

“Unwrapping Your Spiritual Gifts”

Romans 12:1-8

Imagine being handed a beautifully wrapped gift on your birthday. It's got your name on it, it looks valuable, and the giver tells you it was picked out just for you. But instead of opening it, you put it on a shelf in your closet. Days go by. Then weeks and months. Eventually, you forget that it's even there. Now, what if that gift wasn't just for you, but meant to be shared—to bless your family, your church, and maybe even strangers? That's how it is with our spiritual gifts. God has given each believer unique gifts, distributed to each one of us by the Holy Spirit, not just to enrich our lives, but to build up the body of Christ. And yet many of us leave those gifts unopened and unused. A gift is intended to be unwrapped and put to use.

Having looked at what the Bible says about spiritual gifts in terms of both their definition and design, the question most definitely has come up in your mind, “What are my spiritual gifts?” And so that's what I want us to consider for our time together this morning. How do I unwrap those spiritual gifts which the Holy Spirit has given me? To help answer that question, let's turn in our Bibles to Romans 12. This is an important subject for us to think through, because if I am perfectly honest, every church I've ever been in has always been in need of people who are willing to serve. A church often has a small number of people doing a tremendous amount of stuff, and a large number of people doing very little. Someone has suggested that the average church is like a professional football game—there're 22 men on the field desperately in need of rest, and 22,000 people in the stands desperately in need of exercise.

The only way in which that is going to be different is by the Spirit of God making clear to the people of God just why it is He has placed us in this church at this

time, and why He has given to us spiritual gifting for the express purpose of doing His will. And so what I want to do this morning is to provide you with a quick aerial view of these spiritual gifts which are mentioned in the New Testament. I won't spend a whole lot of time on them individually, but I do want to give you a couple of helpful statements for each one. We'll get to that in just a minute. Discovering our spiritual gifts is not something we do by simply taking a self-test. It takes time, thought, and careful study. It demands interaction with other Christians. It demands serving where you can. Above all, it requires that we submit ourselves to the Head of the body, Jesus Christ, who reserves the right to direct its activities. As we walk in the Spirit, He shows us how we have been gifted to make a contribution and an impact. Let me give you some simple steps from our passage.

1—START with full surrender (12:1-3)

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned."

The very first step on the way to unwrapping your spiritual gift involves surrendering to the Holy Spirit. Surrendering to the Holy Spirit means yielding your will, desires, and control to the guidance and influence of the Holy Spirit in every aspect of life. It is an active, ongoing process of allowing the Spirit to lead,

convict, and transform you as a believer, and it results in a life that increasingly reflects the character of Christ.

The appeal that is made

Paul says in verse 1, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship.” In light of all that he has explained by way of the believer’s new life in Christ, on the basis of what God has done for me in grace, I am to ‘present’ myself to Him as a living sacrifice.

“Present” — *translates a Greek verb which means to give over the use of something for a specific purpose*

In the Old Testament, it was not uncommon for worshipers to present sacrificial offerings to the priests, things such as gold or silver, building supplies, things which were used for the construction of the tabernacle. Sacrificial animals were brought and offered. Those sacrifices had to be without a defect or blemish and had to be offered in totality. And so it is an important image that Paul now uses to describe our spiritual worship. Listen to how the verse reads in the NLT—“And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all He has done for you.” This is our spiritual worship, our reasonable service, and the word there is ‘logikos’ which means being carefully thought out. In view of all that God has done for you in His Son, have you ‘thought through’ your worship? Have you through the way you’re serving Him? It is only reasonable to do so (not to sin, but to God, Rom. 6:1-3).

Then notice how this all-important call to consecration not only involves our bodies, but it also includes our minds. Verse 2 says, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you

may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” If you want to know the will of God, then start by offering your body to God as a living sacrifice and then be transformed by the renewing of your mind. I’ll never truly present my body to God in surrender until my mind is first of all made up. God isn’t interested in outward routine apart from inward relationship. My mind and my body are involved in this business of serving Him. Instead of being conformed to the world, you and I are to be transformed by the renewal of our minds. This happens when our minds are saturated with the truth of God’s Word. I do the presenting, He does the transforming. So that by the power of His Word and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, our minds begin to think as God thinks, desire what God desires, love what God loves, and see things with the same perspective as He sees them. Only then are we able to discern the will of God.

The attitude that is needed

Look at verse 3, “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.” Paul wants to safeguard believers against an arrogant mindset.

Friend, a right attitude is needed if you want to unwrap your spiritual gift. God resist the proud, but gives grace to those who are humble. Humility is necessary in exercising the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given. The church that has a serve problem has a pride problem. Pride can be a barrier to effectively using spiritual gifts because it distorts both the purpose and the power behind them. Here’s a few ways how it does:

Distorted Motivation – Pride shifts the focus from serving others to seeking personal recognition and affirmation, turning gifts meant to glorify God into tools for self-promotion (Philippians 2:3-4).

Resistance to Correction – A proud heart resists guidance and correction, cutting off the sharpening from others that helps gifts flourish (Proverbs 13:10).

Independence Over Interdependence – Pride can isolate a person, making them unwilling to cooperate or submit to the body of Christ, forgetting that spiritual gifts are meant to work in harmony (1 Corinthians 12:12-21).

Misuse of Authority – It can lead to the misuse of spiritual authority, where a person might seek to control or dominate others, while ignoring the servant nature of true spiritual leadership (Mark 10:42-45).

Quenching the Spirit – God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6); pride can actually hinder the flow of the Holy Spirit's power through a person.

Inauthentic Ministry – Pride can result in a lack of genuine compassion or empathy, which is foundational to impactful ministry; this is why Paul shows the Corinthians 'the more excellent way' of love (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

And so if you want to unwrap your spiritual gift, it starts with full surrender. Ask yourself the question, "Am I completely surrendered?" But then notice a second important step:

2—STUDY what the Bible says (12:4-8)

"For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to

us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.”

Now, you will notice that there are around seven spiritual gifts that are mentioned in these verses. 1 Corinthians 12 mentions nine, and Ephesians 4 mentions at least four more for a total of 20. None of these lists are considered comprehensive, yet we need to know what the Bible says.

John MacArthur — *“A thorough examination will yield the truth that spiritual gifts fill two major purposes: the permanent gifts that edify the church and the temporary gifts that are signs to confirm the Word of God.”*

The permanent gifts are those that God continues to give believers throughout the church age, and these gifts are to be exercised by believers at all times in the life of the church. These include verbal gifts such as prophecy (or proclaiming God’s truth), knowledge, wisdom, teaching, and exhortation. Then there are nonverbal gifts such as leadership, helps, giving, mercy, faith, and discernment. The temporary gifts included miracles, healing, languages, and the interpretation of languages. And we would classify these as ‘sign’ gifts that were true of the apostolic era. So of the 20 spiritual gifts mentioned in four main passages, we can group them into four separate categories.

Category #1—Specialty gifts

These are roles or offices which were given to build up and provide leadership within the church, such as:

Apostles—these are the ‘sent out’ ones; pioneering new churches and ministries; a foundational leadership gift (historically linked to the 12 apostles but can also refer to modern church planters and missionaries)

Prophets—those who were the recipients of divine revelation; Old and New Testament

Evangelists—the gift of proclaiming the gospel effectively and bringing others to faith

Pastor/Teachers—those given for the care for, nurturing, and guiding a local body of believers through instruction

Category #2—Sign gifts

Miracles—the ability to perform acts that manifest God’s supernatural power; the apostles and the early church

Healing—the divine enablement to bring physical, emotional, or spiritual healing to others

Tongues—supernatural ability to speak in a language unknown to the speaker, often used to communicate the gospel to others

Interpretation of tongues—translating the message spoken in tongues so it can be understood by others

Category #3—Speaking gifts

Prophecy—speaking forth God’s truth, often with a sense of urgency, encouragement, and correction

Teaching—the ability to explain and apply God’s Word effectively and with clarity so that others understand

Wisdom—those who are gifted in applying spiritual truth with insight and discernment in complex situations

Knowledge—a special understanding of spiritual truth or facts, often beyond normal comprehension

Exhortation—encouraging others in their faith, offering comfort, counsel, and motivation

Category #4—Serving gifts

Leadership—those gifted to lead others within the body of Christ with wisdom and care; vision and direction for the future

Administration—the ability to organize the ministry and carefully manage its stewardship; planning for ministry

Giving—willingly and sacrificially giving material resources to support others and the ministry

Mercy—showing compassion and kindness to those who are suffering or in need

Faith—an exceptional trust in God’s power and promises, often resulting in bold prayer or action

Discernment—the ability to distinguish between the Holy Spirit and demonic influences; understand sound teaching from heresy

Helps—the desire and ability to meet practical needs and assist others in ministry

Hospitality—the ability to warmly and generously welcome strangers and care for those in need, creating a welcoming and comfortable environment

Those are the spiritual gifts we find mentioned in the New Testament. While they are necessary, I am not convinced that they are exhaustive. There may very well be many, many more gifts which are not mentioned. The point is not to provide us with a list as much as it is about calling us to surrender our lives to the Lord Jesus and submit to the Holy Spirit who is at work through us to bring blessing to others. There's a third thing I'll mention:

3—SEEK counsel from the saints (12:4, 5)

“For as in one body we have many members...so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”

If you want to begin unwrapping your spiritual gift, you start with full surrender and then study what the Bible says. But something else to keep in mind involves seeking valuable counsel from the saints. We should not underestimate the value of involvement in the body of Christ, for often it is the other members of the body who help us discern our gifts. Notice the emphasis there in verses 4-5, “one body, many members.” Or, “We, though many, are one body in Christ.” And then, “individually members one of another.” So there is an accountability which is being emphasized here, or a sense of belonging.

We need to dispense with the idea that the church is some organization. It was never intended to be such. Rather, it is a living organism. It is a body, not a building. It is a people, not a place. While there is an organization to your body, your body is alive. It isn't a lifeless spreadsheet or something like that. The Bible says that the church is not merely a gathering of individuals, but is instead a living, interconnected body, and each part being essential for the health and

growth of the whole. This is the very thing that Paul explains for us in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. That we are members of one body under the direction of the same Head reflects Christ's ongoing ministry to His people through the mutual care, encouragement, and support of fellow believers. He uses the other people in the body by which and through whom He ministers to us.

Just think about how this works with your physical body. In my body, my head works through each of my members to carry out its desires. If my brain wants to alleviate an itch in my left elbow, it doesn't send a magic bolt of brainpower to my left elbow for some relief. No, it sends a message to the fingers on my right hand, "Your left elbow itches. Go scratch it." Now, does the fact that my fingers are doing the work lessen the fact that it is my brain's will which is being expressed? Of course not. My brain works through my fingers. Apart from my brain, my fingers cannot do a thing.

Friend, that is how the Holy Spirit works on earth through the church. We are the body of Christ, and He is the Head. He empowers His church as His voice, His heart, and His hands. But it is not us working for Him as much as it is He who is working through us. Jesus is the Head, and we are the members. Which is why it is important that you be in a close relationship with your brothers and sisters. They may be used of Him to help you discover where you have been gifted.

4—SERVE as a good steward (12:6)

"Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them."

Unwrapping our gifts begin with being surrendered to the Holy Spirit, studied up on what the Bible says, seeking the counsel of the saints. But it also demands that we serve as a good and faithful steward. Though we all have different gifts, what matters is that we unwrap them and put them to good use.

During the reign of Oliver Cromwell, there was a shortage of currency in the British Empire. Representatives carefully searched the nation in hopes of finding silver to meet the emergency. After one month, the committee returned with its report, “We have searched the Empire in vain seeking to find silver. To our dismay, we found none anywhere except in the cathedrals where the statues of the saints are made of choice silver.” Oliver Cromwell eloquently replied, “Let’s melt down the saints and put them into circulation.”

God doesn’t intend to make statues out of me and you, but wants to actively use us. This is matter of wise and faithful stewardship on our part. Peter says it this way:

1 Peter 4:10-11 — “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

Each of the lists simply give examples of how God works through His people, or significant ways He is at work in the church. He’s at work through the leadership gift of some. Then He’s working through the generosity of others. He’s actively working through those gifted encouragers who are in the body of Christ, or those who exercise the gift of faith that motivates the rest of us. The saints are in circulation!

Now, let me close with a few helpful principles that will help guide us as we seek to discover and deploy spiritual gifts in our lives:

- *First, a spiritual gift bestows an unusual effectiveness in a responsibility given to all believers.*

Most spiritual gifts are assigned somewhere as duties to all believers. For example, God commands every believers to serve, evangelize, pray, and be generous. Yet at the same time, there're some believers who are particularly effective in those things. This is evidence that they have been gifted by the Holy Spirit.

- *Second, we discover our spiritual gifts as we actively pursue our clear responsibilities.*

As we obey the commands God has given to all believers, God reveals to us, through our obedience and by the testimony of others who observe us, where we are the most effective for Him. There is an example of this in Acts 13 as the Holy Spirit called out Paul and Barnabas for an evangelistic mission. That only happened as they were evangelizing their neighbors in Antioch. And it was out of obedience that God called them to a special task. The same thing will be true in your life. As you are faithful to obey God in what He has clearly called you to, you will experience His calling in a specific area of giftedness.

- *Third, a spiritual gift is often discerned at the intersection of our passions, skills, and encouragement we receive from others.*

Let me draw a diagram on the board that may help you see what I'm talking about (affinity, ability, affirmation). The circle labeled 'ability' refers to what you are naturally good at. 'Affinity' refers to what you feel passionate about. And 'affirmation' refers to ways other people have testified that God has used you. Where all three of these circles come together is typically an indication of a spiritual gift.

- *Fourth, spiritual gifts grow out of the unique ways God has shaped our lives.*

God sends each of us through particular experiences to teach us things about Himself that He will use in us to reveal to others. The apostle Paul wrote:

2 Corinthians 1:3-4—“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

- *Fifth, the Spirit of God works in our secular vocations.*

An often overlooked dimension of the Spirit's guidance is how God uses our secular vocations as part of His plan for us in the world. We tend to reduce the Holy Spirit's power to church things, all of which are great and necessary. Yet the Bible says that the Spirit is at work also in our natural gifting and uses it for His purposes in the world. The very word 'vocation' comes from a Latin word 'voca' which means to call. (Exodus 31:1-5, artisans)

Martin Luther observed that when the Lord answers our prayer for daily bread, He does so in a variety of ways. He gives the farmer the skill and ability to plant the seed, grow and harvest the grain. He equips someone to build the road on which we transport the grain, and someone who will drive the vehicle that carries it. He equips the engineer who designs the plant that processes the grain, the store owner who packages the bread for purchase, and the advertiser who alerts us to its availability. The loaf of bread you buy in the store is nothing short of a miracle involving a lot of skilled and gifted people!

Not every person goes into full-time vocational Christian ministry, but every Christian is a minister who is equipped by the Spirit and has a calling upon his or

her life. And this is something that we must 'steward' well. Again, Peter tells us, "As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." One of these days, the Lord is going to hold us all accountable. He's going to ask us whether we used what He gave us for His glory. When we stand before the 'bema' seat of Christ, our works will be consumed like wood, hay, and stubble. Or the fire will reveal them to be like precious stones.

God has given spiritual gifts so those in the church can be built up and spiritually developed. But if spiritual gifts are not dynamically operating in the life of a local church, then the body of Christ is not being built up. They are given to us for the equipping of believers, for the edification of the church, for the evangelizing of others in the faith, for the effectiveness of the ministry, and for the exaltation of Jesus Christ.