

Gifts in the Body of Christ ~ Romans 12

by William MacDonald

Discovering your gift in the body of Christ requires a total personal commitment to the Lord Jesus, prayer, study, and engaging in various forms of Christian service.

Duration: 39:03

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 12:1, Romans 12:3-5

Topics: "Gifts"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of showing mercy to the disenfranchised and unprivileged. He highlights Romans chapter 12, which encourages showing mercy with cheerfulness. The speaker also emphasizes that gifts were given to help others, not for self-exhibition or self-edification. He urges listeners to use their gifts in a way that brings glory to the Lord and to see their gifts as a stewardship from God. Additionally, the speaker encourages believers to be happy in the exercise of their gifts and to work together as members of the body of Christ.

Transcript

Romans, chapter 12, verse 1, I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your body a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. For I say through the grace given unto me to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith, or ministry let us wait on our ministry, or he that teacheth on teaching, or he that exhorteth on exhortation, he that giveth let him do it with simplicity, he that ruleth with diligence, he that showeth mercy with cheerfulness. Now, before we get into the message this afternoon, I'd like to ask for a show of hands, how many people in our audience this afternoon know what their gift is in the body of Christ? Would you please raise your hand? All right, that's what I'd like to speak to you about this afternoon.

Keys to discovering your gift in the body of Christ. Keys to discovering your gift. The word of God teaches us in unmistakable terms that every believer has one gift at least, some have more.

Fulfillment in life is finding out what that gift is, and exercising it for the glory of God, and for the good of others. Failure in life as a Christian is not caring enough to find out, drifting along with the tide, living casually from day to day. It is no exhibition of pride for a man to know what his gift is.

If I were to ask you this afternoon, do you know what your nose is? Your hand would inevitably rise up to the middle of your face, and you'd say, yes, this is my nose. Are you being proud in knowing what your nose is? No exhibition of pride, no lack of modesty to say, no, I know what my nose is. Well, it's exactly the same with a gift.

A nose is something that has been given to us from God, and so is a gift. Nothing to be proud of, but a sacred stewardship to use for his glory. Now, how do you find out what your gift is? Well, of course, the first key is found in the first verses that we read this afternoon, and that is this.

First, make a total personal commitment of your life to the Lord Jesus. If a person is serious, if he really wants to know what his gift is, he has to begin there. What does that mean, make a total personal commitment of your life to the Lord Jesus? Well, it means just exactly that.

It means to come and place our lives upon the altar, to turn them over to Christ. It means to have no will of our own, but to want the will of the Lord Jesus supremely, and to be satisfied with nothing less. How do you prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God? By presenting your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

And, of course, not allowing the world around you, as Philip says, to pour you into its own mold as it tries to do. So, we must begin there. Do I really mean business for the Lord? When he pulls out the great blueprints at last, the blueprints that he had planned for my life, will I be able to say, it was according to plan, or will I find that we were moving in two different directions? Make a total personal commitment of your life to the Lord.

Secondly, pray without ceasing that the Lord will show you what your gift is. I am a very simple believer, you might even say naive, and I really believe that if a person wants to know what his gift is, he should come before the Lord in prayer and ask him to reveal it. And it should be absolutely and patently clear in your life and mine what that particular gift or what those gifts are.

There should be absolutely no doubt in our minds at all. It's that important to God. He's willing to show, but I don't believe he will show unless we really mean business for him.

So, we must make this a matter of unceasing prayer, being before the Lord, Lord, I really want my life to count. I want to be in the place of your choosing, doing the thing that you want me to do. Show me what my gift is.

Third key to discovering our gift to the body of Christ, study the list of gifts as they are given in Ephesians chapter 4, in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, and in Romans chapter 12. I believe it's very important that we get before the Lord with our Bibles open and study these lists of gifts. Now, the question arises, are all the gifts mentioned here, are these lists suggestive or are they exhaustive? I'd rather lean to the view that they're all the gifts, that God doesn't leave any of the gifts to our own imagination that he's giving them all to us.

And if you study the list carefully, you'll find there are about 19 of them, 19 gifts. Now, Brother Wilson, on Friday night, went over the gifts in Ephesians chapter 4. Perhaps we could just review them. He gave

some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.

He gave some apostles. Apostles were men who were directly commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ himself as his representatives. They were sent forth, and they were given the power to perform miracles.

Paul could say, truly the signs or miracles of an apostle were wrought among you. Prophets in the New Testament era were spokesmen for God. They were mouthpieces for God, and they spoke by the power of the Holy Spirit, the very Word of God.

The apostles and prophets had to do with the foundation of the church. They were not the foundation, but they laid the foundation in what they taught concerning the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Once the foundation is laid, there's no need really for the apostles and prophets anymore in the primary New Testament sense of the word.

We have the ministry of the apostles and prophets preserved for us within the pages of the New Testament. In a weaker, secondary sense, the words are used today. The word apostle is similar to the word missionary that we use today.

Missionary would come from the Latin meaning sense, people's sense on a mission, and a prophet has been on the word has often been used today for a man who preaches the Word of God, who speaks out about sin, and warns God's people of the consequences if they do not turn from their sin. Those are not the primary senses in which the words are used in the New Testament. Then we have evangelists.

Evangelists are men with power given them from God to preach the gospel with convicting, converting power, and they have a sense of where souls are, a sense of where the unsaved are as far as conviction of sin and conversion to the Lord Jesus are concerned. Evangelists. Their parish is the world, not the church.

And then we have pastors, and pastors are shepherds, and if you want to know what a pastor should be, just go through the Old Testament and take all the references to shepherds and put them together, you'll have a wonderful illustration. You'll see a man who carries the lambs on his bosom and gently leads those who are with young. And on the other hand, take the pictures of the false prophets in the Old Testament, you'll find out what a pastor should not be.

Woe to the idle shepherd that leaveth the sheep. Sword shall be upon his right eye and his arm, his eye shall be utterly darkened and his arm shall be withered. Pastors.

Teachers. A teacher is a man who has gift from God for expounding the Word of God and applying it to the heart of God's people. Then as we turn over to 1 Corinthians chapter 12, we find some additional gifts given there.

We find, for instance, the Word of Wisdom. The Word of Wisdom. And the Word the ability to communicate just the right counsel, advice for any particular crisis that might come up.

You've met men with exactly that gift. They come into a situation where a difficult problem exists, and they are able by the Spirit of God just to bring that Word of Wisdom. Nobody has thought of it up until that time, and yet when they hear it they say, well that's exactly right, that's the solution to our dilemma.

The Word of Wisdom. Then Paul also lists in 1 Corinthians 12 the Word of Knowledge. My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

The man with the gift of the Word of Knowledge is able to communicate knowledge from the Word of God in crisis situations in life. Then there's the gift of faith. I believe, firstly, that the difference between the grace of faith and the gift of faith.

The grace of faith is that which enables us to take God at his Word. The gift of faith, perhaps, is the gift that enables men to remove mountains. But, of course, those mountains are only removed in special times of need.

We think of George Mueller when we think of the gift of faith. The gift of faith that a man can bow his head with a house full of orphans and give thanks for the food when there's no food on the table. And then the knock comes on the door, and there's the food outside in the bakery van.

The gift of faith. Then there's the gift of healing, and it's interesting that both these words are in the plural, the gift of healing. It may mean not only physical healing, but mental, emotional, spiritual healing as well.

There's no question that a person with the gift of healing can be used of God in a supernatural way in recovery in every case that affects the life of man. Working of miracles. We know that in the early days, the apostles were given the power to perform miracles, and we learn in Hebrews chapter 2 that this was given to confirm the message that they preached.

It was first spoken by the Lord, then by those who heard him, God bearing them witness both with signs and wonders and diverse miracles of the Holy Ghost. I personally believe that God is still the God of miracles, and we should expect to see miracles all the time. I refuse to join those people who don't want to rise above flesh and blood.

My God is the God of miracles, and he's at it all the time, and if we only had eyes to see, we'd see that there are miracles. But this is a gift of miracles where a man has this special endowment from God. Workings of miracles.

Then there's the discerning of spirits. Some people are very, very gullible. It's easy for them to be taken in.

A man with the gift of discerning of spirits has an awareness of dangers. He has a sense, for instance, of a false spirit at work, an evil spirit at work, and he knows how to test the spirit and discern what is of God and what is of Satan. There's the gift of tongues.

As far as I know, the gift of tongues is the miraculous ability to speak in a foreign language that a person has never learned. He's never been to school, never learned, and yet he has that miraculous ability to speak it. And so, with the interpretation of tongues, the ability to interpret those tongues.

It took place, of course, and at least the tongue took place in Acts 2, and I'm sure the others were there in the Corinthian church. Then there's the gift of helps. The gift of helps.

And this is also listed in 1 Corinthians 12. The gift of help is exactly what it means, and you've seen Christians like this, and any assembly who has them is really blessed. This person who has a gift of helps sees ways in which he can be of help to God's people and to others, and rushes in without being asked.

A wonderful thing. These people work very silently sometimes behind the scenes, but they have this special endowment from God just to be a help to the people. The gift of governments has to do with rule in the local fellowship, and we generally associate it with the work of elders.

Ministry. If governments have to do with elders, ministry probably has to do especially with deacons. The word ministry is a very unofficial word.

It means service, serving the Lord and serving his people. There's a gift of exhortation, Romans chapter 12, 8, that we read today, and this is a special quality that a man has to speak and to stir up the saints. He believes that satisfaction is the grave of progress, and he himself is not satisfied with the current status, and he's always trying to stir on the saints to greater achievements for the Lord.

Then there's a gift of giving, and we should all be givers, but some have the gift of giving in a special way. I mentioned George Mueller before as having the gift of faithful. I think he had the gift of giving too.

It's interesting to read the biographies of Mueller and find that he was one of the heaviest contributors to Hudson Taylor when he went out to China to evangelize the inland areas of that country. Imagine not only praying in enough money to support those orphanages that Ashley downed, but also to support the work of the Lord in far-off China. And then there's a gift of ruling, which is mentioned in Romans chapter 12, and this has to do, we believe, with the gift of government, has to do with the care of God's people, the shepherd care of God's people in the assembly.

And finally, there's a gift of showing mercy, and you'll have to acknowledge, too, that some people have this ability in a very special way. They see the disenfranchised, they see the unprivileged, they see people who need help in a very special way, and they are Johnny-on-the-spot showing mercy to them. It's interesting to me that in Romans chapter 12, when it speaks about showing mercy, it says, "...he that showeth mercy with cheerfulness." Well, isn't that a funny thing? "...he that showeth mercy with cheerfulness." You could have said that with any gift, couldn't you? And one night in a meeting, I expressed my perplexity about that expression, "...he that showeth mercy with cheerfulness." And a lady came to me, and she said, I think I can help you.

I said, what's that? Well, she said, my husband and I were living together, and we were living a very quiet, contented life, and she said there was really nothing to disturb our calm and repose. But then she said, my mother reached the stage in life where she could no longer take care of herself, and so we invited her to come and live with us. And she said, I cared for her.

She said, I did her laundry. I provided her meals. But she said, I wasn't happy inside.

She said, I was resentful at her intrusion into our home. And she said, every once in a while, my mother would say to me, you're not happy anymore. Why don't you smile anymore the way you used to? The lady looked at me with tears in her eyes.

She said, you see, I was showing mercy, but I wasn't doing it with cheerfulness. "...he that showeth mercy with cheerfulness." So, we have these gifts listed in the New Testament, and I think if I'm going to know what my gift is, I'll have to digest them. I'll have to go to the word of God, and meditate upon them, and study them, and find practical examples of them in the Scripture, and also in life today.

Now, I know what some of you are thinking. You're saying, just a minute, brother, you should have crossed some of those gifts off the list. Some of those gifts are no longer in existence today.

Well, study them, and if they're no longer in existence today, God won't give them to you. It's just as easy as that. The Lord won't give them to you if they're no longer in existence today, and I don't know any better way of solving that problem.

Okay, now it says in 1 Corinthians 12:31, desire the greater gifts. 1 Corinthians 12:31, it says, "...but covet earnestly the best gifts, and yet show I unto you a more excellent way." Now, in its primary interpretation, I believe that Paul is speaking here to the assembly as a whole, not to individuals. I believe he's speaking to the assembly as a whole.

He's saying, you all covet earnestly the best gifts. That is, you covet that God send into your assembly the greater gifts. Actually, the gifts themselves are sovereign bestowments of the Spirit of God.

He gives to every man severally as he will, but I believe that we are entitled to get before the and say, Lord, we need the gift of government. We need the gift of ruling in our assembly in a way we don't have it today, and so he says here, covet earnestly the greater gifts. You say, well, what are the greater gifts? Well, I would suggest this just from the study of the context.

The gifts that edify are greater than the gifts that amaze. Some of those gifts were definitely signed gifts, and it seems to me that the emphasis of Paul's teaching in these three chapters, 12, 13, and 14, are that the gifts that edify are really greater than the gifts that amaze. And then we suggested, for instance, that apostles and prophets were temporary gifts in their primary New Testament sense.

The gifts that are permanent are better than the gifts that are temporary. These are the ones that we should desire today. All right, key number five.

Key number five, and I think this is very, very important. Engage in various forms of Christian service as the Lord opens the doors. Engage in various forms of Christian service as the Lord opens the doors.

How do you find out what your gift is? Well, certainly one of the ways you find out is by doing things. You can only steer a bicycle when it's moving, and this is true in the Christian life too. It's the way God steers us when we're moving.

People are afraid to try things. Maybe some sisters here in the audience this afternoon, and you could be having Bible classes in your home, gathering the neighborhood ladies in and teaching them the word of God, but you never try. You just get petrified when you think of it, and your knees turn to India rubber.

And I know why. I know why, because you're afraid they could ask you a question you couldn't answer. Isn't that right? Sure it is.

Well, join the club. Join the club. There's no one of us that knows all the answers.

All you have to say is, I really don't know the answer to that question, but I wish you'd give me a week to look it up, and I'll try to bring the answer to you next week when we meet. Just as easy as that. Just as easy as that.

In our discipleship intern training program, we ask the fellows that come to us year after year. We say, look, all we ask you to do, we don't expect you to be proficient in all these things. All we ask you to do is let us expose you to the various forms of Christian service.

At the end of the year, we'll sit down with you, and between us, we'll try to tell you what your gift in the body of Christ is. And by then, many of them know they're not left in any doubt. Why? Because they've been willing.

They've been willing to go on the campus and do evangelism. They've been willing to go into homes and do pastoral visitation. They've been willing to do man-to-man discipling.

They've been willing to do anything that they've been asked to do during the year. And some of them very soon find out that this particular thing is not for them. It's not their cup of tea.

Well, that's fine. We didn't expect that everything would be their cup of tea, but it narrows the field down. So, engage in various forms of Christian activity as the Lord opens the door.

Now, often there's a feeling of reluctance at first. Often. Jeremiah had it.

Jeremiah said, I determined in my heart I wouldn't speak his name anymore, but the fire burned within me and I couldn't stay. And I feel that this is true with very many of us. A natural reluctance.

Also, a feeling of inadequacy. Moses. My, how Moses sputtered before the Lord as if the Lord didn't know what he was doing.

And Jeremiah, too. He said, thou hast persuaded me and I was persuaded. A feeling of natural inadequacy.

And we could give many scripture references for that. Frankly, I believe that in every true call to Christian work there is that feeling of inadequacy and often a feeling of reluctance as well. All right, the spiritual gift may not be related to any natural talent.

The spiritual gift may not be related. I think it's more glory to God if it isn't, don't you? You say, a Spurgeon, well, he sure must have had the gift of gab. Well, he really didn't.

It was absolute agony for Spurgeon to get up on the platform at times. He tells in one of his biographies that he actually vomited blood before he got on the platform sometimes. The Prince of Preachers.

You say, natural talent? I say not for a minute. If God can take someone that doesn't have it and get him up and use him in a way like that, people say, well, it wasn't Charlie Spurgeon, it must have been the Lord, and that's exactly the way it should be. So, God still likes to take the nobodies and the nothings, the ciphers, and do something great in their lives so that all the glory is his own and not theirs.

But a gift needs to be stirred up. We read that in Paul writing to Timothy. Stir up the gift of God that's in you.

How do you do it? Well, when the elders come and ask you to do something, do it. Do it. You might not think you like it.

You get some surprises in life. To my shame, I tell you this afternoon as I stand here that when I knew that God had tapped me on the shoulder, I got down on my knees and said, anything Lord, except there were two things I didn't want to do. There were two things I knew I didn't want to do.

Do you know what they were? I didn't want to take funerals, and I didn't want to visit in the hospitals. Well, I've learned not to say things like that to the Lord, because those are two things that I can really say today that I enjoy doing. I love to visit in the hospitals.

I love to go in and just sit down. I'm no great visitor. Don't misunderstand me.

I just love to sit down and read the Word of God and pray with the people. And I love to be with Christians, for instance, when they're going through times of sorrow like that, and be with them. Just put an arm around them and seek to comfort them and to take the funeral to the glory of God.

I never would have known if I hadn't tried. I'm so glad that the Lord thrust me into it. Okay, next key.

Observe the area in which the Lord seems to especially bless your service. Observe the area in which the Lord seems to especially bless your service. If you're an evangelist, it's going to tell pretty soon, because when you preach the gospel, souls are going to be saved.

I know that I'm not an evangelist. If my being in the work of the Lord depended on the number of people that come to Christ every year, I'd have been out long ago. I'd have been out long ago.

So, you observe the area in which God works. Is that a lack of modesty to see that? I don't think so. It's not that you're taking any credit to yourself.

When the Spirit of God is working through a man, doesn't the man know it? I think he knows it. Not in a way to inflate him. It says in the first part of that chapter, don't think above yourself what you want to think.

Don't have a superiority complex. Takes a very small pin to prick a very big balloon, and God is an expert with a pin. He really is.

But when God is using a man, he knows it without it making him proud. Observe the areas in which the Lord seems to especially bless your service. Then also, next, weigh the comments and opinions of older spiritual Christians.

Weigh the comments and opinions of older spiritual Christians. No man is the judge of his own gift. It has often been said, and it's true.

An outsider can be far more dispassionate in appraising a person's gift. And sometimes people do. They get wrong ideas of their gift.

We had a lot of young fellows that came to Emmaus, and they thought they could preach like Billy Graham. And we had to tell them that they couldn't, because there was only one Billy Graham, and when God made him, he threw away the pattern. That's true, too.

And this is one of the beauties of the Christian life, that every one of us is an individual, individually designed by God with a unique function. I think that's beautiful, just like the members of the body. So, weigh their comments and opinions of older spiritual Christians.

And incidentally, every young person should seek to have an older person as a mentor, as a coach, as a guide to help him on in the Christian life. If you don't have one, seek to cultivate one, and you'll be enriched by it. And the next key, consider your own reactions.

For instance, where does your burden lie? Sometimes when you're lying in bed at night, you can't sleep. You picture yourself in a situation, for instance, where you're preaching the gospel to people, and this burden that they come to Christ, I think this is indicative of something. Do you see yourself teaching the word of God? Do you see yourself fitting in as a help in the local assembly, seeing things to do and doing them without being asked? Where does your burden lie? Also, in that connection, in what sphere do you find the greatest fulfillment? In what sphere do you find the greatest fulfillment? You mean, what do you mean by that? Well, I believe that when you and I are exercising our gift, that there's a quiet voice saying to us, this is what you were made for.

I believe that. When you're really in the niche that God has appointed for you, you hear that voice saying, this is it. You weren't made for that, you were made for this, and you find the greatest fulfillment in it.

And then Bill Godfrey, in that connection, suggests something that I think is very good. He said that when a man is exercising his gift, he has the maximum effectiveness with the minimum fatigue. He has the maximum effectiveness with the minimum fatigue.

Now, that doesn't mean there isn't fatigue in connection with the work of the Lord. That doesn't mean you won't get tired. It doesn't mean that.

But that kind of fatigue is different from the exhaustion of trying to be somebody you were never intended to be. That's really bad. That's really exhausting.

If I were to go right now on a three-week evangelistic campaign with gospel meetings every night, I probably would just come unglued because it's really not my work, and I'd be trying to force myself into something that isn't my work. So, when you are exercising your gift, you have the maximum effectiveness with the minimum fatigue. And then, finally, a final key to the discovery of your gift.

Carry out your gift as a stewardship from the Lord. First Peter, chapter four, verse ten. First Peter, chapter four, verse ten.

As every man has received the gift, even so minister the same one to another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Now, just a few additional tips, if I may just take the time quickly. A few additional tips on the exercise of gifts.

One is to be happy in the exercise of your gift. Be happy. When God reveals your gift, give yourself to it and really be happy in it.

Once again, you think of the members of the body. What's a healthy body? A healthy body is one in which the members are all carrying out their own function in obedience to the head. That's the way it should be in the body of Christ.

I find out what my gift is, I'm happy in it, in obedience to the instructions from the Lord Jesus. Second tip, don't envy others. A lot of people go through life wishing they were somebody else.

How ridiculous, you know? Tall people wish they were shorter, and short people wish they were taller. Stout people wish they were thinner, and thin people wish they could put on a little weight. And there's so many frustrated, dissatisfied, unhappy people.

They're unhappy with the dispensations and providences of God, and it's absolutely ridiculous. I'll tell you, if God shows you what your gift is, you don't have to envy anybody else. You can look at them and rejoice.

Say, praise God for Billy Graham. I can't preach the gospel for sour apples, but he can, and I just rejoice that he can, and he's a member of the same body as I am. Three, use your gifts for the good of others.

I think this is so important. Use your gifts for the good of others. Gifts were never given for self-exhibition.

Never. It says that very clearly. It says, for the good of all.

1 Corinthians chapter 12, verse 7. That isn't exactly the way it says it in the King James. To profit with all, I think it says, doesn't it? To profit with all. 1 Corinthians 12, 7. But the manifestation of the gift of the Spirit is given to every man to profit with all.

But that means, for the profit of all, is what it means. Why were gifts given? You were given a gift to help others, not to help yourself, not to edify yourself. You were given that gift to help others along in their Christian life.

What a wonderful picture. Number four, fourth tip, don't touch the glory. Don't touch the glory.

What does that mean? It means that use your gift in order that the Lord Jesus will receive all the glory. It's wonderful how much you can accomplish for God if you're determined that he'll get the glory. It really is absolutely wonderful.

And finally, just one final thing, and that is this. Remember that personal holiness is far more important than gift. You know that a man may have gift, a certain gift, and actually he might be out of fellowship with God.

He might actually be living in sin, and yet he has the gift, and God honors his word, and there are results. That's a shocking thing, but it's true. But what's more important than gifts is personal grace, personal holiness.

And so, in the use and exercise of our gifts, we must keep these things in proper perspective. May the Lord help us to be serious about these things. When I come back, if the Lord carries maybe everybody's hand, we'll go up next time.

Brother Glenn is going to lead us in a closing hymn. 37, hymn number 537. We'll sing verses one and three, and then our brother McDonald will close in a word of prayer.

537, verses one and three.

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