

Romans 12:3-8

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[0 : 00] If you will please take out your copy of God's Word, which I hope you brought with you this morning, and turn to Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 12, verse 3.

And while you're doing that, let me say I'm sure glad that we don't bow at the altar of performance. That it is totally okay that Jordan started out reading the wrong Advent candle. No problem there at all.

It's totally okay that Wes has a hard time talking and tuning at the exact same time. I know I couldn't do it. It's also okay that you notice that the ball didn't hit me. That ball was supposed to hit me.

Chris gave me a job of throwing a big ball from five feet away and hitting a target this large, and I missed. Praise God that that's also okay. Our salvation is not a salvation of works.

It's a salvation of grace. It's holy of God. And we should praise Him for that this morning. So let's pray together and do just that before we begin to study. Father God, we do praise You this morning for Jesus Christ, who we celebrate His coming at this time of year.

[1 : 09] Thank You, Father, that He came so that man no more may die, to give us second birth, that we might have life in Him. I thank You this day for those of us who have placed saving faith in Christ.

We stand before You now with no condemnation. We are justified, forgiven, clothed in the righteousness of Christ, that You see us as perfect and holy.

I praise You, God, that also that is not a completed action, that we are still being made perfect. And as such, You've given us things to do, tasks to carry out.

You've given us the great privilege of joining in Your work in this world. And so I pray, Father, this day as we study Your Word, that it penetrates our hearts and causes us to live differently as a result.

And we pray this in the precious name of Christ. Amen. So begin with me. We're going to read, starting in verse 3 of chapter 12 of the book of Romans, through the end of verse 8.

[2 : 11] Verse 8 of Romans, So we've come to the all-important, practical aspect of the book of Romans, right?

Paul has laid out doctrinally great truths about our salvation, that we are justified by faith alone, in Christ alone, forever. That God is sovereign over all those things.

And he turns then, at the end of chapter 11, to this doxology, this great praise, this closing, this summation of these doctrines. And then he turns to us in chapter 12, to show us how then these things practically work themselves out in our lives.

All that we're going to be talking about in the coming months, I presume, are the therefore. Because of what Christ has done for you, the mercies of God, Paul calls it in verse 1 of chapter 12.

Because of the mercies of God, therefore, live in this way. And we're going to take verses 3 through 8 in two Sundays.

[3 : 59] We're going to deal with some observations, some general observations about the text this morning. Primarily from verse 3 through the first part of verse 6. And then next week, we'll drill down a little deeper and talk specifically about the gifts.

What they mean and how they can work themselves out in our day-to-day living. I want to show you three things. Firstly, God has gifted each of us uniquely for his service.

You see that in verse 4 through the beginning of 6. He says that we're one body with many members. And the members do not all have the same function.

We aren't clones. We aren't robots. We don't all look the same. So we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.

We are uniquely gifted for his service. You are you and no one else is. There's a couple of great kid songs about that, right? Search all the world over. There's no one like me.

[5 : 04] This applies to the family of God as well. God has made you unique and gifted you particularly for the place that you are. And for the people with whom you serve.

A great parallel text to this is found in 1 Corinthians chapter 12. You can turn there with me if you like. We're going to begin reading in verse 12 of chapter 12. 1 Corinthians chapter 12.

So we are created uniquely, bound together to serve as a collection, as an extension of who Christ is in the world.

We have been blessed in this way, given the Spirit of God, the same Spirit that we might work together and cooperate with one another. Paul's analogy here excludes two things.

It excludes you from feeling invaluable. You can't say, I'm an ear, therefore I'm not a part of the body, right? That's what he's talking about there.

[7 : 16] You can't say, I have a lesser gift, therefore I'm not valuable to what's happening. It also excludes anyone else from calling you invaluable, right?

That's what he says there at the end. The eye can't say to the hand, I have no need of you. Right? Because the body needs every part. In reading a bit of MacArthur's commentary on this passage, he quoted from a fictitious article that was written in a public school newsletter, which I find this hilarious that this was written in a public school newsletter.

But listen carefully to this. This illustrates this perfectly. Once upon a time, the animals decided they should do something meaningful to meet the problems of the new world.

So they organized a school. They adopted an activity curriculum of running, climbing, swimming, and flying. To make it easier to administer the curriculum, all the animals took all the subjects.

The duck was excellent in swimming, in fact, better than his instructor. But he made only passing grades in flying, and was very poor in running. Since he was slow in running, he had to drop swimming and stay after school to practice running.

[8 : 30] This caused his webbed feet to be badly worn, so that he became only average in swimming. But average was quite acceptable, so nobody worried about that, except the duck. The rabbit started at the top of the class in running, but developed a nervous twitch in his leg muscles because of so much makeup work in swimming.

The squirrel was excellent in climbing, but he encountered constant frustration in flying class because his teacher made him start from the ground up instead of from the treetop down.

He developed charley horses from overexertion and so only got a C in climbing and a D in running.

The eagle was a problem child and was severely disciplined for being a nonconformist.

In climbing classes, he beat all the others to the top of the tree, but insisted on using his own way to get there. And the story goes on and on, and they developed that a bit more.

But we try very often as people. We set up what we think a Christian should look like. We may idolize a particular Christian, some hero of ours, and look at the way they look and want to cram our lives into theirs.

[9 : 38] Make ourselves the shape of them. And we ought not. You are uniquely gifted. You are particularly created to serve in a very particular way.

We ought not try to be someone else. So we're given this listing of gifts here. And as I've been looking over and studying the spiritual gifts, as we'll talk a bit more about next week, I want to show you that these gifts, I believe, overlap with each other, even include each other.

And I, therefore, don't believe that they're mutually exclusive to one another, or even rigidly defined.

So we have to be careful as we study gifting, because the temptation can be to say, well, I have the gift of teaching.

Therefore, I don't need to serve. Therefore, it's not necessary for me to be merciful, because I don't have the gift of mercy.

The temptation is there, and I see many, many people who, while they would never say that out loud, do this on a subconscious level. They find the thing that they're most good at, and they, therefore, neglect all of the others.

[10 : 57] We are all being made together like Christ. Are we not? I'm meant to look each day a bit more, and a bit more, and a bit more like my Savior.

The perfect embodiment of any spiritual gift or attribute we may find in the Scripture. He was it. Completely holy. Perfect in every way in his service to God.

So if we're being made to be more like him, I may be particularly gifted in one area, and not in another. I may have to really work at some areas of my life. I may have to pray daily that God would just give me extra grace to fulfill these other things.

But we have to be careful that we don't rigidly define them, and therefore neglect some of the other areas. So let me show you why I don't believe they're rigidly defined, why I believe they overlap, why they're not mutually exclusive.

Okay? So see if you can track me for just a second. In 1 Corinthians 14.3, Paul says, The word encouragement is the same word as exhortation here in Romans 12.8, which says, The one who exhorts in his exhortation.

[12:21] So here are two gifts, exhortation or encouragement, and prophecy overlap. Okay? So you catch in 1 Corinthians 14.3, The one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding, and encouragement, or exhortation.

Catch that connection there. Another example is Titus 1.9, which says, That the elder should exhort in sound teaching. That's the literal translation. Exhort in sound teaching.

These are the same words that we find here at the end of verse 7, and the beginning of verse 8. Teaching and exhorting. Only exhorting is said to use teaching.

So again, these gifts overlap. You tracking me? Right? And if you just look at the list itself, how would you precisely draw a line, in verse 8, between contributing generously, and doing acts of mercy cheerfully?

The two, can't they, shouldn't they, walk hand in hand together? Surely the one who is joyfully merciful, is a generous person.

[13:29] Right? So again, we see these gifts, having some overlap. Or take service at the beginning of verse 8. How will you distinguish, serving, from, doing mercy?

And the point that I'm making, is that we just must be careful. I'm not negating the value of, spiritual gift tests. That could be helpful. But we just must be careful about how, we categorize these things. That we don't live our Christian lives, categorically. Right? Today is my day to be merciful. I will go and be merciful. These things intertwine, and work together, in our living. So, what do we do then with that?

Well, if we know this to be true, and we're trying to find, how it is that God has uniquely created us, to serve, what do we do? What is the practical way, in which we can accomplish that?

Firstly, be a part of a church. It's really great to see, everybody here this morning. Some of you, I've seen and not seen, and you're back. That's good.

[14:34] Some of you are very consistent here. I don't know, maybe because finals are going on, soon. Everybody's trying to get, prayed up and ready to go. You know that doesn't work.

Right? If you're not part, of a serving congregation, you're not ever going to really, realize your potential, in Christ. You need people examining, what's going on with you.

To show you this, look, in the same letter, Romans chapter 1, verse 11 and 12. Paul says in his greeting, for I long to see you.

Why? So that I may impart to you, some spiritual gift, to strengthen you. That is that we may be, mutually encouraged, by each other's faith, both yours, and mine.

So spiritual gifts, working, in the proper way, are from faith, for faith. So if, if we're to, walk out our gifts, it ought to be done, in a desperation, for God to be working, and moving, in our lives.

[15:49] Employing, the gifts that he's given us. Right? So from faith. And they ought to be, for the strengthening, for the building up, of faith, in others. So practically, what does that look like?

What do you do, as you're around other Christians, and you're looking for ways, to serve? Simply, you look for opportunities, to serve. You jump in, and you do, the things that need to get done, and then you ask other people, how it's going.

Am I an encouragement to you, when I operate in this way? If the church is, functioning properly, that encouragement, is being offered to you. I have to tell you, how much it blesses me, when you do, X.

Or you do, Y. You look for the fruit, that comes out, of faithful service. You look for confirmation, for leadership, to say to you, you're really good, at this.

Can you please, keep doing that, for our church? And so you, begin to feel out, who God has created, you to be, and continue to serve, in that way.

[16:52] Doesn't mean that, when you discover, you're a great teacher, you stop, cleaning the floors. Right? Needs to get done, hop in, and make, it happen. And I believe, it's just that simple.

I don't think, that we need to, over-spiritualize, the gifts. But to recognize, that God, has knit you together, uniquely, to be knit together, with a congregation, to serve, his purposes, and his ends. Okay. Second observation. The offering, of ourselves, as living sacrifices, is prerequisite, to experiencing, our potential, for his service.

I'll say that again. The offering, of ourselves, as living sacrifices, is prerequisite, to experiencing, our potential, for his service. Let's not forget, about verse 1, and 2, of chapter 12.

Paul says, I appeal to you, therefore, in light of everything, that I've said, because of these great truths, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies, as a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

[18:03] We dealt with that, two weeks ago. In a response, to the great grace of God, to us, in our lives, we are, as priests, to offer ourselves, wholly, every bit, of our being, back, to God.

He says, do not be conformed, to this world, but be transformed, by what? The renewal of your mind, working these truths, back into you, that by testing, you may discern, what is the will of God, what is good, and acceptable, and perfect.

Now this, this text, has been used, generally, very often, verses 1 and 2, particularly verse 2, to talk about, how it is that we know, the will of God, for our lives, in all the varying, circumstances.

Where am I supposed, to go to school? What's the next job, for me? Where should we move? It's a time to have children, all of those things. Certainly, generally, that applies, right? If we're offering ourselves, fully as a sacrifice, to God, we're renewing our minds, we're reading the scriptures, certainly, generally, that applies.

But specifically, I think if you asked Paul, what did you mean, specifically, when you talked about, discerning what the will of God is, what is good, and acceptable, and perfect, he wouldn't have said, oh, just generally, just, you know, the things you may encounter in life.

[19:15] He would have said, did you read the rest of the letter? I went on to talk. I continued talking, and in fact, verse 3 starts with the word, for.

So I think, specifically, Paul is talking about, all the things, that are to follow. So if we're offering ourselves, wholly, sacrificially, to God, and renewing our minds, then we will test, we will discern, that everything he's about to say, is good, and right, and true.

You will not, fully recognize, your potential, God has worked into you, until you fully sacrifice, yourself, to him.

We must, get that, right. If you tell me, you've given yourself, wholly to God, and I see no, effective ministry, in your life, then I don't believe you.

On the other hand, if you tell me, that you're serving the Lord, you can tell me, all these things, that you're doing, but I don't see, a total commitment to him, I don't believe that either. Some of us, need, to give up some things, to wholly, sacrifice, ourselves to God.

[20:30] I don't know, what those specific things are, for you. I can tell you though, that I don't see, effective ministry, in many, of the lives, of our congregation. You haven't said to God, God, I know, that I have value in you, I know that I am an image bearer, because Christ, has restored that in me, and I know that by your spirit, you give me a particular set, of gifts, to serve the church.

And I'm willing to do, whatever, you would have me do. I'm willing to go, wherever you would have me go. I'm willing to use my time, in whatever way, in my resources, in whatever way, you would have me do that.

Many of us hang on, to particular things, in our lives, that are going to keep that, from happening. Good things, most of them.

We listed the things, that you value in your life, it would be very, very unlikely, for any of you, that we would say, oh, that's a horrible thing, to value in your life. They'd be good things, we could put them, in the good category, right?

But they get out of balance. You begin to value, those things, above Christ, and his mission, for you. Let me tell you one, for me, from the past.

[21:42] Free time. I used to have, a thing called free time. I don't really remember, exactly what I did with that, but it existed in my life, and I, I remember enjoying it.

Just, what are you doing today, Nathan? Nothing. Nothing going on, sometimes. Right? And as God began, to cram more things, into my life, working a full time job, working here at the church, part

time, having children, it disappeared.

Right? And for a while, I really didn't want it to. I fought for free time, at times. Not saying it's not okay, to rest. Okay? So hear me carefully, it's okay to rest.

But, you know the goofing off time, college students, I think you know, what I'm talking about.

Right? It's highly likely, that if you, deliver yourself, over, to Christ's service, you're not going to have, any free time.

Right? You were going to set time aside, to rest, because you know you have to, to get at it the next day. You were going to say, I better get to sleep, at 10 o'clock, because I know I've got to get up, at 5 a.m.

[22 : 50] and get rolling on my day. Right? The free time will tend to, flitter itself away. Right? You may have to give up, some relationships in your life, that are sucking, life out of you.

Right? You may have to give up, some extracurricular activities, that you're involved with, that consume, so much of your time, and have very little value, eternally.

You may have to give up, some of those, free time things. Guys, you might never beat, that video game, you've been trying, to pull off. It just, you might just have to say, oh well, never going to get to the last level.

I don't even know, if they make video games, in levels anymore. Excuse me, if I've misspoken. We have to offer, all of ourselves, to his service.

Let me be pastoral, for a moment. And, hear me carefully, I love, all of you. Some of you, I don't know that well. Some of you, I don't know at all, actually. There's a good chance of that. Some of you, I know very well.

[23 : 51] I love you very, very much. And that's what I'm about to say. Being a shepherd, shepherds had two instruments, at their disposal. They had a staff, and they had a rod.

You ever heard this? The staff was the big, long stick with the hook, on the end, which was used to gently, correct the sheep. It was used to, corral. They also had a rod. And you know what the rod, was used for?

For the sheep that wouldn't hear, the correction of the staff. The sheep would get a good, crack on the head, with the rod. So what I'm about to say, for some of you, is going to feel, like staff, and some of you, like rod.

Just know that it's all, from love. It is shameful, the way some of you serve, this congregation, in the simple ways. Some of you are, far too little, involved.

You rush in, you consume, and you rush out. There is a massive, amount of work, that goes in, to doing things around here. Jamie, my sister said well, the other evening, this building is not self-cleaning.

[24 : 50] Wouldn't that be nice, if we like, shut the door, and pushed a button, and it just did its work, like a self-cleaning oven? We do. There are lots, of things to be done, around here. And members, a lot of our non-members, even some people, who I know, aren't Christians, but are coming around, this congregation, to explore, what a community, committed to Christ, looks like, do more work, in this building, than you do.

It's shameful. It's sad, that I, and Chris, run around here, cleaning things, while you sit around, and chit chat.

You consider, that maybe, it's important, for the pastors, of this church, to be talking to people, rather than, cleaning windows, and wiping off tables. When we have events together, it's not enough, to stack two chairs, against the wall, and then go home.

I did my part. Did you know, that the work isn't done, until the work is done? There are a lot of things, that have to get done, in succession, before we're finished, with something that we're doing. There are lots of things, that have to get set up, and get ready for.

You need to be looking, for ways, you can be more involved. Now, to be fair, Chris and I have failed, at showing you those things. Right? I am a horrible, delegator, of a volunteer, group.

[26 : 16] Right? Like, I don't want to make you, do anything. But it's really, a disservice to you. Right? So, we're going to show you, ways that you can be, more involved. But just the same, you've got to take, some responsibility for it.

Right? You've got to take, some responsibility, for not asking, what can be done. Right? Right? Right? Right? If we're going, to fully experience, our potential, for service, we have to be, fully sacrificial.

We have to offer, all of ourselves, as living sacrifices. And let me tell you this. Since I have learned, to do that, in the area, of my free time, let me tell you, that I do not, regret it.

Right? Work in the service, of our king, is so much better, than flitting away time. And it has, an eternal reward. Something that we will, appreciate forever. The things you do, to waste time now, you will never, appreciate.

In fact, I actually believe, you'll probably regret. I don't know what that's, going to look like, exactly. You will never, ever, undervalue, the things that you do, for the kingdom.

[27 : 23] And thirdly, proper service, service to God, is saturated, with humility. It's saturated, with humility.

As we begin to talk, about gifting, and the part, that you may play, recognize, that every bit of it, must be saturated, with humility. We see that, in verse three.

Paul even starts out, very carefully, by saying, for by the grace, given to me, he's about to give, a command, to be humble. Right? And so he carefully says, by the grace given to me, as God has put me, in this position, called me as an apostle, by his grace, not because Paul's great, but because God is great, in me, I say to everyone among you, everyone among you, not to think of himself, more highly, than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, a sound mind, each according to the measure of faith, that God has assigned.

Right? Be realistic, about who you are. Right? That's what he's saying. Recognize that apart from Christ, you have nothing.

Mankind, humanity, was created to bear the image, of God. To reflect it, so to speak. But at the time of original sin, that was destroyed.

[28 : 45] It's like a mirror. If you can imagine, I have a mirror up here, just shattering the mirror. Right? Still some semblance in there, some little hint, of what we were created for.

But you don't see a whole picture, of who God is. You see very little of it, in fact. But because of Christ, we've been restored. We're now whole mirrors again. And we can then, reflect, who God is. There's no credit to us in that. Salvation is holy of God. All his doing. We can take zero credit for that.

That's why we say, the gospel at once, most gladdens, and abases the soul. Right? It humbles us, but it makes us so happy, about who we are, in Christ.

There's no room, for boasting in that. In this world, recognize that no one, really suffers, from low self-esteem. You think about that, like, they just got low self-esteem.

[29 : 48] And we think, then the solution to that, is to kind of like, bolster them up, like, tell them what's good about them, and what they do well. Low self-esteem, is just another form, of pride.

It's thinking that you, want to be someone, different than you are. You're not, fully valuing, who you, are. You're worshiping, who you want to be.

It's just as bad. Right? Pride, pride, is self-worship. And we do this, as Christians, in the church, with gifts.

We need a proper balance, of understanding, who we are, apart from Christ, and who we are, empowered, by him. Any talent, that you have, any way, that you can possibly, serve this church, or the world, was a gift to you, value it.

Right? Love it, hold on to it, and put it, into action. Paul says in verse 6, having differing, gifts, according to the grace, given to us, let us, use them.

[31 : 00] Recognize, I may not be, that guy, but I am this guy, and God's given me, things to do, with my talents. This is a snare, for the preacher.

Right? I, may never be, probably, more than likely, will never be, a John Piper, or a John MacArthur, and I know that. I listen to other preachers, to be a better preacher.

I don't think too much, of my ability, to get up here, and orate. But God has given me, a very specific task, a very specific people, and I'm going to do that, faithfully, until he tells me to stop, or takes me home.

Right? Be, confident in who you are, because who you are, is a picture, of Christ. Right? And do the things, that God has given you to do.

Don't spend all your time, trying to be someone else. Be, you, and serve. 1 Corinthians 12, verse 4 and 6, Paul says, now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.

[32 : 11] And there are varieties of service, but the same Lord. And there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God, who empowers them all, and every one. And what I want you to see in that,

is to see that, if you have gifting, and you do, if you're a Christian, if you're found in Christ, you've placed your faith in Him, for your salvation, you have gifts.

And it's the same God, that gave it to you, that gave it to me, or to that guy. Right? Praise God for that. Do you have value, in Him, and employ it. Paul says again, Galatians 6, 14, But far be it from me, to boast, except in the cross, of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world, has been crucified to me, and I, to the world.

A picture of that. Paul says, I cannot boast in anything, except what Christ, has done, for me. We get a picture, beautiful, sacrificial service, from our Lord, from Jesus Christ Himself.

I hope you know the story, the last supper, when He washed the disciples' feet. John 13, verse 12, it says, when He had washed their feet, and put on His outer garments, and resumed His place, He said to them, Do you understand, what I have done to you?

You call me, Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I, then your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet, for I have given you an example, that you also should do, just as I have done to you.

[33 : 41] Truly, truly, I say to you, a sermon is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you, if you do them. So Jesus humbled Himself to do one of the dirtiest tasks of the time.

The point of this, Jesus wasn't saying, get together with your youth group, and have a feet washing ceremony, with nice clean feet. It's not what He was saying for us to do. The lowliest servant in a household had this job, of washing feet.

Because, if you lived in this time, and you prepared yourself for a dinner, you got all cleaned up, you anointed your head with oil, got your hair looking good, slicked back, ready to go. You walked out of the house, and guess what happened to your feet?

I think a lot of us probably experience this because we wear sandals, chacos particularly. It got stinky. You walked on a dusty road, in sweaty feet, and your feet got stinky. And in this time, people reclined at low tables.

So your feet were like part of the scene. Right? So, the lowliest servant would wash guests' feet.

Right? When they came over. And that is the position that Jesus Christ put himself in.

[34 : 51] The crummiest job, he did it for the disciples. We ought to be willing to do the same. The opportunity may not always arise, but believe me, it will.

At some point in your life, you will have the crummiest job. Right? Somebody runs in here and says, Nathan, the toilet's overflowing in the bathroom, and it is gross. I ought to be.

My desire should be to jump at that and go get it done. Right? Ooh, I don't want you guys in there.

Let me go get that accomplished. Right? Could be that one of you needs to jump in front of me and make it happen.

Right? The lowliest job, the crummiest of job, is what Jesus is setting the example for us here. You know, the Corinthians, one of the great issues with the Corinthian believers and what Paul was addressing is that they had ranked the gifts.

They had laid out a hierarchy and everybody wanted to be the best and the biggest. They wanted a name for themselves and I see that happening so much in the American church.

[35 : 55] So in chapter 12, verse 31, he says, earnestly desire these gifts and I will show you a still more excellent way. And then we get chapter 13, right?

the classic love chapter not just designed for reading at weddings. He's talking about love of the church in that case, which includes your spouse.

But he's talking about the way we ought to love one another. Humble love. So proper service to God is saturated with humble love.

The greatest, the highest example of this, the greatest display of this humble love is the cross. So if we're to look to what that looks like, it's Jesus Christ not only laying his life down on our behalf, which is the tangible thing that we can touch, the abuse that he received, the pain that he experienced, right?

But more than that, spiritually, he bore the wrath of God, right? He had a perfect communion with God in the Trinity and God turned his back on him in these moments and poured out wrath.

[37 : 06] I don't even comprehend what that looks like, right? What that would feel like. I can't even begin to fathom it and praise God I never will. I'll never really know what the wrath of God looks like to me.

But Christ took that on for us, the lowliest of servants and he is our master. Ought we not serve in the very same way?

So let me just recap for you to help you wrap your mind. God has gifted each of us uniquely for his service. He has given us gifts.

The offering of ourselves as living sacrifices is prerequisite to our experiencing our potential for his service. And proper service to God is saturated with humility.

Let's pray together.