

Title: Put Our Gifts to Use
Date: 2/8/26
Subject: Christ followers are to use the spiritual gifts the Lord has given them.
Scripture: Romans 12:6 - 8

An Oregon public school printed the following article in its newsletter:

“Once upon a time, the animals decided they should do something meaningful to meet the problems of the new world. 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. This caused his web feet to be badly worn, so that he was only average in swimming. But average was quite acceptable, so nobody worried about that - except the duck.

“The rabbit started at the top of his class in running but developed a nervous twitch in his leg muscles because of so much make-up 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 "Charlie 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 non-conformist. In climbing classes, he beat all the others to the top of the tree but insisted on using his own way to get there....

Pastor and author Chuck Swindoll commented on the article (Seasons of Life, p. 313): “The obvious moral of the story is a simple one - each creature has its own set of capabilities in which it will naturally excel - unless it is expected or forced to fill a mold that doesn't fit. When that happens, frustration, discouragement and even guilt bring overall mediocrity or complete defeat. A duck is a duck - and *only* a duck. It was built to swim, not to run or fly and certainly not to climb. A squirrel is a squirrel - and *only* that. To move it out of its forte, climbing, and then expect it to swim or fly will drive a squirrel nuts. Eagles are beautiful creatures in the air but not in a foot race. The rabbit will win every time unless, of course, the eagle gets hungry.

“What is true of creatures in the forest is true of Christians in the family, both the family of believers and the family under your roof. God has not made us all the same. He never intended to. It was he who planned and designed the differences, unique capabilities, and variations in the body.”

Previously in our study of Romans 12, we've seen truths that will guide us as we fulfill our roles in the body of Christ. God's mercy is the foundation and motivation. We are to offer our bodies, our entire beings, to God as living sacrifices. We aren't to live according to the ways of the world system opposed to God. We are in the process of being transformed through the renewing of our minds. We aren't to think of ourselves more highly than we ought but should think humbly, seriously and with clear minds. We're to understand that

we're brought into Christ's body as one of the many parts. God has placed believers in the body in the exact place where he wants us to be and gives us the resources we need to fulfill our particular role to serve him. We belong to each other and are to be committed to one another.

Read Romans 12:6 – 8.

Definition of spiritual gifts:

Spiritual gifts are abilities given by God to serve the Lord and people for God's glory and the church's benefit. They're also known as grace gifts. It can be difficult to distinguish between God-given spiritual gifts and God-given talents sometimes called natural or innate talents. Both are given by God and He can mesh them together. Spiritual gifting and how they're used might be discovered through a person's natural talents and inclinations.

Every follower of Jesus Christ is involved in ministry or works of service (Ephesians 4:12). Being a minister isn't limited to the person who preaches sermons, works full time for the church, etc. That's one usage of the word. The more accurate understanding of the term is God says all of his people are ministers who are to be engaged in the ministry of building up the body of Christ

God gives different gifts to different people according to his grace, his plan, his wisdom, his choice. This passage lists some of the gifts God gives. Gifts can also be found in Ephesians 4, 1 Corinthians 12 and 1 Peter 4. The number of gifts is around 20 and is based upon how the lists are combined.

People don't all have the same gifts. It's not a uniformity where everyone has exactly the same gifting and way the gifting is used. There are various functions, areas of ministries, roles, positions, and uses that depend upon the age level with whom someone is ministering which leads to a lot of uniqueness.

Another Scripture informs us: "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good... All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines" (1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 11).

The gifts are given for the common good. They aren't meant for a person to use for their personal enjoyment and spiritual enrichment. They're for the whole body. Gifts are to be used. They aren't to be hidden.

How to discover gift-oriented ministry. Each Christ follower has a gift mix that's unique to them in that there's an infinite variety in the combination of gifts, the extent (or depth) of gifting, and the way the gift is used. A person's gift-oriented ministry is discovered as he is informed about gifts.

Examine self for strengths, abilities and desires for how they may indicate giftedness. Not think more highly than ought but think clearly and humbly. Try to match interests and motivations to ministries.

Experiment with different ministries, noting effectiveness and God's blessing in results. Experimenting in different areas will help us to see how God has designed us. The thought isn't to find our gifting and then

we'll find our ministry. It's to get involved, and as we do, we'll discover some gifts God has given us and ministries that are or aren't for us.

Confirmation and recognition by mature believers as to how they think God could use you to serve others. They may tell us we were cut out for that ministry or may suggest we try something else.

Stuart Briscoe, who was the founding pastor of Elmbrook Church, believed in the Navy method - people should be thrown into ministries to see if they sink or swim. After a month, if they swim, great, they've found a way to serve the Lord. If they're sinking, they should be pulled out, told "Good effort. Let's see how you do in something else."

Work at developing gifts in ministry. We should take our time before we chisel our conclusions in stone. Focus on motivation and ministry. Be willing and available to serve.

Someone said, "If you want a profitable ministry, find out what irritates you about Christians, then lay down your life for the reputation of Christ." The thing that irritates you could point out your gift, at least how that gift can be used. If you think Christians are unkind, then show mercy. If you feel believers don't evangelize or defend the faith, then be active in doing so. If you think Christ followers are unlearned, then teach them.

Before we look at the specific gifts, each Christian is to do what people who have these special gifts do. We are all to serve. We can all encourage others. We can all contribute with our finances. We are to do all of these things but there are some who have the unique God-given ability to do them beyond the average.

Specific gifts how they are to be used

Prophesying. Proclaiming divine truth that has been revealed in God's word. It's not foretelling the future but fourth telling. To inform, strengthen, encourage, comfort, instruct.

It's to be done in proportion to the faith a person has received. This is similar to the measure of faith God is given as noted in v. 3.

Serving: helping, assisting, supporting in practical ways. Probably associated with meeting physical and material needs. It's a supportive gift, often running behind the scenes as it allows others to use their time for spiritual ministry.

Teaching: helping people understand and apply the truth of God's word. Some say it's declaring the truth. This is often connected with the pastoral office. Another Scripture (Ephesians 4:11) lists some of the giftings and offices in the church. It puts pastors and teachers together. Many people feel the two terms refer to one person, not two different people. The pastor is to be a shepherd who cares for the flock and a teacher gives food to the flock. Another Scripture (1 Timothy 3:2) teaches that an overseer, a spiritual leader in the church, is to be able to teach.

Encouraging: to come alongside to help, strengthen, encourage, and comfort. Some say it's helping people apply the truth. The NIV Study Bible note on this verse says: "Exhorting others with an uplifting cheerful call to worthwhile accomplishment. The teacher often carried out this function. In teaching, the believer is shown what he must do; in encouraging, he is helped to do it."

Contributing to the needs of others: the ability to give money cheerfully to advance God's work. It could also be administering what other people give.

This instruction comes with a qualifier - let him give generously. Throughout the teaching on giving found in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, Paul frequently speaks of giving generously, willingly and cheerfully. It doesn't make a difference if the person is worth billions or only has a few pennies. All believers are to give generously, willingly and cheerfully knowing that the God will reward.

One night at a Billy Graham Crusade at Madison Square Garden in New York, a well-known mobster walked in with four bodyguards. They sat in a row with two of Graham's team members. The time came for the offering and the bodyguards looked at their leader to see what they should do. The underworld figure said, "This is on me, men." He pulled out a wad of \$100 bills big enough to choke a cow. He went through the \$100 bills until he came to a dollar bill and put it in the offering plate. Though the mobster probably wasn't a Christ follower, he does provide an example of ungenerous giving.

Most of the items in our budget are obligations, but giving to the Lord is a privilege and a blessing. It's an act of obedience that accompanies our confession of Christ as our Savior. It's especially true that those who have the gift of contributing to the needs of others should give generously.

Leadership: governing, overseeing, directing the work of the church. Spiritual leaders, such as those in the office of elder in the church, utilize this gift as do those involved in various ministries.

This gifting also has a qualifier – diligently. They are to be industrious and attentive, careful to perform the necessary responsibilities.

Showing mercy: providing practical and compassionate love to the suffering, sick, needy, poor. Sympathy and empathy in caring for those with physical and material needs. Help them bear, lift or remove the burden.

The qualifier for this gifting is to do it cheerfully, not grudgingly. Imagine a person who volunteers at a meal site that provides a Thanksgiving meal. They're put in charge of dishing out the mashed potatoes. As people come through the line, they frown and ask, "Do you want mashed potatoes?" Then slap a pile on the tray.

Showing mercy isn't a chore to be performed. It's to be done with delight, kind of like the attitude of Chick-fil-A team members: "It's my pleasure." And they don't say it through gritted teeth.

Each of the gifts in this passage include the two words "let him." Let the person. The person is to actively use their gifts. The Lord has given them to us so we can give to him and others. It's like the Nike tagline "Just do it." Just use the gift. We are to be using the gifting God gives us.

More from Swindoll: "If God made you a duck - you're a duck, friend. Swim like mad, but don't get bent out of shape because you wobble when you run or flap instead of fly. Furthermore, if you're an eagle saint, stop expecting squirrel saints to soar, or rabbit saints to build the same kind of nests you do" (Seasons of Life, p. 313).