

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Ministry of Spiritual Gifts, Part 3

Scripture: Romans 12:8

Code: 45-92

I want you to open in your Bible now to the twelfth chapter of Paul's letter to the Roman church, Romans chapter 12. Need I say that this has been a marvelous and exciting and thrilling study for us over the last couple of years in this great epistle? I know it has for me and continues to be a source of great joy and encouragement and blessing.

And as we have come to the twelfth chapter, it's almost as if we've been digging a long time and we finally discovered gold. And here we are at the point we've been waiting for for so long, when we can see how all of this doctrine that we've had to dig through is finally settled and we've arrived at the treasure that God has for us in the matter of how to live as God would have us live, to know His blessing and give Him glory.

Let's remind ourselves of how Paul introduces the great truths of the practical section of this epistle that begin in chapter 12. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God which is your spiritual worship. And do not be conformed to this world but be ye being transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. For I say through the grace given unto me to every man that is among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body and all members have not the same office, so we being many are one body in Christ and every one members one of another, having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or service, let us attend to our serving; or he that teacheth on teaching; or he that exhorteth on exhortation; he that giveth, with liberality; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness."

Now in reading that passage, we realize that we have arrived at a very crucial point in this great epistle, the key point, the turning point where doctrine turns to duty, where theology turns to practice, to life. And Paul is saying in view of all that God has done for us described in eleven chapters, which he calls the mercies of God, in view of all of that, he calls us to a total consecration of soul, body, mind and will in an act of complete self-sacrifice, putting ourselves on the altar of sacrifice.

It isn't a new thought. Jesus called for that, didn't He? "Except a man take up his cross and follow Me, can't really be My disciple. Except he deny himself, unless he's willing to turn his back on father

and mother and brother and sister, if he's not willing to count the cost and lay down his life, he's not worthy to be My disciple." It's the same idea.

There comes a turning point in the life when we are to lay it all out for the service of Jesus Christ. And I really have to confess to you that it is a daily thing. Paul said, "I die daily," didn't he, in writing to the Corinthians. I die daily. It's every day that I have to put my life back on the altar because it has a way of crawling off.

But I really do think there has to be a starting point. And I can remember when that was for me. I can remember, as some of you know, when I was thrown out of an automobile going about 75 miles an hour and slid down the road about a hundred yards on my backside and wound up three months in bed. That was a real turning point in my life. I mean, you can't really argue with that kind of activity. If the Lord's going to play that way, you might as well give in. And that's what I did.

And it was then at the very strong and sovereign prompting of God through that, that I said, "Lord, here's my life, I no longer want to make the choices, I want You to make the choices. I no longer want to be in control in any sense." And my life went on the altar. And I remember the prayer I prayed that very day standing on that highway after I'd gotten off so I wouldn't get hit by another car after I had already spun all the way down the road, I walked off and I remember saying, "God, whatever you want me to do, I'll do it. If it's a small job, give me the grace to do it and be satisfied, if it's a big one, give me the ability to do it and be humble." And I gave everything to Christ standing on that highway.

For me, that was really the moment of putting myself on the altar, as it were. And then it's a constant daily process of maintaining that level of dedication and commitment. And that's where it all starts, with that act of self-sacrifice.

Now why do we do that? Why are we suppose to present ourselves? Well, the answer is in order that we may serve God properly, as described in verses 3 through 8 and following, so that we may be of use to Him, so that we may maximize our giftedness, so that we may serve His cause and His purpose and His holy Kingdom, and His people and reach the lost and do His work in His way. And once we've made the proper sacrifice, then in verse 3 we will come to the proper attitude. And the proper attitude is not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, but to think properly or rightly or soberly according as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith. The first thing is to have a humble evaluation of ourselves. Out of self-sacrifice comes the attitude of humility. I've just put my life on the altar and now I'm nothing. I'm not trying to salvage my own ego, I'm not trying to fulfill my own goals and desires and build my own reputation, I just want to do what God wants me to do.

I've said to the Lord so many times, "Lord, I thank You for all You've done in my life, but if You choose to take it all away, that's okay, too. I just want You to know that my relationship to You is not predicated on what privilege You've given me. I want to come to the place where I know what Paul meant when he said I know how to bound and I know how to be abase, but in whatever state I am, there with to be...what?...content." Because for me all life really is is putting my own self on the altar and saying, "There I am, Lord, You do whatever You want to do and if You give it to me, great. And if You take it away, that's great, too, because it's Yours."

And Paul had that attitude. He said, "If I live, I live unto the Lord. If I die, I die unto the Lord. I am the Lord's whether I live or die." And that is the right attitude.

And so, out of a self-sacrifice comes humility. You're not in control. Your life isn't for you anymore. And so as you look at yourself then you're not going to think more highly than you ought to think, you're going to think honestly about what you can do for God. You're going to look rightly and fairly and honestly and sober mindedly and evaluate properly the giftedness and the capability that God by His grace has given to you. There's no sense in living with delusions of grandeur, imagining yourself to be indispensable to the Kingdom of God or able to do things far beyond what reality would indicate. And so we have to have the proper attitude. You start with the proper offering and then you go to the proper attitude.

And then you need to understand the proper relationship. Service demands an understanding of that, doesn't it?, in verse 4. "For as we have many members in one body," that is I have one body and it has members, ears and eyes and nose and organs inside and fingers and arms and legs and all of that, "and all of those members don't have the same function," in fact each one of them has a different one, "so we being many are one body in Christ and every one members one of another and we have gifts that differ according to the grace that is given to us." So we go from a proper sacrifice, the right sacrifice to the right attitude to the right relationship. And we understand that we are essential to the body of Christ.

So on the one hand this is a marvelous kind of paradox, I have put my life on the altar and I look at myself humbly and say, "I'm not the beginning and the end of all things, I give my life to God, whatever He chooses to do, I want to do that." And so I rightly evaluate my function. But immediately after that I am reminded that I am important to the body of Christ. And that's the balance because I have a function. I am a member of His body. And as a member of His body, there is a function that I must do. And you remember in our last study, we went into that in some detail, looking not only in this passage but also at other passages, namely Romans 12 which deals with the church as a body.

And so, we begin then to apply our theology. We begin to really move into the area of practical living with the right sacrifice and the right attitude and the right relationship. And that brings us, doesn't it, to verse 6 again, and the right service, or the right ministry. Now that we've put our life on the altar,

now that we have properly evaluated the gift that God has given to us, the abilities we have, the ministries His Spirit desires to work through us and that we understand how vital that is to the ongoing and growth and development of the body, it is time for us to get moving. And so he says if you have the gift of prophecy, then do it. If you have the gift of service, then get serving. If it's teaching, then teach. If it's exhortation, then exhort. If it's giving, then do it with liberality. If it's ruling, do it with diligence. If it's showing mercy, do it with cheerfulness. That's all exhortation.

He's not really getting into a technical definition of the gift, as much as he's saying get at it...get at it. It's a call for action. You, who have been recipients of the mercies of God, you who bask in the glories of all the eleven chapters which define for us what God has done on our behalf, get busy doing what He has called you to do on His behalf.

Peter, you'll remember we mentioned this, gives us similar exhortation in 1 Peter 4:10. "As every man has received the gift, you have a spiritual gift, even so minister the same one to another as good stewards of the multi colored grace of God." And there's that idea that God's grace gifts to us are multi colored. God is like an artist with a palette and on the palette there are many different colors and he mixes those colors and paints us a unique color all our own. And according to the multiple colors He has and the multiple way He has designed us, we need to get on with doing what He's gifted us to do. If you've received it, then do it as a good steward...that is as a good manager of your giftedness. It isn't really yours, it's His, He gives it to you to use in His behalf.

So, Paul is calling us then to the right service. And I only remind you again that you must understand the right relationship, that is that you're essential to the body of Christ. You must have the right attitude, that's one of humility. You are essential. You're not indispensable. You are essential, but only in humility will you operate as you should. And it all begins with presenting yourself as a living sacrifice.

And so, Paul calls every believer to ministry. There can be no such thing as an obedient Christian who isn't ministering. Now let me remind you that by that I don't intend to say that you have to be ministering within the organized structure of your church. I believe every Christian ought to belong to a church. I don't like the idea today that people just kind of float around and they don't want to identify. I don't think that's biblical. I think in the Scripture people identified with a local assembly of believers. In fact, the New Testament indicates that when they moved from one church to another, letters of recommendation were sent to the following church that they might know all about this person's ministry and life and service. And we know on the day of Pentecost how many people were redeemed and we know a couple of chapters later how many more were redeemed. And the reason the numbers are so accurate is, no doubt, they kept a record of who belonged. It's very important that you have that identification and that accountability. And the New Testament knows nothing about Christians who don't belong to a local assembly of people.

But I'm not necessarily saying by saying that that you can only minister your gift through an officially designated and entitled function in the church. You can minister it any place. In fact, I suppose a good place to start would be at home, wouldn't it? I mean, if you have the gift of showing mercy, shouldn't folks in your house know that? If you have the gift of giving, shouldn't people close to you know that? If God uses you to exhort or to teach, shouldn't people around you notice that? Now it might get a little heavy if your gift is preaching... But for the most part, where you need to begin your ministry is around the people that you spend your time with. And they might be good ones to evaluate the legitimacy of your giftedness anyway.

So, Paul is saying get on with it. Do it. And what does he do? He lists seven different categories of giftedness: prophesying, serving, teaching, exhorting, giving, leading and showing mercy. And it's a similar list, isn't it, to the one in 1 Corinthians chapter 12. In 1 Corinthians chapter 12, Paul gives a similar list. He adds a few that aren't here, and Paul here has a few that aren't there. And then in 1 Corinthians 12, he also lists the sign gifts, the miraculous gifts which we believe have passed away with the apostolic era. And here in Romans, you just have the continual permanent gifts. There's no sign gift given here, tongues or interpretation or miracles or healing, those are not mentioned here. These are those which are the ongoing ministries of the church.

Now keep in mind that these are broad categories, very broad. Within the area of prophesying, serving, teaching, exhorting, giving, leading, showing mercy there are multiplicities of possible manifestations. The variety of gift areas, the degree of giftedness, the measure of faith that is poured out, at the end of verse 3 it's mentioned, you have to take all of that into consideration. You have variety of gifts, you have degrees of giftedness given to each individual, you have a measure of faith for the use of that gift for whatever extent God wants it used. You can add to that that 1 Corinthians 12 says there are many manifestations of the gifts, there are many administrations of the gifts. It is also obvious from Scripture that there are many combinations of the gifts, as God mixes the colors on His palette. And then you would add to that varying amounts of Bible knowledge from individual to individual, varying amounts of skill and preparation, varying amounts of wisdom and experience, diverse personality, diverse opportunity. And when you get it all mixed together, every Christian comes out unique so that every one of us stands alone in the body of Christ with a function that no one else can fill except for us. And should we not fill it, the compensation won't be as good as it was if we had done our job.

And I know...I think it's a real mistake to over simplify the gifts and just say, "Well, we have a whole lot of people who have the gift of teaching and if you don't do it, we'll get some other folks who have that gift." That...that's...I don't think that's right to do that. If you over simplify the gifts, and you just figure there's a gift of this and a gift of that and a gift of this and a gift of that and everybody fits exactly into those categories, you're going to create a lot of problems. Let me tell you the problems.

First of all, you're going to create the problem that basically I just mentioned, the problem that says, "Well, if I don't do it somebody else with the gift will." Right? In other words, you're going to give excuses to people who really don't want to do anything under the idea that somebody else will step in. Listen, people must be aware of the fact that there's nobody put together like they are. As I've said in our series earlier, every one of us is a spiritual snowflake, there's no two of us alike. If you don't do it, it isn't done the way God would have chosen originally to have it done. Oh, He'll stick something in the gap, but you'll forfeit the blessing and God's purpose in its truest and purest sense has to be passed on to others who wouldn't be initially His choice.

Another problem that you get if you over simplify the gifts is the problem of confusion. I see confused people all the time and they ask me this when I travel around, "I'm having a terrible time defining my gift. I went to a seminar and they told me all these were the gifts and I don't seem to fit into any one. I sometimes think I have a little of this and then I think I have a little of this and I just don't know what my gift is." And I always say to them, "Don't worry about it. Your gift is what you are, that's all." It resists a label. And if you keep trying to label it and over simplify and over define it, you're going to cause confusion.

And then there's another problem that comes when you over simply the gifts and that is a rationalization that says, "Well, that's not my gift, I can't do that. Sorry, I'd certainly like to give to this cause but my gift is not giving. Praise the Lord," see. "My gift is taking, do you have anything I can...?" See. I mean, there's a lot of that rationalization. Well, that's not my gift, I'd certainly like to help but, you see, I have the gift of showing mercy and I'm certainly not going to teach anybody anything or exhort anybody, no, no, no.

See, that over definition, that over simplification becomes an excuse. And then, of course, I think an over definition has another problem, and that is it leads to self-deception because people get locked in on a gift they think they have and they don't have it. "Well, I've got that gift. Once I taught something and somebody said, 'Boy, that was good,' that's my gift." And they narrow it down and they think that's it and that may not be it. So we resist that over simplification. You are absolutely unique and you need humbly to evaluate your giftedness even though it resists a definition.

I told the folks in the radio Bible conference this week that through the years I have obviously become very much aware of what it is that the Spirit of God wants to do through me. I know what that is. Now there are other things that I can do. I mean, I have enough sort of basic human intelligence to do some things and I could spend my life time doing some good things, some nice things, some helpful things that would be outside the mainstream of my giftedness. And at the end of my life I would have done some good things but I would not have used the gift that God gave me. And so I want to do the best thing, the most needful thing, the thing God has most gifted me to do and labor in that area. And to be honest, my gift resists definition, too. I don't understand it, it's just a whole lot of stuff that

comes together and comes out what I do. When I'm walking in the Spirit, I see it and I don't need to define it.

Now let's look at those seven gifts again and just remind ourselves of the areas that the Lord uses to mix our gift in with our personality and our experience and our opportunity and our Bible knowledge and our measure of faith and all of that. First he mentions prophecy and he says in verse 6, if you have prophecy, then do it according to the proportion of faith. And the prophecy means to speak publicly, if you have a gift for public speaking. And prophecy is defined absolutely for us in 1 Corinthians 14:3, it tells us exactly what the gift is. "He that prophesies speaks to men," that's what it says. He's a speaker. He gets up and speaks. What does he speak about? He speaks edification, exhortation and consolation. He builds them up with truth. He exhorts them to obedience and he comforts them. He is a public speaker who brings edification, exhortation and consolation.

Sometimes in the Bible these men who were with...who had the gift of prophecy gave revelation from God, direct divine revelation. Other times they reiterated something God had already revealed. Sometimes they preached the Scripture. Some of the New Testament preachers who exercised prophetic gifts who spoke publicly, quoted Old Testament truth as well as giving new revelation. Now since all the revelation is complete, the one with the gift of public speaking today speaks the revelation already revealed, doesn't he? And so it is the gift of speaking publicly.

And it emphasizes primarily the application of God's Word to the time and the place and the present situation. And we saw that. So this is the preacher, the one who confronts a society, who proclaims God's Word, who brings God's truth into the picture.

I had lunch not long ago with the man who owns the Los Angeles Times and many other newspapers and television stations. And a very fine gentleman. And I was very honored to spend some time with him. And he said to me, "I want to ask you a question, John." He said, "I've come to Grace and I just wonder when I hear you speak why you don't use your platform to speak to some of the social evils of our time. Why don't you speak to some of the important political issues and why don't you speak to some of the current problems in our society and to the nuclear issues? And so forth and so on." And I really knew where he was coming from. And these are the things that are on his heart and they're the things that impact our society and they're important things. He said, "Why don't you speak to those things?"

I said, "Because I believe God has given me a spiritual calling and a spiritual ministry and a spiritual gift for proclaiming God's Word. And I have one goal in my life and that is to let God have something to say in our society." I said, "When you work in the L.A. Times, you can let the whole world know what your view is and what your editor's views are and what your columnists' views are and you can include the letters that come to the editor and get all the public opinion you want and I just want to throw God's opinion into the middle of the mix. Because I believe God also needs to be heard." And

I commend him. He said to me, "That' makes sense, I never thought of that." But he says, "God does have a right to be heard in the midst of this." I said, "That's what I believe God has called and gifted me to do, to bring the truth of God to bear upon the scene."

Now how do you exercise the gift of prophecy? According to the proportion of faith. Now you can translate that the proportion of THE faith, that is consistent with the revealed faith, the Scripture. Or you can translate it subjectively to the proportion of faith, either way is fair with the Greek text. On the one case it means when you preach, or when you speak publicly and when you give God's message, it ought to be consistent with THE faith, the revealed faith, the Bible, the faith once for all delivered to the saints, Jude calls it. Or according to the proportion of faith God's given you.

In other words, preach according to the measure of your gift. Either way would be a fair way to translate and I don't want to pick one over the other. The best way to say it...to see it is to see it both ways. What you should do when you exercise the gift of prophecy is to exercise it to the maximum measure of the ability God has given you and true to the Word of God, right? That's what its total message is.

And I remember as a person, I see myself as having a little bit of this gift of speaking publicly the Word of God, and I remember where I started doing that. I remember when I did that early and I did that before anybody recognized it, before I was ever heard by anybody, standing in a bus depot shouting at people milling around. I did it on a street corner in a rainstorm. I preached in missions to inebriated people who couldn't wait till I get done so they could get a free meal and couldn't care less about what I said. But I was beginning to exercise that gift. Preach anywhere I could preach, little country churches to dear souls, preach my heart out to three little old ladies, one time, in a little town and they just grinned and thanked me. Probably thought to themselves the poor kid will never cut it.

But if you have that gift as we said in the last couple of studies, you need to use it. John Stott has written a very fascinating book called Between Two Worlds in which he talks a lot about this prophetic ministry. And he has some great illustrations of a passionate heart of the one gifted to prophesy. He writes about Justin Martyr who was a great preacher in the mid second century, in his first apology toward the end of that first apology, he gave an account of the weekly worship of the Christians. Now we're in the mid second century, going to find out what the Christians did when they met together. And he says prominence was given to preaching, to proclaiming God's truth. He writes, "And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place and the writings of the Apostles, or the writings of the prophets are read. And as long as time permits, then when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs and exhorts the people to the imitation of these good things." I mean, they were doing this back in the second century. They called them the president. I don't know where they came up with that name but they did. They read the Scripture and then somebody got up and called them to response.

Eusebius who was the bishop of Caesarea at the beginning of the fourth century and one of the great fathers of church history was able to sum up the first two hundred years of the church in this way. Speaking of preachers and teachers, "They set out on journeys from home and performed the work of evangelists, making it their aim to preach to such as had not yet heard the Word of faith at all, and to give them the book of the divine gospels. But they were content to lay the foundation only of the faith in some foreign places, appointing others as pastors to whom they entrusted the care of those lately brought in. Then they would depart to other lands and nations with the grace and cooperation of God," end quote. Preaching...preaching established churches and preaching was what went on once they were established.

John Chrysostom who preached for twelve years in the cathedral in Antioch before he became the bishop of Constantinople, way back in A.D. 398 gave an exposition of Ephesians 6:13 which has come all the way down to the present in which he preached on "take the whole armor of God," and in that he voiced his opinion about preaching. In fact, he says, "Only one means and one way of cure has been given us and that is the teaching of the Word. This is the best instrument, this is the best diet and climate, this serves instead of medicine, this serves instead of cautery, or cauterizing, and cutting, whether it be needful to burn or to amputate, this one method must be used. And without it nothing else will avail." And he went on to extol the virtues of proclaiming the Word of God. And his biographer says, "He was a martyr of the pulpit, for it was chiefly his faithful preaching that ended in his exile."

And I don't know if you remember the story of Hugh Latimer who was born in 1485. He was a preacher of the English Reformation. He died a martyr. But Hugh Latimer was a marvelous, marvelous person. Listen to what he wrote. "And now I would ask you a strange question. Who is the most diligent bishop and prelate in all England that passes all the rest in doing his duty? I can tell, for I know who it is. I know him well. But now I think I see you listening and hearking that I should name him. There is one that passes all others and is the most diligent preacher in all England. And will ye know who it is? I will tell you. It is the devil. He is the most diligent preacher of all others. He is never out of his diocese. He is never from his cure. You will never find him unoccupied. He is ever in his parish. He keeps residence at all times. You will never find him out of the way. Call for him when you will, he is always at home. He's the most diligent preacher in all the realm. He is ever at his plow. No lording, no loitering can hinder him. He is ever applying his business. You will never find him idle. I warn you, where the devil is resident and has his plow going, there away with books and up with candles, away with Bibles and up with beads, away with the light of the gospel and up with the light of the candles. Yea at noon day, up with man's traditions and his laws, down with God's truth and His most holy Word. O that our preachers would be as diligent to sew the corn of good doctrine as Satan is to sew cockle and darnel. There never was such a preacher in England as he."

And then he concluded his sermon, "The prelates are lords and no laborers. But the devil is diligent at his plow. He is no unpreaching prelate. He is not lordly loiterer. But a buy plowman. Therefore you unpreaching prelates, learn of the devil, to be diligent in doing your office. If you will not learn of God nor good men to be diligent in your office, then learn of the devil," end quote.

Now what he was trying to say was you people that aren't preaching as you ought to be preaching, you better realize there's somebody out there preaching. And unless you start preaching, he's going to win everybody to himself. So Paul says if you've got the gift...what?...use it...use it.

The second gift he mentions is the gift of service or ministry, diakonia, practical service. As I mentioned, that's a support gift. It's like the gift of helps mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:28. In the strict sense it means to wait on a table, as we saw. But it came to be a very general term for serving the Lord in the church. It can be any kind of serving, any kind of serving. It can be serving a dinner to somebody. It can be serving by driving someone somewhere, by taking them to dinner, by visiting and going over Scripture with them and helping them, by assisting them to paint their house and doing it for the love of Christ, by taking an offering, by helping people find a parking place, by stacking papers, stuffing bulletins, putting cassettes together, whatever...taking care of babies in a nursery, writing people letters, endless...endless.

O how beautiful is the gift of serving. And every person who has the gift of serving has it uniquely blended together with the way God has made them so that their service is inimitable. Their service is utterly unique. I mean, I know, my own experience, there are so many people that I sense are serving. I mean, I'm aware of these people all around our church. And serving me in such wonderful ways, so many many people. I think of Marilyn, my secretary, of Pat Rotisky who works with myself and Jay, of all of the people around us who serve us. And it isn't easy. And then there are many others who serve, people who come in and they want to help and they want to do this and everyone of them, there is a very unique kind of service rendered because they're uniquely designed by God.

And then he mentions the gift of teaching. And we need to keep moving. We spent time talking about service. We spent time talking about teaching. He says if you have the proportion of grace gift given for teaching then get teaching. He that teacheth on teaching, implied let us wait on teaching or let us get on with our teaching. Now what is this? This is the Spirit energized ability to pass on information from the Word of God. You say, "How does it differ from preaching?" Well, it's systematic, it's the ability to analyze, systematize and instruct. It is not so much the idea of being a public proclaimer as being somebody who can systematically train someone else. It doesn't necessarily mean public speaking. A public speaker has to have teaching, he has to have content, he has to have teaching substantive. He doesn't have to have teaching in the verbal sense. In other words, the gift of preaching has content, there's no kerugma without didache, there's no proclamation without truth. But teaching is the gift of passing on systematically analytically instruction. It is expounding. It is interpreting. It is unfolding the meaning so that people may understand. It's a gift, a

marvelous gift without which the church cannot survive.

It blesses my heart that we have so many people here exercising the gift of teaching. Several hundred every Sunday morning are all over this campus teaching systematically instructing, everybody from little tiny children to senior adults. And then as the week begins there are Bible studies and FLOCKS groups and LOGOS classes and Christian school classes and seminary classes in which those who are gifted in teaching are instructing and training others in an understanding of the Word of God. What a wonderful gift. And don't we all love to be under those who have the gift of teaching.

If you have that gift, use it. And as I've said so often, if you can't find a formal way to use it, find some folks who don't know anything, sit them down and become their teacher and tell them all you know. I mean, it may have to be outside the system, but that's all right. And it can start right in your own home, right in the circle of your own friends. If you have that gift, you better use it.

You say, "Well, I don't know if I really need to use it." Listen, the whole point here is this, let me just remind you of it, how could you even think like that? If God has given you any ability to teach, how could you even think not to use it? How could you say, "Oh yes, Lord, please I want all the mercies of God bestowed on me, but please don't ask me to do anything in return"? That's what you'd say. "Oh yes, give me all the mercies of God, just don't ask me to present myself back." How could that be? That would be ingratitude of the first order no matter what we say. So if you have the gift, you ought to use it.

Now finally he comes to verse 8, and he says, "He that exhorteth, on exhortation." Let him get on with his exhortation. Now this is the gift of exhortation. Really there are many ways it manifests itself. This is a very broad kind of thing. The word means to encourage, to strengthen, to advise, to comfort. It could be to encourage in the sense of encouraging them out of sin into righteousness. It could be used in the sense of comforting them in trouble. It could be in the sense of finding someone that's weak and encouraging them to be strong and get stronger and trust the Lord and walk by faith and God will work it out. It can come in a lot of ways. It's a very broad thing. Some people are just really great at comforting those that are in sorrow. Some people are very great at infusing strength into those that are weak, in encouraging those that are fainthearted, as Paul mentions them in his letter to the Thessalonians. These are the encouragers.

And I said to some folks today who came over to the visitors line, they said, "We're not first-time visitors, but every once in a while we like to say 'Hi' to our pastor." And I appreciate that and I...while the father and mother and the son were there, I said, "I just want you to know that you people are encouragers, you encourage me so much."

I was privileged this evening to counsel with a young couple about to be married and I'm so very grateful for what God is doing in their life. And I said to him, I said, "For many years you have been an encourager, a positive influence, a loyal source of strength to me," in so many words. And he has. He's an encourager. And whenever I find that I am concerned about difficulties or problems or things aren't going the way they ought to, I usually try to get alongside some encourager, some strengthener. Oh how we need these people.

We have a guy like that on our staff name Herb Clingen. I don't care what goes wrong, he's literally on fire all the time...all the time. He encourages me. In fact, the other day we were in staff chapel which we have...well, we have our staff meeting every Tuesday but once a month we have everybody come together and we have staff chapel and Herb gave the word, and I mean he gave the word. And the whole time I just sat back there and I know if somebody looked at me, they would wonder what I was thinking about because I had a silly grin on my face. And I had come into that meeting burdened and concerned and in the process, the Lord began to so turn my heart over from the concern side to the joy side that I just had a stupid grin on my face for about 40 minutes, all the time that Herb was talking. And I was turning to the one sitting next to me and saying, "Isn't it marvelous? Isn't it wonderful?" And he was saying, "Yes, it certainly is." And I know he was enjoying it but it was encouraging to me because of something that I was feeling in my own heart. I mean, bless God for the encouragers. We need you. I mean, if that's your gift, then share it, would you? come alongside the weak and strengthen them, come alongside the fainthearted and give them courage, come alongside the sorrowful and give them comfort.

Somebody says this is the gift of counseling. No it isn't. Counseling is a process. Counseling is a process in which this gift may operate. I mean, counseling just describes a sort of a format where you try to help somebody. But what's helpful is that if while you're in that format, the person trying to help you has got this gift. If they don't, it may be a little flat.

A fellow who came to me early in my ministry here, the first year I was here and I counseled him three times. He came to me and said, "I just thought it might help to let you know that you don't have the gift of counseling." So I took his word for that.

Now let me just give you a perspective. Prophecy proclaims the truth. Teaching systematizes the truth. And exhortation calls for a right response to the truth, doesn't it? Calls for a right response to the truth. And serving puts the truth into action. You see, the gift of exhortation is the...is the ministry of challenging God's people to act consistent with God's will. Now listen to that. The ministry of exhortation is challenging God's people to act consistently with God's will.

In other words, if you're weak and defeated, then somebody needs to come to you and say, "Cheer up, my brother, be strong in the Lord and the power of His might. God is the victor and quit being downhearted and live on the victory side because you're promised victory, right?" In other words,

start living the way you're supposed to be living. And if you find somebody in sorrow, go to that person and say, "Why are you sorrowing as those who have no hope? Our God is a God of victory and your sorrow will be turned some day into joy, get on the joy side." In other words, get up there and live consistently with God's revelation. And if someone is fainthearted and afraid, you need to remind them that God is the one who leads and God is the one who wins in the end and no enemy is greater than God and no one shall distress us and no harm shall fall beside us...or rather on us but only beside us, as Psalm 91 says, because God is our source of strength, our refuge, our help in time of trouble, and so forth.

In other words, your pulling them up to the level of living according to God's revelation. So the preacher proclaims it. The teacher systematizes it. And the exhorter calls for people to live according to it. And you go through the New Testament and you'll see exhortation after exhortation after exhortation. If that's where God has gifted you, then use it, if you feel prompted in your heart to do it. And you say, "Well, how do you know?" Well, if you see a situation and you just feel in your heart that you'd like to speak to that, then that's probably the Spirit of God prompting your heart to do that. Be of good courage, be strong, be joyful.

And then he mentions also in verse 8 the gift of giving. "He that giveth, he should do it with liberality." Now giving is a marvelous word. The word for "give" in the Greek is didomi. But this word is metadidomi, it's intensified. It means to super give. It means to impart one's earthly possessions, to impart one's earthly possessions, to be a super giver. Now if you've got the gift of super giving, all of us are to give, but some have the gift of super giving, do it with...and the word is in the authorized "liberality." The word that is the root of that in the Greek means "with simplicity." Now with simplicity means with no dichotomy of motive...with no division of motive.

In other words, when you give with simplicity, it is that you give for a single purpose, you give for the glory of the Lord, for the joy of giving, for obedience to Christ and nothing else is in your mind. There is no thought, "Well, I better keep a little back for myself, I don't want to get carried away." There's no thought, "Boy, I hope someone is looking so they will see my magnanimity and generosity." There's none of that duplicity. There's none of that diplous, duplicity that our Lord said characterized the Pharisees. They were diplous, they were double minded. They gave, on the one hand they gave to discharge their religious duty. On the other hand they gave to be seen by whom? Men. None of that. If you have the gift of giving, do it with single minded liberality, full hearted without a divided mind, without a divided heart for one reason, out of loving, joyous obedience for the glory of the Lord and nothing more. What a blessed thought.

It's kind of like the Macedonians who out of their deep poverty gave liberally with no thought for themselves. No thought of self-glory because it says in 2 Corinthians 8:5, first they gave themselves. They gave themselves. And then all that they had...all that they had. And we're to give liberally. And we're to give generously.

In Acts 2 it talks about the fact that people were selling what they had and when people had need they were distributing to everybody. You know, when the Passover...I mean, the Feast of Pentecost came, people were all coming to Jerusalem for the celebration. And as they moved into the city, of course, they would stay in the homes of the Jewish people and even the city government provided extra food for them so they could house all these strangers who came in for the festival. And then when Pentecost came and all these people got saved, a lot of the people who were saved that day were from out of town, but they didn't want to leave because now they've been introduced into the community of those who worshiped Christ and so they stayed. And so the church had a real problem.

And you can add to that the fact that most of the people that got saved were poor, not many rich, not many noble, not many mighty, Paul said to the Corinthians. God chose the base things, didn't He, to confound the mighty. And so here you had a lot of folks without resources. And so the people who had resources had to be gifted in the area of giving to dispense that. And the early church was an absolute model of generosity, as those with the gift of giving were willing to sell property, do anything they had to share with those who had need. Bless God for those who have the gift of giving. If you have the gift, then use the gift.

You say, "How do you know you have the gift?" If it's in your heart to do it, if your heart is prompted to do it, if you feel the moving of the Spirit of God to do it, to be generous, to give over and above, it's that alone that can identify that gift. And if when you do it you sense an overwhelming joy and response. Certainly all of us should be doing more than we're doing. But some super givers are uniquely gifted by God.

And then he mentions the gift of ruling. And he says if you rule then do it with diligence, the Authorized says it actually means with speed or with haste. What is the gift of ruling? It's the same as 1 Corinthians 12:28 where it's called the gift of government. Most interesting, ruling...the word here just means to lead, to manage, to be in charge, to oversee, or to rule. It's just a simple idea. This is the gift of leadership, the ability to organize, administrate, make something happen, cover all the details, get the people together, mobilize them, get them moving, accomplish the job. It's a leadership gift. It has a kind of a nice parallel with the gift of governments in 1 Corinthians 12:28 because that is the word kubernetes from which we get cybernetics. The word kubernetesis the skill of piloting a ship, the skill of piloting a ship.

In other words, the gift of running things, piloting. And that's the gift of leadership. And this is such a wonderful gift. It belongs to the elders of the church. I believe the gifts of leadership belong to the deacons and many of the deaconesses of the church. If you read carefully through the qualifications, the deacons were to be those who manage their own household just like the elders who demonstrated ability to control varying elements within their own home. In fact, the basic difference between a deacon and an elder was only one thing, and that was the qualification skilled in teaching.

Deacons were not primarily the articulators of the faith, the skilled teachers, but they were equally qualified and in many cases would be equally leadership quality, according to 1 Timothy chapter 3. And so we know then that this is a gift the church needs, it's a very important gift. And the fact...you know, in the whole Corinthian letter, 1 Corinthians, there's no mention of leaders? There's no mention of elders? And that may have been part of their problem. They had a disastrous democracy which turned out to be a mess with everybody doing exactly what was right in his own eyes.

And so, those of you who have gifts of leadership, get involved in that. Do that. Apply yourself to that. And by the way, he says do it with speed, do it with haste, do it with zeal, diligent, fast, that's the idea. Get on with it, get at it. I mean, the church can't function without that. God has designed the church to have leaders. Why do you think in Acts 6 the Apostle said, "Look, we've got to take care of the prayer and we've got to take care of the ministry of the Word, so you better choose some men out from among you and put them over this business. You better get some guys that can feed these widows that aren't getting proper food, some guys that can organize, collect the food, distribute the food. Some leadership."

And that is to be a task diligently done. Hurry, make haste. The church needs administrators that can keep the church on course with fairness, with wisdom, with efficiency, with humility. This kind of management ability is indispensable to the church. And if you have gifts in those areas, get on with it, pull some things together, make some things happen.

You know, early in the years of our church I used to say, "Look, I don't have time as it is to do the things God's given me to do, so if anything else is going to be done, God's going to have to raise you up to do it." And God through the years at Grace Church has raised up people and people and people and people who say, "I think we ought to have this ministry." I remember when the first person came to me and said, "I think we ought to have a tape ministry." I said, "Great, why don't you do that? I just don't have time, go ahead and do it." He said, "No, I'm just telling you we need it." I said, "Right, and I'm just telling you to do it." He said, "You mean me?" I said, "Your idea, the Spirit of God put it on your heart, make it happen if you believe that's what's in your heart." And he made it happen, bless God. Vern Lumis(?), now he's with the Lord.

And I remember when one of our members came and said, "You know, we need a bus." I said, "Thank you, Woody. God has laid that on your heart." He said yeah. I said, "Well, I think you really ought to find a bus and buy it." He said, "Me?" I said, "Right." He did. I mean, he got the whole thing going. I remember when we had no women's ministry and some women came and said, "We need a women's ministry." And, of course, lately people don't come as often because they know what I'm going to say.

But, that's really critical. I mean, if you see a need and you know how action can be taken to resolve it, don't tell me, get some other folks who have that same likemindedness and see what God might do

as you begin to move.

And then we look at the last one, if you have the gift of showing mercy, do it with cheerfulness. You know what that means, showing mercy? Pity, compassion. It refers to those people whose very special preoccupation is toward people in misery, people in misery, the poor, the downtrodden, the imprisoned, those who really have it tough. That is a beautiful gift...mercy toward those who are in pain, mercy toward those who are deprived.

Do you know people like that? They're in the jail ministry. They're down at the hospital. They're trying to reach out to the poor and the distressed and the hurting. They're down in the streets somewhere. They're at the rescue mission. They just have a passion in their hearts for those kind of people that are deprived. In fact, it says in Proverbs 14:21, "He that has mercy on the poor is happy. He that has mercy on the poor is happy." And in verse 31, "He that oppresses the poor reproaches his maker, but he that honors the poor...he that honors, rather, his maker has mercy on the poor." And you know Jesus came, didn't He?, to preach the gospel to the poor, to set at liberty the captives, to bind up the broken hearted. He came for the downcast, the downtrodden, the poor, the needy. Bless God for the gifts of mercy to those who are deprived.

I would to God that more people who are gifted by the Spirit in that way were using that gift because then we wouldn't have so many people depending on a godless government instead of on the church of Jesus Christ so that we could bring them to depend on us rather than on the government. And how are we to do it if that's our gift? With cheerfulness. You know what the word is? Hilaros, what word do we get from that? Hilarious. Now when we say hilarious we mean hilarious and it means happiness and joy and laughter.

In other words, if you're going to go to miserable people, you better not be miserable at it. That isn't any good. Go with a joy. Don't say, "Oh, I've got to go down to those crummy smelly outcasts again. I'm going to grit my teeth and do it." No, do it with joy. I mean, our city is full of those people. I was...the other night with Chief Vernon during the Olympics. About midnight my son Matt and I got in a police car and with the chief and his adjacent, he said, "I want to show you the security systems of the Olympics." And so we took off from the Parker Center where we were in the underground control systems and we went out of the parking lot and he said, "Hey, before we go down to the Olympic Village and we go through the security systems and everything," he said, "I want to show you 'Box Town', or 'Box City.'" He said, "You probably haven't heard of it, it's a fairly new phenomena in Los Angeles."

I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "People who live in boxes." I said, "You mean regular boxes?" He said, "Right, boxes, cardboard boxes." And so we went down, I think it was Los Angeles Street, down around Fifth and Los Angeles, or somewhere around there. And we turned a corner and here were all kinds of people lined up, I mean, for an entire block, box to box. And you could see feet

sticking out the bottom of big boxes that held like television sets, or large appliances or whatever. They live in boxes.

And I said, "Well...." He said, "A box is very good protection." And this is "Box City," this whole community of people. I said, "Well, did...what happens in the morning when they get up, does somebody clean up their boxes and haul them away?" He said, "Yeah, and they just go back. They know where the stores are that have the big boxes and so the next day they go back and get another big box."

So if you're down in L.A. some night, just drive by "Box City." See a whole mass of humanity living in boxes. You say, "Why do they do that?" I'll tell you basically, they choose it. Most of them are inebriated out of their minds, drunken. But it sure struck me, here we are in the midst of a highly computerized technological system, probably saying, "Well, you know, I looked up and down my street the other day in Northridge and I just didn't see one guy in the derelict condition, I didn't see one guy in a box, to be honest. The only people in our town that are in boxes are about three years old." That's our kids, throw away the toy and play in the box, right?

I mean, they're out there in our society. And, I don't know, it's hard sometimes to reach out to those kind of people. I'm just saying that there are people who are in misery. And you've got to go to them and love them and do it in a hilarious way. And they have to know you love doing it. That's just one kind of misery. There are myriads of kinds.

What a marvelous list, isn't it? I mean, it's just a simple list and we've just gone through it rather simply. But he doesn't...he's not giving us some detailed technical definition over simplifying, over qualifying, technically identifying every little gift and all of its parameters. No, no, no. He's just running by a general list for believers to consider as they look to how they should respond to the mercies of God. And the list really covers the needs of the church, it really does. Prophecy, that's proclamation. Ministry, that's operation. Teaching, that's systematization. Exhortation, that's motivation. Giving, that's implementation. Ruling, that's mobilization. And showing mercy, that's commiseration, if you will. That was the hard one, but I got it. I mean, we need to proclaim and mobilize, and challenge and instruct and give and lead and assist, really comprehensive.

Now I proclaim and others teach and some exhort and lead and serve and care and the church works in that way. So where does it all start? I'm so thankful for the mercies of God for me that I give Him my life. And having given Him my life, I then look at what is left in humility and say, "Lord, all I am I want to use in Your service." And whatever my gift is I begin to use it to minister to the body. And if you haven't been doing that, may I say to you what Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:6, "Stir up the gift of God that is in you?" Stir it up. Stir it up.

John Owen, a great man of God, Puritan writer, once wrote, "Spiritual gifts are that without which the church cannot subsist in the world, nor can believers be useful unto one another and the rest of mankind unto the glory of Christ as they ought to be. They are the powers of the world to come, those effectual operations of the power of Christ whereby His Kingdom was erected and is preserved," end quote.

And so we look to the use of our gifts. Can I give you a focus? You really don't want to spend all of your time even with all we've said just looking at your gift, trying to analyze it. You want the Spirit of God to work in you. And as you focus on Christ, isn't that what the Scripture says? Second Corinthians 3:18, "As we gaze on the glory of the Lord we're changed into His image by the Holy Spirit." So you want to focus on the Lord, focus on the Lord, focus on the Lord, give your life to Him, offer it as a living sacrifice. And out of that the Spirit of God produces the humility and begins to make the gift function. So we don't want to become too analytical and too methodological.

The Corinthians, they could only see the gifts. I want this gift, I want that gift. Boy, I want to have this gift. I want this prominent thing. Like selfish children at Christmas, like many charismatic people today who just want gifts and gifts and gifts and gifts and their focus is on the gift and not the one who gave the gift, isn't it? A.B. Simpson wrote that great ole hymn, "Once it was the blessing, now it is the Lord. Once it was the feeling, now it is His Word. Once His gifts I wanted, now the giver alone. Once I sought healing, now Himself alone."

And we seek Him, don't we? And seeking Him and finding our walk with Him, the gifts given us will operate.

Father, thank You for our time in Your Word tonight. What a good time. And thank You for letting us finish this passage and sum up as best and feebly as we could the words of the beloved Apostle under the inspiration of the Spirit of God. We want to use our gifts for Your glory in Christ's name. Amen.

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