

# Discovering and Using Your Spiritual Gifts

By Scott Sauls

Many Christians agonize over the question, “What is God’s will for my life—what is it, exactly, that God wants me *TO DO*?” We have made the answer to this question very complex—as if there were some major *mystery* that God is hiding from us, that we must unpack and discover. Biblically, however, we like the way St. Augustine answered the question. Essentially, his take was that if you want to do God’s will, then do two things, in this order: First, endeavor to love and obey God in *whatever* you are doing, and second, as you love and obey God—*do whatever you want*.

These things being said, let’s take a look at some principles derived from Romans 12:1-8<sup>1</sup>, a passage that focuses specifically on the fact that God, in his mercy, gives a unique role to each individual in the service of his church. Each person is uniquely wired with *Spiritual gifts*, meant to be used to honor God and strengthen people and the church.

- **The motivation for serving.** There are two motivation-systems from which people will approach their service:
  - Religious motivations. Religious people tend to be motivated primarily, if not exclusively, out of a sense of “should” or duty. God is viewed as a “boss” of sorts, who will reward those who serve well and effectively, and punish those who don’t. Without dwelling too much on this motivation (it is *not* the one we encourage!), it is appropriate to state the inevitable outcome for those who “do good” and serve simply because they feel the *should*. First, there will be *fatigue*. If you operate like a slave, eventually you will feel like one. A slave does not feel loved by his master—rather, he feels used. As such he grows weary. Second, there will be *anger*. Religious, duty-driven people are usually very angry deep down. The reason is that they view their service as if it were part of a deal. “If I do this for God (people, the church), then I should expect that the favor will be returned.” When the “favors” don’t come, bitterness results in the religious person—he/she feels like a victim.
  - Gospel motivations. This is the only motivation that will bring joy to your serving (see Rom 12:1-2!). We “offer our bodies” to God and to others, not from a sense of slavish duty but “in view of God’s *mercy*.” If someone loves us, *really* loves us, we will *want* to do everything in our power to love and bless them in return. To respond to God’s mercy is like being a man in love—when he notices his beloved enjoying a U2 song on the radio, he just can’t help himself so he goes out and buys her the entire U2 collection. She savors a glass of merlot at dinner, and he can’t help but buy her a case of the stuff the next day. THE POINT: When our hearts are captured by something, we will give ourselves—our time, our service, our praise, our money—to him/her *effortlessly*. If we are unmotivated to serve God by serving people/the church, we haven’t grasped his mercy fully.
- **The attitude for serving.** Scripture calls both for a humble assessment of self, and a gracious assessment of others. That is:
  - You are not superior. Rom 12:3 reminds us to think of ourselves with “sober judgment.” In other words, if God has made us really good at something, we accept it as a sweet gift from him and don’t let it go to our heads. We are not to think of ourselves “more highly than (we) ought,” it says. The primary way this happens in churches is through *gift projection*—believing that if I am gifted/passionate about a certain area of service, then everyone else should be as well. In gift projection, an evangelist looks down on a helps person, a helps person looks down on a teacher, and so on. Scripturally, however, we are encouraged to see ourselves as *interdependent* with other fellow Christians, whose gifts aren’t rivals but complements to ours.
  - You are not inferior. Conversely, we are also to beware of our tendency to think too *little* of ourselves. All of us in various ways will struggle with self-comparison, thinking that others are better or stronger or more effective Christians because they have gifts that stand out, and we do not. But, as Martin Luther once said, the humblest serving maid’s service has as much value as that of the prince of all preachers. Why? Because her gifts, like the preacher’s, are unique gifts from God, given to serve a very valuable purpose in the overall picture of the “Big Story” of redemption. Further, God delights in our weakest efforts, just like a loving dad delights in his 3-year-old’s efforts to clean up spilled oatmeal. Even though the child makes a bigger mess trying to clean up the mess (!), the father *loves* the motivation beneath it.
- **The practice of serving.** Mercy calls us not to passivity but to loving action (Rom 12:3-8). This essentially means 2 things:
  - Do whatever you need to do to figure out how God has wired you. There are many tools and resources for this. Read carefully through the following spiritual gifts document from Mars Hill Church. Certain gifts may stand out as ones that you possess. In addition, ask yourself questions such as (1) *What problems do you notice most easily?* Does it kill you when you see that people are lonely and hurting? Does disorganization drive you nuts? Inaccurate theology? Lame music? Etc. While your concerns should never be used as an excuse to complain and grumble, they just may be a call to action for you—God’s subtle way of nudging you to become part of the solution (2) *What are you good at?* If you can’t assess yourself in this way, ask people who know you what they think. Take a Spiritual gifts assessment. The principle is...God does not want anyone serving in areas where they are not gifted—no square pegs in round holes! Rather, he wants us to identify our giftings so we will be effective in our particular role of service to the church and the world (3) *What do you enjoy?* Ever see Chariots of Fire where Eric Liddell declares, “When I run, I feel God’s pleasure”? This is Romans 12 personified! God’s intention is that when we serve, there be a deep sense of satisfaction and accomplishment—participation in a mission and purpose that is larger than ourselves, in a Story that we are part of.
  - Use your gifts with gusto. Find a venue in which to serve God, people and the church. Rom 12:3 reminds us that the call to serve is for “everyone,” not just the staff, the elders, the house group leaders, etc. With this view, it is the members of the congregation that are the true “ministers”—the staff, pastors and leadership are merely there (in their unique role of service) to *facilitate* service among all members of the family of God. Don’t devalue your ability to make a significant contribution—in faith believe that God assigns great value to your service, regardless of how seemingly small or large your role might end up being. Ephesians 2:10 is promising—it says that every Christ-follower is God’s “workmanship” (literally, “poem”). You are his work of art, whom he intends to put on display to show his creative genius to the world in which you live. Serve well, and feel his pleasure!

<sup>1</sup> Other spiritual gifts passages include 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 27-28; 1 Peter 4:10-11; and Ephesians 4:7-16.