

“HAVING GIFTS THAT DIFFER: DISCERNING YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFT.”

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First Christian Reformed Church
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Scripture Texts: Romans 12:4-6a

Introduction.

This morning we come to the conclusion of our series on spiritual gifts in Romans 12. We started with ten truths about spiritual gifts and then six things they are not and shouldn't be confused with. Then we considered the three speaking gifts (teaching, exhorting and prophecy), and the four serving gifts (serving, giving, leading and mercy).

We started this series with the story of a Rabbi being questioned by a Roman centurion, “who are you and what are you doing here?” The Rabbi thought those were such great question that they should be asked of him every day.

That would be a fruitful spiritual discipline, if we were to ask ourselves every day, who are we and what are we doing here? It might lift us out of the humdrum of our ordinary, earth-centered lives, into the rarer air of the spiritual meaning behind what God is doing in and through us.

Why do you get up every morning? What are you living for? Who are you living for?

Is it possible there is more to you and your life than you think or imagine?

Do you know “Who you are and what on earth are you doing here?”

Our text says we are one body in Christ and individually members one of another. Does that have implications for why we get up and what we do all day? What does that mean?

Romans 1-11 makes it clear, we are not our own, we did not choose God, He chose us. It is staggering to consider such undeserved mercy. You should shake your head in disbelief that God did that. We are not our own.

You are a member of His body and you are members of each other. You have a God-ordained place and a part to play. We are not as independent and autonomous as we like to think. We need others and others need us. God wants us to humble ourselves to serve others and be served by others.

We think far too little of our lives and the *spiritual gifts* God has given *to each of us*. And by each one of us I am talking about each of you. To the student in ninth grade; the single seeking God's direction for their future; the mom at home with little ones; the man in the barn or shop; the person in the office or on the road; and the widow in the retirement center or care home.

God has called all of us to good works, works of ministry or service in His Church and in the world. He could have done it Himself, He could have sent angels to do it, but He didn't. It is His will that we do the work of building up and edifying the body.

Let me give six quick evidences of this from Scripture.

1. We are created for ministry!

Ephesians 2:10 We are God's workmanship, *created* in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

You are here today because God had a plan for you before you were born and that plan continues each day of your life on earth.

2. We are called into ministry!

Eph. 4:1 I urge you to live a life worthy of the *calling* you have received.

I Peter 2:9 You are a *chosen* race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who *called you out* of darkness into his marvelous light.

Maybe you have heard the phrase, "priesthood of all believers." In the New Testament priestly language is only used in reference to the body of believers as a whole (Phil. 2:17; I Peter 2:9). We are all priests, we are all ministers.

Ministry is not just what pastors do. Ministry is a call to good works. The life of a Christian is a lived-out response to the grace we have received. Gratitude expressed in giving, serving, helping, sharing, reaching out.

3. We are saved for ministry!

II Timothy 1:9 [God] *saved* us and *called us to a holy calling*, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus.

Why did God save us? Sin? Yes, but He didn't stop with that. God is raising up an army of ministers. He saved us to serve, He gives that we might give.

4. We are gifted for ministry!

I Peter 4:10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.

That's what we have spent the summer talking about. Your calling, your measure of faith, your spiritual gifts, your differing degrees of grace, it is all by God and from God. You already have gifts, press on in putting them into practice.

Spiritual gifts are faith in action, ways to express your faith to strengthen the faith of others.

5. We are being prepared for ministry!

Ephesians 4:11-12 God gave...pastors and teachers to *prepare* God's people for works of ministry, so that the Body of Christ may be built up.

That is what this summer has been about. That's what the papers in your box last week and this week are about, helping you to discern what God has equipped you to do in His Church.

6. The body of Christ needs your ministry and mine!

Romans 12:5 We, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

I Corinthians 12:7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

This is clear from our Ephesians:

Ephesians 4:16 the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

We are a body with many members, all of whom are necessary. The timing of these sermons is God's doing as we begin a new year together with many opportunities for ministry and service.

I encourage you to take the inventory and see what it reveals. I encourage you to reflect on how God has uniquely shaped you and how your SHAPE reveals how God has equipped you for ministry and service in the of Christ. The letters of SHAPE are an acronym for how to think about how God has created us and called us and equipped us.

After you assess what spiritual body gifts you might have, consider your *heart*.

What do you love to do? If you could do anything for God and His kingdom what would you most like to do? As a Christian what do you care about? What you are passionate about? What needs are you drawn to? If you feel nothing, ask God to give you a heart for something.

Ability refers to natural, acquired or learned skills, talents, trades, knowledge, experience, expertise or training. What you know how to do. What are your areas of competence or confidence? What are you good at?

It makes sense that God will take our natural abilities and talents from birth and transform them and mix them with the spiritual gifts given at our new birth. Remember that famous line from Chariots of Fire when Eric Liddle said, "I know God created me for His service. But He also made me fast. And when I run, I feel His pleasure." He ran for God's glory.

Our *personality* or temperament is influenced by genetics, nationality, sex, race, birth order, environment, circumstances, opportunities and God.

God has wired each of us uniquely and there is no right or wrong temperament. In fact, the church needs the balance each of us brings just like our marriages and families need the balance. I don't have a lot of creativity, not a lot of right brain, but Phama sure does.

We need the Marys and the Marthas, the Peters and the Pauls, the Pauls and the Barnabas'.

Finally, the “e” in our SHAPE. What God has done in all *your past experiences* was done with a kingdom purpose in mind. God does not go off on tangents or take meaningless detours. He builds our character through events in an orderly fashion for a divine purpose.

Our lives don't often have the clarity of a burning bush or a Damascus Road. Often it is easier to see God's hand by looking back rather than in the midst of the moment.

Reflect on some of the key experiences or turning points of your life, experiences that have most affected or impacted your life, spiritual, educational, successes, victories, triumphs, failures, defeats. When you reflect don't avoid the painful events, defeats, losses, sicknesses. Those may be places God is speaking most clearly.

One more thing about your past. Are you concerned about your sinful past and letting that hold you back from using your gifts? Paul didn't. He worked harder for Jesus than anyone. He said, “By the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Corinthians 15:10). Don't get stuck in the swamp of guilt about your sinful past; live in the grace and gifts of God for your present and future. God will use your past for His glory and the benefit of others.

When working with wood you need to know the grain. It helps to know your own grain.

Romans 8:28 We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

What's your ministry and how can you find it?

After you take the inventory, and you assess your SHAPE, then what? Let us use them.

Experiment with the gift of encouragement and mercy. Next time you know someone who is distressed or discouraged or defeated by circumstances in life ask if you can meet them for coffee and just listen to their story. You don't have to have answers, just spend some time listening. Don't be quick to speak. Don't start telling your own story or similar experience, make this their time. After listening offer an encouraging word and a promise to pray for them.

Experiment with the gift of teaching or giving a word of knowledge. Next time someone comes up with a question from the Bible, something they are confused about, and frankly you aren't sure of the answer either, tell them you will do some study. Then go to your Bible, check cross references, or go on line. Or ask a pastor or elder or older Christian. Then sit down with them and share what you learned.

Experiment with the gift of intercession and healing. Next time someone shares about some physical pain or chronic suffering, ask if you can put your hand on them and pray for them and ask for God's healing power to deliver them from what they are suffering. Pray in the name of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. Just pray and ask God if He would be pleased to glorify Himself by healing this person.

Experiment with the gift of giving. Next time you hear about someone in a financial hole that they can't see any way out of, do something crazy like open your wallet or purse and ask if what you have would make a small difference and be an encouragement that God knows and cares and can send help. Or you can just put \$100 in their box or in the mail. And if what you give is a real sacrifice trust God to supply your needs.

Experiment with the gift of exhortation or prophecy. Is someone you know struggling with some sin, falling into temptation, can you in a spirit of gentleness speak the truth in love, ask if you can pray with them, and if you can help them by asking them each week how they are doing. Just having someone who cares enough to love and speak the truth may be what the Holy Spirit uses to deliver their soul from the enemy's grip.

Experiment with the gift of administration. Do you know someone who is just overwhelmed by life or by clutter in their home or clutter in their mind or with some demanding deadlines or unfinished projects and you are able to see

a way to organize or clean up or clear the way or walk with them toward a solution?

Is there a need in our church or around you that you could actually do or help with and you see how it would lighten a burden for someone else or even for the whole church?

If you are not currently on the rotation to serve in the nursery would you be willing to do that twice a year to lighten the load for those who serve often? Call the office. Would you be willing to make a meal say three times a year to lighten the load for those who do it regularly? Call Marilyn McCoy or call the office. If you aren't on the cookie rotation, would you be willing to do that twice a year. Call the office. Drive John Mead to dialysis. Help with GLOW. Teach a class.

Serving with our gifts is not meant to be rocket science or complicated to figure out. Ask God to lead and guide you and open some doors to opportunities. Look for a need and meet it. Find a hurt and pray for it. Listen for a cry for help and answer. Identify a weakness or a gap and overcome it. Notice what's missing and provide it. Wherever there are large groups of people there are many needs, needs for deeds of love or mercy or everyday basic helpfulness.

Conclusion and application.

This leads me to say a word about Life Groups This is a call and encouragement to be a part of a Life Group. We have some new groups forming. Pastor Zac and Alicia would like to lead one, and Jonathan and Cynthia are very interested in hosting and leading one. There may be a couple of other opportunities. Call the church office to let us know you are interested in being part of one.

And we are looking for those willing to facilitate a group. You don't have to teach, the questions are prepared for you ahead of time, you just guide the group along.

Your participation in a small group will help you become who God created you in Christ Jesus to be, and will help us fulfill God's vision for us as a mutually ministering body of believers with varied gifts.

Life Groups are a place we also receive the *affirmation* of others who know us and see what we are good at and how God is using us.

The Lord has given spiritual gifts to every Christian in this room. Let us pray this year God will help us find our gift and embrace it by faith. Use it in the strength that God supplies, so that God will get the glory and you will get the joy.

Paul's exhortation to Timothy to fan into flames his gift is his exhortation to us. Pour gas on God's fire in you, fan the flames, stir up embers, don't be slothful in this. Don't ignore or neglect His work. We have been created, called, saved and gifted for good works, let's be diligent in doing them. Consider the good work God has begun and think about where He might be leading you.

Who are you and what are you doing here?

Let me leave you with a final reason for pursuing ministry in the body and in the world.

Life comes from what flows out of us. When you serve in some ministering way, that river the flows out of you will water your own soul and will revive and refresh you. When the water only flows in and not back out it becomes like the Dead Sea, stagnant and lifeless. I call us to life-giving ministry and service.

II Timothy 1:6-7 For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you ... 7 for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

I Timothy 4:14-15 Do not neglect the gift you have ... 15 Practice these things, devote yourself to them.

Prayer: Father, you are the giver of every good and perfect gift and you delight to give beyond all we could ask or imagine. In the name of Jesus we ask you to pour out your Spirit in abundant measure and by your Spirit we ask you to fan into the flames the gifts you have already given to us. Glorify yourself in your Church and remove every hindrance, every sin, every cause for pride or boasting. Come, Holy Spirit, fall afresh upon us I pray, in the name of Jesus, Amen.