considering one of the four lists in the New Testament helps us to see the point: we all have gifts, but none of us has all the gifts. Well, except for Christ. And that's why, when the more we come together, the more we use our gifts to bless others, the more and more of Christ we see demonstrated in and through and among us. In other words, the more the present age is squeezed into the shape of Jesus' kingdom. This of course is why he died. He died to save us from eternal consequence and separation from him and each other. He died to glorify his Father and make us a family, a people who join him in ushering in a new age, when the illustration of the Body will give way to the return of the Incarnate Son, Jesus Christ.

The *giver* of gifts is gracious.

The *purpose* of gifts is to bless.

The *discovery* of gifts requires community.