

THE GIFTS

Have you ever looked around the church or the Christian world and admired the Billy Grahams, the Joe Stowells, the Anne Graham Lotzs, and wondered why you aren't like them? Or, perhaps you've longed to have the faith of a George Mueller or Joni Erickson Tada. Maybe you've felt discouraged thinking, "*I can't do anything great for the Lord.*" Ah, but you're wrong. If you make the effort to find and use your unique spiritual gift, God will do great things through you too. You may not get the fame those people have, but you will be just as effective in the spiritual circle in which God has placed you. And He will look upon all who use their spiritual gifts equally. Yes, you are as important in God's eyes as Billy Graham when you faithfully execute the spiritual gift God has given specifically to you.

John Owen, the seventeenth century English 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.*"

In the first five verses of our study of Romans 12, we learned that God's purpose for our lives is for our minds to be constantly renewed through our study, meditation, and prayer over the Word of God found in the Bible. We are to do this within a community of believers, the local church, so that we might function in a way to make the body of Christ effective in pointing toward the glory of God and the love He has for all people. Such a community church is also able to provide for all the needs of its members. To do our parts individually, you and I, we must identify and use the spiritual gifts God has given us to serve the church. Today we're going to look at a general overview of the basic gifts God has given His people. If you'll open your Bibles to Romans 12, we'll begin our study in verse 6.

Romans 12:6-8:

*6 God has given each of us **the ability to do certain things well**. So if God has given you the ability to **PROPHECY**, speak out when you have faith that God is speaking through you.*

*7 If your gift is that of **SERVING** others, serve them well. If you are a **TEACHER**, do a good job of teaching.*

*8 If your gift is **TO ENCOURAGE** others, do it! If you have **MONEY**, share it generously. If God has given you **LEADERSHIP** ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing **KINDNESS** to others, do it gladly.*

Here Paul identifies seven spiritual gifts. Other passages in the New Testament list additional gifts. Actually there are quite a few. But this morning we'll look only at the ones in Romans 12. Most of these gifts seem somewhat self-explanatory, but a little more detailed look at them might be helpful for us all. First he mentions **prophecy**. Prophecy

has two aspects. One is to inform people of what God plans to do in the future, and the other is to speak out publicly the truth of the Word of God as found in the Bible. Prophecy is basically a gift of preaching, of proclaiming. Paul wrote about the importance of this gift in 1 Corinthians 14:1,3,4:

*1 Let **love** be your **highest goal**, but also desire the special abilities the Spirit gives, especially **the gift of prophecy**.*

*3 But one who **prophesies** is helping others grow in the Lord, encouraging and comforting them.*

4 One who speaks a word of prophecy strengthens the entire church.

The Greek word for prophecy means to **speak publicly**. It is the gift of public speaking. Now on rare occasions it may include foretelling what the future will bring, but for the most part it simply has to do with speaking the Word of God in public.

There has never been a time through all of redemptive history, whether in the Old Testament or the New Testament or up to the present day that God hasn't had His preachers, His spokespersons. Sometimes they gave new revelations from God. Sometimes the prophet of God spoke as Jeremiah spoke in Jeremiah 35:12,13 (NAS):

12 Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying,

13 "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, 'Go and say to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, "Will you not receive instruction by listening to My words?" declares the LORD.

There is a "Thus says the Lord" quality to prophetic messages. They are the direct words from God to His people. They are important messages which God wants people to hear and pay attention to. The prophet, or person with the gift of prophecy, is the one who brings the message. But many times the prophets were simply repeating what God had already revealed. If you go to the Old Testament and read it, you will find that the prophets instructed, exhorted, warned, rebuked, and encouraged. They stressed duty, repentance, and obedience. They promoted reverence and righteousness. They condemned sin and they promised blessing. **This is simply public speaking for the purpose of bringing to the people the message of God.** They spoke of practical applications that the Word of God had for life. They took the Word of God and tied it to the lives of the people. John Calvin put it this way: "By prophesying I do not understand the gift of foretelling the future, but of interpreting the Scripture so that a prophet is **an interpreter of God's will, and I might add a public proclaimer of it.**" I like what Peter says about prophecy in 2 Peter 1:19:

*19 Because of that, we have even greater confidence in the message proclaimed by the prophets. Pay close attention to what they wrote, for **their words are like a light shining in a dark place**—until the day Christ appears and his brilliant light shines in your hearts.*

Prophecy is the light of God's Word confronting the darkness of this world. So the point is this: the gift of prophecy itself is the gift to be able to preach the Word of God and to make it relevant to situations in peoples' lives today.

Now let's go back to verse 6 of Romans 12 again: "*If you prophesy then prophesy according to the proportion of faith.*" When you preach make sure that you preach according to the faith, the biblical faith, the Word of God. And preach according to the power, energy, and ability that God has given you. Remember what we studied last week in verse 3 about the *measure of faith*? **First God gives us a spiritual gift and then He gives us the amount of faith necessary to use that gift.** When you go to prophesy, do it in proportion to the gift you have. Let's turn here for a moment to 1 Thessalonians 5. Here Paul is writing an epistle giving instruction to the church and he wraps it up with some very interesting things at the end in verses 16-22:

16 Always be joyful.

17 Keep on praying.

18 No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

19 Do not stifle the Holy Spirit.

20 Do not scoff at prophecies,

21 but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good.

22 Keep away from every kind of evil.

All of this goes together. If you despise prophesying, you'll quench the Spirit, which means you make it impossible for the Holy Spirit of God to work on your behalf. If you accept prophesying, that is preaching, then test it to make sure it's good. Don't quench or stifle the Spirit but don't just accept everything that's preached to you without testing it to see if it's good. How do you test it? First, prophecy has to be consistent with the Word of God in Scripture. Secondly, prophecy *has to give a clear witness for Jesus* (Revelation 19:10). If any pastor, priest, minister, television evangelist, or self-proclaimed prophet is preaching and telling people about God and/or Jesus, and they do not satisfy both of these requirements, they are not to be believed. And you can be certain that in some way Satan is the source of what they're teaching. They themselves may even believe it, but God has blessed us with these two simple rules for determining the honesty of a preacher. And those who preach and don't satisfy these requirements are false teachers and false prophets. God Himself tells us He will test us about who and what we will believe. Let's look at **Deuteronomy 13:1-4**:

1 "Suppose there are prophets among you, or those who have dreams about the future, and they promise you signs or miracles,

2 and the predicted signs or miracles take place. If the prophets then say, 'Come, let us worship the gods of foreign nations,'

3 do not listen to them. The Lord your God is testing you to see if you love him with all your heart and soul.

4 Serve only the Lord your God and fear him alone. Obey his commands,

listen to his voice, and cling to him.

All true biblical preaching is preaching the Word of God and lifting up and exalting God Himself and His Son Jesus Christ. There are no other gods and anyone who tells you there are or could be is a false prophet and you are not to listen to him/her. 1 Peter 4:11 teaches us:

*11 Are you called to be a speaker? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Are you called to help others? Do it with all the **strength and energy** that God supplies. Then **God will be given glory** in everything through Jesus Christ. All glory and power belong to him forever and ever. Amen.*

Prophesying must exalt the person and work of Christ, glorify God the Father, and proclaim the Word of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. If you have that gift, use it. Paul says in 2 Timothy 4:1-5:

1 And so I solemnly urge you before God and before Christ Jesus—who will someday judge the living and the dead when he appears to set up his Kingdom:

*2 **Preach the word of God.** Be persistent, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching.*

3 For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to right teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever they want to hear.

*4 **They will reject the truth and follow strange myths.***

*5 **But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at bringing others to Christ. Complete the ministry God has given you.***

Go for it! People are going to want preachers who make them feel good about themselves, who tickle their ears and entertain them. Don't you worry about such things, you just preach the Word of God, and that simply means preach what is in the Bible because in all the world that is the only thing we can rely on and trust in one-hundred percent of the time.

The second gift mentioned in Romans 12 is the gift of **servicing**. If you have the gift of serving, then serve. The gift of serving is also referred to as the gift of **helps**. The Greek word used in this passage is the same as the one used in 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Acts 20:35. Helps is a support gift. A gift of practical help, a gift of serving. It's used several places in the New Testament to mean *to serve a meal*. It came then to be a general term for any kind of spiritual service no matter what that service may be. There are so many things that need to be done in the ministry of a church. If people were to just show up and say, "*Is there anything I can do?*" they would be kept busy all day long. This is the

meaning of the gift of helps. You're willing to do just about anything that needs to be done. This is a very important gift and covers so many of the behind-the-scene tasks that are necessary for the church to function. Those of you who help us set up and take down every week may be exercising your gift of service or helps.

Then Paul mentions **teaching** and says if you have the gift of teaching, then teach. Some people will ask, "Well, what's the difference between teaching and preaching?" The word here for *teaching* means a formal systematic training; a process that involves taking someone from one point to another systematically. It can refer to a teacher in a seminary, a Bible college, a Sunday School, or a small group. It can also include one-on-one discipling. It is a ministry in which someone leads a person along in the systematic understanding of the Word of God. This is the process that Matthew 28:19,20 refers to where Jesus commands them:

19 Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

20 Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Paul certainly had the gift of teaching and he also had the gift of prophecy, public preaching. Sometimes God will give a person more than one gift. In fact, in 2 Timothy 1:11 Paul says:

11 And God chose me to be a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of this Good News.

Elders in the church need to have the gift of teaching. It's the ability to analyze and systematize and pass on instruction to people concerning the Word of God, to thoroughly interpret the Scriptures so they are understandable. This should be the primary role of a pastor, to thoroughly interpret the Bible for the people of the congregation. That's expository Bible teaching.

Then we come to verse 8, Romans 12:8:

*8 If your gift is to **encourage** others, do it! If you have **money**, share it generously. If God has given you **leadership** ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing **kindness** to others, do it gladly.*

The gift of **encouragement** that Paul first addresses in this verse is referred to in some of your translations as **exhortation**. "Exhortation" is probably the more accurate rendering of the word. People with the gift of exhortation minister in many ways, but it is more often on a personal basis, working with one individual at a time. Encouragers, or exhorters, may give a word of warning, or speak comfort to someone. An encourager is someone who builds up other people in their faith. Encouragers are quick to speak a word of appreciation to someone.

Leslie Flynn has defined the gift of exhortation as involving

“The supernatural ability to come alongside to help, to strengthen the weak, reassure the wavering, buttress the buffeted, steady the faltering, console the troubled, encourage the halting.”

Encouragers may give spiritual advice at times and they are often the **counselors** in the church. If you have this gift, you could possibly encourage people out of sin into righteousness. You could comfort those who are in trouble. You could take someone who is weak and encourage them to be strong and get stronger and trust in the Lord to work things out. Some people are just great at comforting people who are in sorrow. These are the encouragers. Oh how we need these people! If that’s your gift, make sure you share it. This gift is a gift that challenges people to respond consistently to God’s will. If you’re weak and defeated, you need someone to come alongside you and say: *“Be strong my sister, be strong in the Lord and the power of His might. God is the victor. Remember that God is your strength and He will accomplish His purpose in His time.”*

Paul also mentions the gift of **giving** in verse 8. Everyone is called on to give, to give offerings and tithes. But the spiritual gift of giving cheerfully goes beyond that. The Greek word used in Romans 12:8 means to *super give, to impart one’s earthly possessions*. People with the gift of giving give generously with no mixed motives. They give with a single purpose and that is to the glory of the Lord. There’s no thought about how much they need to keep for themselves. And they have no thought about hoping that others find out how much they are giving and just how generous they are. In Acts 2, Luke talks about the fact that people were selling what they had and giving to those in need. Those who have this gift feel a sense of overwhelming joy when they give and never worry that they won’t have enough for themselves. There is a supernatural generosity involved in the spiritual gift of giving.

Next Paul speaks of the gift of **leadership**, a gift which is to be taken with a great sense of responsibility. It means to lead, to manage, to be in charge in order to get the job done. This is a gift that men and women should possess who are elected as elders and deacons in the church. Look at what we find in Acts 6:1-4:

1 But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. Those who spoke Greek complained against those who spoke Hebrew, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food.

*2 So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers. “**We apostles should spend our time preaching and teaching** the word of God, not administering a food program,” they said.*

*3 “Now look around among yourselves, brothers, and select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. **We will put them in charge of this business.**”*

4 Then we can spend our time in prayer and preaching and teaching the word.”

Notice verse 3 especially. The leaders were to be “*full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.*” Too often today congregations forget that and turn to the corporate model in business, rather than to God’s model in the New Testament. Those who lead in the power of their spiritual gift are not bossy or dictatorial. They are servant leaders who follow the example of Christ.

Mark 10:42-45, (NIV):

42 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.

*43 Not so with you. Instead, **whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,***

*44 and **whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.***

45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The church needs leaders to see that the work gets done, to see that the needs of the people are met. The church needs leaders who can keep the church on course with fairness and wisdom and efficiency. This kind of management ability is indispensable to the church, when it is used with God’s wisdom and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Then Paul goes to the gift of showing **mercy**, kindness to others, and he says to do it gladly or cheerfully. The gift of mercy refers to those people who desire to serve others who are suffering, and includes the poor, the sick, and those who really have it tough. It is a wonderful gift. People who have this gift can be found in the jail ministry and in the hospitals. They’re found out on the streets somewhere or at the rescue mission. They just have a passion in their hearts for people who are deprived. Proverbs 14:21 tells us:

*21 It is sin to despise one’s neighbors; **BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HELP THE POOR.***

Then in verse 31 of the same chapter we read:

*31 Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but **those who help the poor honor Him.***

Jesus Himself came to preach the Gospel to the poor, to free those who were captive, to bind up the brokenhearted. He came for the downcast, the downtrodden, the poor, and the needy. In James 2:5, James writes:

*5 Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose **the poor** of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?*

Paul says to do all this with cheerfulness because if you’re going to serve people who are

miserable, you can't do it by being miserable yourself. Do it with joy. People who are suffering, people who are homeless, people who suffer with emotional problems, they know if a person sincerely cares about them. They know if a person is excited about helping them or are doing it because they feel it's something they have to do. And if they don't feel that sincerity, or that joy, they will not feel comfortable accepting help from such a person.

Now in verses 6, 7, and 8 Paul has given us a simple general list of gifts for believers to consider as they think about how they should respond to the mercies of God. And the list really covers all the needs of the church. Let's now review these gifts Paul has identified:

1. **PROPHECY** - Preaching, publicly proclaiming the Word of God.
2. **SERVING OR HELPS** - Basically describes a person who is willing to do whatever is necessary at any given time.
3. **TEACHING** - A ministry in which someone leads a person along in the systematic understanding of the Word of God.
4. **Encouragement** - People who are just great at comforting people who are in sorrow and who give wise counsel to the church.
5. **Giving** - When you find great joy in giving generously to the work of the Lord so you may glorify God.
6. **Leadership** - To guide the government of the church, through the principle of servant leadership, so that the work of ministry is unimpeded.
7. **Mercy** - Showing kindness to those who are suffering or who are in need.

The first eight verses of Romans 12 outline for us the way life should be in God's kingdom, and a way of living that can bring joy and fulfillment. Let's review how it works and then let's all try to live it every moment of every day. In verses 6-8 Paul gives us a general list of gifts that believers have. It's not an all inclusive list, there are others, but this list serves the needs of the church. In verses 4 and 5 we saw that if each of us identify which gift we have and realize we've been given that gift by God to serve the body of Christ, the church, to which we belong, the church will function according to God's will, and we will have a fulfilling life because we are operating according to the special and unique design God incorporated into us. And verses 1-3 tell us that in order to be able to do all these things we must fill our minds with the Word of God found in the Bible and not the things of this world. In that way, we will allow God to change us so that we live the way we should live and not the way the rest of the world lives. In spite of how many people mistakenly think the Christian life is boring, I can tell you that I've been a whole lot happier since becoming a Christian than I was chasing the pleasures and values of this world. Life is just lived with a whole lot more joy in every way.

Just imagine a community of people where the head is Christ, the arms are the preachers, the legs are the servers, the hands are the teachers, the eyes are the encouragers, the ears are the givers or financial providers, the feet are the leaders, and the hearts are the mercy givers. Just imagine a body like that with each individual member or part performing

their special gifts for the glory of God and consequently the benefit of all people with whom this body comes in contact. This is a church that is equipped to provide the needs of people and in so doing to proclaim the glory of God and Christ. This is the way things should be in Christ's Church, and if they're not, Jesus gets pretty detailed about what will happen to such churches in Revelation chapters two and three. Next week we'll get into some specifics about relationships among people and how we were designed to function in our relationships with other believers.