

Romans: The Good News of God

What Does the Bible Say About Spiritual Gifts?

Romans 12:3-8

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Scripture

For the past three Sundays we have been looking at Romans 12:3-8, in which the Apostle Paul has been teaching us how Christians are to serve in the body of Christ. The first Sunday I gave you a general overview of the text. The second Sunday we looked at what the Bible has to say about ministry. Last week we examined how you can discover your S.H.A.P.E. for ministry. I hope you have taken the time to work through the booklet that I gave you. As I said last week, if you have any questions about that booklet, don't hesitate to call me.

Today, I would like to look at what the Bible has to say about spiritual gifts.

So, let's read Romans 12:3-8:

³For 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. ⁴For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸the 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. (Romans 12:3-8)

Introduction

G. Raymond Carlson once said, "Spiritual gifts are not toys

with which to play; they are tools of the Spirit with which to do the Lord's work effectively."¹ Every Christian has been given a spiritual gift, the purpose of which is to build up the Body of Christ. John Calvin put it this way, "Whatever ability a faithful Christian may possess, he ought to possess it for his fellow believers, and he ought to make his own interest subservient to the well-being of the church in all sincerity."²

Lesson

So, to help you understand what Christian ministry is I am taking you through what we call Class 301, which is also called "Discovering My S.H.A.P.E. for Ministry." Today, I want to look at what the Bible has to say about spiritual gifts.

I. Ten Truths about Spiritual Gifts

Let me begin with ten truths about spiritual gifts.

First, only believers have spiritual gifts. Paul talks about spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:7, where he says, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." Only believers, born again by the Spirit of God, receive spiritual gifts.

Second, every Christian has at least one spiritual gift. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:7, "I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another." Many Christians have more than one spiritual gift. For example, Paul had the gift of preaching, apostleship, and teaching (2 Timothy 1:11). However, many Christians don't know what their spiritual gift is. If you don't know what your spiritual gift is, pick up last week's sermon and booklet, and you will have a tool that will help you discover what your spiritual gift is.

Third, no one receives all the spiritual gifts. Paul says in Romans 12: 6-8, "**Having gifts that differ according to the grace**

¹ Quoted in John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2006), 614.

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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.”

Fourth, no single spiritual gift is given to everyone. Paul asks in 1 Corinthians 12:29-30, “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?” Paul’s point is that no single spiritual gift is given to everyone.

Fifth, you cannot earn or work for a spiritual gift. That is the whole point of a gift. Gifts are given; they are not received in response to work.

Sixth, the Holy Spirit decides what spiritual gift you get. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:11, “All these [spiritual gifts] are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.” You don’t *decide* what spiritual gift you get; you *discover* what the Holy Spirit has given you.

Seventh, the spiritual gifts you are given are permanent. Paul says in Romans 11:29, “For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.” You don’t get a spiritual gift for a couple of years, then lose it, and get a different gift instead. Now, some people discover that they may use their gift in different ways. For example, some people enjoy teaching children for a season, but later find that they are better at teaching adults. So, their focus shifts from children to adults, but they are still using the same spiritual gift of teaching.

Eighth, you must develop the spiritual gift God gives you. Paul says to Timothy, “Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you” (1 Timothy 4:14). Spiritual gifts that are not used are like muscles that are not used; they atrophy. So, you must develop the spiritual gift that God gives you.

Ninth, it is a sin to waste the spiritual gift that God gave you. In the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30), Jesus said, “For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and

entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'" You will stand before God on the Day of Judgment and you will give an account to him about how you have used your spiritual gift.

And finally, using your spiritual gift glorifies God and grows you. Jesus said in John 15:8, "By this my Father is glorified, that

you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.” As you use your spiritual gift, you glorify God. And further, you grow and mature as a follower of Jesus.

II. The Purpose of Spiritual Gifts

So, then, what is the purpose of spiritual gifts?

First, spiritual gifts are not for your benefit but for the benefit of others. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12:7, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit *for the common good.*” Peter said the same thing in 1 Peter 4:10, “As each has received a gift, *use it to serve one another*, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”

You receive a spiritual gift in order to minister to others. You don’t receive the gift of evangelism, for example, to evangelize yourself. You don’t receive the gift of teaching to teach yourself. You don’t receive the gift of generosity to give to yourself. Gifts are meant to be used in service to others.

Second, spiritual gifts are to produce maturity and harmony in our church family. The Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 4:11-14, “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, *for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith* and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.” This is a very important passage on the purpose of spiritual gifts. My job is to equip you for the work of ministry. And then together we will see the body of Christ built up. And as the body of Christ is built up we will grow in harmony and unity in the faith.

What happens when part of the body does not work properly? Let’s say that your kidney is not working properly. You will not feel well and you will get sick. Eventually you will see a doctor. He will diagnose the problem and prescribe a certain course of

treatment to get your kidney working properly again.

Well, in a similar way, when you are not using your gift the body of Christ will not work properly. It will not function as well as it could or should. The prescription for the cure is that you should use the spiritual gift that God has given you.

And third, recognize that you have both a primary and a secondary ministry in the church. I believe it was Rick Warren who first alerted me to this purpose, which I think is very helpful. Let me explain what I mean.

Your *primary* ministry commitment should be in the area where you are *gifted*. And your *secondary* ministry includes serving in any area of the body where you are *needed*.

Let's say you are gifted as a teacher, then you should serve in a ministry of teaching. But perhaps there is a need to help with getting a ministry off the ground, and you are asked to help with administration. Administration may not be your gift but you are needed in that role, and so you help out because you know that it will get the ministry off the ground.

Years ago I heard Bill Hybels share a story that illustrates this point. He delivered a message titled, "Gauges, Gifts, and Games." He said that for years he believed that Christians have two gauges: a physical gauge and a spiritual gauge. He was a very disciplined person, and he watched both gauges carefully. On the physical gauge he made sure that he ate properly, exercised regularly, slept well, and so on. On the spiritual gauge he was regular in reading the Bible, spending time in prayer, being actively involved in ministry, and so on. He said that as he monitored both gauges they rarely got under $\frac{3}{4}$ full.

One December, however, he was getting ready to officiate at a wedding. This was at the height of the Advent and Christmas season. For some inexplicable reason he just burst into tears. He could not stop crying. Worse, he did not know why he was crying. Well, that was not a good time for that to happen! Somehow he managed to pull himself together and do the wedding.

He knew that he was having a breakdown and his prayer was,

“Lord, just help me get through the Christmas season.” A few days later he led the church in about 8 Christmas services. Throughout this time he would often burst into tears for no reason at all. After the last Christmas Eve service, he and his family got on a plane and travelled to the Bahamas (or some such exotic place).

After a few days in the sun and sailing (apparently Bill loves to sail), he was doing much better. It was then he realized that he actually had a third gauge, a gauge that he was not watching. This third gauge was the emotional gauge. Even though he was doing well physically and spiritually, he was so busy with ministry that he was depleting his emotional reserves. He was completely unaware of it of course, and it had been going on for months. Once he realized what was going on he was able to pay attention to his emotional gauge and not run himself into empty before crashing.

But, he wondered, why did he get so emotionally depleted? That is when he grasped that he was not paying attention to using his primary gift. Bill’s spiritual gifts, in order, are evangelism, leadership, and then teaching. His ministry at the church had the order of his spiritual gifts reversed so that he was spending about 65% of his time on teaching (which was his weakest spiritual gift), about 30% on leadership, and only about 5% on evangelism.

He remembered that the previous summer he had spoken at a national conference. It was one of those conferences that is a great thing to add to one’s resume. However, on the plane he had an opportunity to share the gospel with the passenger in the seat next to him. When he got home, his wife asked him how the conference went. “It was great,” he said, “but let me tell you about this guy on the plane next to me.” And he proceeded with great enthusiasm to share his evangelistic encounter with his wife.

Later Bill realized that when he operated in the area of his primary spiritual gift he actually got energized. But when he operated in the area of his third (and weakest) gift—teaching—he got depleted rather than energized.

So, it is very important to understand what your spiritual gift is so that when you use it you will find yourself being energized

rather than being depleted.

Bill also discovered that it is important to relax—or, as he calls it, to play games—in order to revitalize yourself when you are depleted. For him it is sailing. For his wife it is reading a book.

You need to discover what it is that will revitalize your emotional reserves so that you don't crash and burn out.

Now, as I said, sometimes you are needed to serve in an area of ministry for which you are not spiritually gifted. The ministry needs to be done, and so you do it. However, you will be most effective when your primary ministry uses your top spiritual gifts.

III. The Definition of a Spiritual Gift

Having given you ten truths about and the purpose of spiritual gifts, let me now give you a definition of a spiritual gift.

I would propose the following simple definition of a spiritual gift: *A spiritual gift is a special ability, given by the Holy Spirit to every believer at the moment of conversion, to be used to minister to others and therefore to build up the Body of Christ.*

IV. Cautions about Spiritual Gifts

Let me now give you some cautions about spiritual gifts.

First, don't confuse spiritual gifts with natural talents. Christians and non-Christians alike have natural talents. However, only Christians have spiritual gifts. Often natural talents look similar to spiritual gifts. For example, some people have the natural talent of teaching, but only Christians have the spiritual gift of teaching. The difference between a natural talent and a spiritual gift is that a spiritual gift is given to Christians by the Holy Spirit that is meant to be used to minister to others and to build up the church.

Second, don't confuse spiritual gifts with the fruit of the Spirit. In Galatians 5:22-23 Paul says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." The fruit of the Spirit show your maturity, whe-

reas spiritual gifts show your ministry.

Third, don't confuse gifts with roles. For example, one of the spiritual gifts is that of shepherding, or pastoring. Church ministers are usually called "pastors," and they often have the gift of pastoring. However, there are many people in the congregation who have the spiritual gift of pastoring but they do not fill the role of pastor. And the same could be said of many of the other gifts.

Fourth, realize that using your gifts without love is worthless. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing." Love, like spiritual gifts, is intended to build up and not tear down.

Conclusion

As I said last week, my goal is to get every communicant member involved in some ministry at the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church. I want to get *you* involved in ministry.

Now, maybe someone doesn't want to get involved in ministry. You have some excuse for not getting involved. In response to those who make excuses about why they cannot serve the Lord, Rick Warren writes:

Abraham was old, Jacob was insecure, Leah was unattractive, Joseph was abused, Moses stuttered, Gideon was poor, Samson was codependent, Rahab was immoral, David had an affair and all kinds of family problems, Elijah was suicidal, Jeremiah was depressed, Jonah was reluctant, Naomi was a widow, John the Baptist was eccentric to say the least, Peter was impulsive and hot-tempered, Martha worried a lot, the Samaritan woman had several failed marriages, Zacchaeus was unpopular, Thomas had doubts, Paul had poor health, and Timothy was timid. That is quite a varie-

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ty of misfits, but God used each of them in his service. He will use you too if you stop making excuses.³

So, to that end I have placed a card titled “Ministry Involvement” with a pen or pencil on each chair. Will you please get out the card and pen or pencil? I want you to fill it out now.

My Ministry Involvement	
Name:	_____
I know what my spiritual gift is. It is:	_____
My secondary spiritual gifts are:	_____

I am involved in the following ministry / ministries at TBPC:	_____

I am not involved in a ministry at TBPC. I would like to get involved in the following ministry:	_____

Let me encourage you to get involved in some ministry today. Don't delay. You will discover that God will be glorified, you will grow spiritually, and the body of Christ will be blessed. Amen.

³ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Co., 2002), 233.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons
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PRAAYER:

O Lord our God, you have given every believer a spiritual gift. Help each communicant member of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church know what his or her spiritual gift is. Then spur each person to get involved in some ministry in our church.

There is so much that can be done. There is women's ministry, men's ministry, children's ministry, youth ministry, Emptynesters, pacesetters, nursery, hospitality, prayer, ministry deployment, missions, NTCA, music, choir, greeters, ushers, Sunday school, adult Christian Education & Fellowship, Growth Groups, and so much more. Help each one here today to get actively involved in a ministry of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church.

And all of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

As you leave here today, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.