

## Together in Christ: Grace Gifts

Romans 12:3-9a

The offering song introduced us to the topic of being a good steward of God's grace gifts. I'd like to read the words to that song to introduce today's topic in Romans 12.

**Read: 'Something To Give' by Carolyn Arends**

The Bible has much to say about God's gifts for us to use. And there's many books on the subject. Beware of those resources that play to our feelings. Selling the idea that we can find the secret to our fulfillment. I'm not against discovering the way God uniquely gifts you. But unlocking the power of the Gospel does not being with a search for a feeling of accomplishment. It begins with a thankful heart and a will to humbly serve God. God gives us a measure of faith that includes His gifts of service to build up His church. When we put them to use...it connects us together like a body, so that we belong to one another.

Let's be gripped by the wonder of God's grace. The old rugged cross reminds us of God's love and His finished work to rescue us. The empty cross reminds us Jesus rules in heaven today and intercedes for us. He has sent us the Holy Spirit to continue the work of transforming each of us into His likeness and growing us together in love and service till He returns.

### **Pray**

#### **Read R 12:1-2**

We owe God our very lives and we thank Him by living for God - offering our bodies. It's like handing God a blank check that says, "I am yours". Living for God starts with our will. Instead of giving in to the pressing schemes of this evil age, we say 'no'! And we say 'yes' to the Spirit's leading. And the Spirit gives us a hunger to grow in God's living Word. I can be reading a passage for the 100<sup>th</sup> time in my life and find God telling me something new I need to know or do in real time. The Spirit brings the love of God right into our soul, heart, mind and body. Our faith is not a fluffy cloud or just feelings like waves tossed around. It stands on the immovable rock of Jesus and it burns, fueled by the limitless power of the Holy Spirit. Want to know God's will? Dedicate your whole life to Him. Confess whatever is holding you back from loving and trusting God completely and ask Him to fill you with His Holy Spirit...and believe it. That's been called spiritual breathing...out with the sin and in with the Spirit. On average, people between 18-24 send and receive 3,853 texts a month. There's something in us that can keep communications going wherever

we're at. I wonder what that's mimicking? The deceiver wants to distract us with trivial human interactions, instead of being in constant awareness and conversation with our heavenly Father. God is pleased to personally guide each of us into the work and relationship He wants. And we don't have to climb a palm tree and eat date nuts for a year to begin. His overarching will is already written. That's why the first book we dove into was the Gospel of Mark. Jesus called those learning at His feet, brothers, sisters and mothers because receiving and following Jesus is doing the will of God. That's where it all begins. God has a written will for us together as His church. Are you ready?

### **Read R 12:3-5**

We are a grace-given people. Rescued to be citizens of God Kingdom. We all share a unity with Christ. And I hope you are reviewing your identity in Christ often (Mind Renewal for the Believer). We all share the love of Christ and we are each given a responsibility to share God's grace (including gifts). We exercise it by the measure of faith God gives us. It makes us belong to one another. So belonging, that it's like the way a body is connected and operates from controls in the head. Who is our head? Jesus. When that toe hits the bedpost, the whole body senses the

pain. When the one part goes ah-h-h (warm shower), the whole body rejoices. We must think of our faith fit with the humility of Christ. Resist comparison to others. The Son made Himself a servant to God's will...all glory to the Father. And that's to be our attitude for exercising this faith fit...all glory to God.

### **Read R 12:6a**

Unmerited gifts are gifts. I'll tell you what not to do with a gift. He gives you a power sander and you let it sit in the case on your next project. The giver walks by and sees you wasting all afternoon, hand-sanding something that could have been done better in 5 minutes with the gift. Here's another way to blow it. She gives you some prized tomato plants. When they produce and people taste them with delight, you brag about you're great gardening. One person doesn't use God's gift. The other person uses it for personal gain. Both are bad stewards of God's grace.

Now let's dig into learning about the gifts. Get out your Bibles for this part. There's four main passages on gifts: Rom 12, 1 Cor 12-14, Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4. Ephesians teaches about gifts of people to equip the church for God's work. They serve in roles (offices) such as pastors and evangelists. Our study is the gifts for believers in general. We begin with Peter who's

writing to help believers amid suffering abuse from those around them...because they don't join in with their reckless living. Sound familiar? Peter assures them the end of all things is near. Time is precious even now. So how shall we live in these final hours?

### **Read 1 Peter 4:7-11**

1. Alert and sober minded...to **pray**. That God's will be done is our first concern because God is good...
2. The supreme priority for one another is **love** deeply (covers multitude of sins). I'd say offering **hospitality to one another** (without grumbling) is a practical way to love. It's a duty for all of us.
3. Use whatever gift you have received to serve others. Not our own agenda. It's being faithful stewards of God's grace. We're doom slayers...deploying God's grace balm. There's two main types: speaking and serving (doing). We're to do it as if it's coming from God not us. With His words and with His strength. Faith and humility in concert.

I just want to point out here that deploying God's gifts is a priority but the first concern is our love for God and others. The gifts will come along as we obey.

Do you ever wonder why the Bible includes letters about churches blowing it? Is it just so we can shake our head and say, "Glad we don't have that problem?" No. It's opportunity to dig deeper into what God expects. Let's see how Paul handles gift pride and gift chaos. The part we're reading comes right after Paul corrects the believers in Corinth for their selfish and divisive observance of Communion.

### **Read 1 Cor 12:1-3**

The reason Paul begins this instruction on spiritual gifts is because of their past in idol worship (and all kinds of practices evoking unseen powers but certainly not the Holy Spirit). This is a helpful approach for those who have experimented with the occult and spiritualism. In this next section, What I want you to notice is the Trinitarian way Paul explains the origin of grace gifts in the church.

### **Read 1 Cor 12:4-6**

God is One in three divine persons: co-equal. Extra Thought: The Ephesians passage on gifts name Jesus as the giver. In Romans, the faith and gifts are from God (often meaning Father). The Holy Spirit is mentioned most as the giver in 1 Corinthians. Does God intend for us to make divisions in the Godhead on who gives what? We must be careful not to create three Gods. We must be careful not to fall in love with our charts and systems. Some things about the Trinity and gifts will remain a mystery – at

least this side of heaven. God is at work in all the ways that His grace get distributed in His church (i.e. Eph 4:4-6).

**Read 1 Cor 12:7.**

The gifts are to edify God's people...build one another up in Christ. Your obedience to serve with the merciful faith gift God gives you - encourages our faith in Christ. It help us understand God's love even more. It help us through difficult times. It provide us with practical answers to our needs. *When we exercise God's gifts in this family of faith, it confirms where we belong and what to do.*

*Repeat*

**Read 1 Cor 12:11**

All these gifts (speaking and actions) are the work of one and same Spirit, and He distributes them to each one, just as He determine. We can make guesses about what's going on in God's gift distribution business (history and current trends), but we will never have the mind of God. He may tell us more someday...in heaven. We can agree to disagree on some of these matters. While God's revelation about the 'when' of gifts remains partly under a veil, we have clear instruction on the why, what, how and where. Finally, let's look at the grace gifts in Romans.

**Read R 12:6-8**

The way it reads, sounds like a Nike commercial: Just do it. I would not

want to be without any of these gifts in our church. My understanding of Scripture leads me to believe that every believer receives a special portion of at least one of these gifts from God. I'm not going to explain them in the same order. Prophecy is proclaiming God's truth (not same as Prophets in OT still recording Scripture). Preaching and sharing the Gospel are examples. It must line up with God's word. The Bereans in Acts were known for listening to Paul and then going to Scripture to confirm. And you know who's the most likely to check? The one motivated by God to help other's learn God's truth. This often comes with a desire to study (research). What gift is it? Teaching. We are blessed with teachers – for both young and old. God be praised. It's not automatic that we're always up and aware of needs. Sometimes we need someone to come along and turn on the light. To brighten our day with God's love and promises. And remind us what we can do for Him. That's an encourager. Where would we be without you? Bumping around, maybe grumping around. And then there's the one's who doesn't need a trumpet call. They quietly go and make things better for everyone. We walk up to the church entrance and it's shoveled. We walk up the stairs and there clean. We walk into the warm worship hall,

and it's lighted with rows of chairs. The servers. But you don't want to draw them out into the limelight...it's for the Lord, keep it that way. If you're new, you might not know about the acts of mercy that happen consistently. The sick visited and the needy helped. Sometimes I share in a mercy ministry to those in their last years of life. When I get around the ones who show God's mercy, I'm cheered up too. And how does a small church in a small town afford a full-time pastor couple? And a building paid off, heated and furnished. How do we support several missionaries? Givers. And finally, God gives some to lead. It's by God's grace, so they don't do it for attention. You will find people gathered to them because they serve others well. And those especially gifted in leading can administer or take help from an organizer/planner. I look forward to seeing God's grace exercised in this family of believers...because of your faith and good stewardship.

In every one of the passages about the grace gifts, love is mentioned as the

supreme motivation. So I will conclude this sermon by adding the very next thought – the motive that makes all grace gifts work.

**R 12:9a Love must be sincere**

We're not always going to be thrilled with our role or who God has put before us to serve. We might feel like avoiding, putting it off or looking for an excuse. Or even question God about it. But Paul's appeal to us is not to our feelings but our will. Our duty to God. It's great when we have a buddy-like feeling...a natural camaraderie. But it's nothing compared to what comes by denying our selfishness and giving our lives to God. Spirit-led people become like a tree planted by living waters. By the power of the Gospel, out flows the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). And that, my church family, will get us through the hard times and trouble in this world...till the Lord returns. Amen?

