

The Lens of Giftedness Directs Contribution (Romans 12:3-8)

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:1-26

Introduction

I want to begin this morning by sharing a little story with you [show picture]:

Many years ago, the animals got together and decided to start a school for all their children. Up to that point it had been the responsibility of the parents to teach their own children the skills they needed to know. But now the animals thought it would be better for their children to learn from professional teachers so they organized and hired a staff.

The teachers met and decided a standardized curriculum would be the best approach and that all of the animal children should be taught classes in swimming, running, flying, and climbing and that standardized testing would be used to measure progress with remedial lessons given to those who failed to meet the minimum requirements in any area.

The ducks proved to be excellent swimmers and were, in fact, even better than their teacher. They also achieved good scores in flying but they did very poorly in running and were terrible at climbing. Since they were deficient in running and climbing, swimming class was cancelled so they could practice those skills during that time. Before long the ducks were so tired from trying to climb and their feet were so ragged from all the running that they were only average in swimming. But average performance was acceptable so no one worried about it.

The squirrels proved to be excellent at climbing and running but they wanted to fly after first climbing to the top of the tree and then pushing off while spreading all four legs wide apart and gliding to the ground. But when their teacher insisted they start flying from the ground they were unable to master the course material. So every day they were sent to the flying therapist who worked with them on exercises meant to strengthen their front legs and make them suitable for flying. All the concentrated exercise resulted in the squirrels having such sore legs they could only get a C in climbing.

And so it went with all the animals of the forest as the teachers tried to make them all competent in all areas until none were able to excel in their area of giftedness

Unfortunately, many churches operate just like Animal School as people are plugged into ministry positions without regard to whether those positions are a fit for them [show picture]

Last week we saw how God's Word shows us in Ephesians 4 that each and every believer is responsible for doing the ministry of the church and no believer can sit back and say "ministry is not my job"

We saw that the result of every believer being involved with ministry would be a church that is built up, unified, spiritually mature, and stable in its judgments

In other words, the church that has all its members working together for kingdom purposes would reveal Jesus to a watching world just as the Body of Christ should

This morning we are going to look at how the lens of the giftedness of each believer should direct them and the church to finding the area or areas of ministry where they can make the most valuable contribution

Our main passage this morning is **Romans 12:3-8** and as we consider what it has to say to us we will be noticing some **foundational truths** and some **functional concerns**

Then we will take some time to consider how each believer can go about **finding their best fit** in the ministry of the church

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

I. Foundational Truths

Let's begin by looking at some truths that form the foundation for what is to follow

A. All believers are gifted

The first truth is that **all believers are gifted**

When I was in high school there were kids who excelled academically and they were said to be "gifted" and they were given access to more advanced classes that better served to challenge them

The "gifted" label also gets applied to anyone who stands out in some form of endeavor or another

We say, "He's a gifted athlete" or "She's a gifted musician" or "...a gifted writer" and so forth

And we begin to think that being gifted is something that only individuals who are truly outstanding can claim

But, if you are a born-again follower of Jesus Christ; you are gifted

We saw this truth last week when we looked at **Ephesians 4:7** – God has given every believer at least one gift

We see this same truth in **verse 6** of our passage today when Paul indicates rather matter-of-factly that all the members of the body have gifts

And **God wants us to understand our gifts** as we see in **1Corinthians 12:1** which was part of our Scripture reading this morning – *Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed*

Paul's statement actually carries with it the force of a command that lets us know that we cannot be content to remain ignorant of our gift –

We need to be informed about our gift because the gifts are essential to the functioning of the church and our part in it

And we see that we are expected not just to know about our gifts but to use them

Again we see this in **verse 6** of our passage - *Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them*

And Paul warned Timothy of the propensity of many believers in **1Timothy 4:14** – *Do not neglect the gift you have...*

Neglect of the gifts of God is not only possible but it happens every day

Some believers fail to use their gift for its intended purpose **out of ignorance** while others do so **out of disobedience** but the end result is the same in that it brings harm to the church because **each believer is a gift to the church**

B. Each believer is a gift to the church

The gifts God gives to believers are for the benefit of the church because the gift each believer has been given is to enable them to carry out their unique function in the church

As Paul writes in **1Corinthians 12:7**, *"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good"*

Metaphor of a body

The New Testament regularly describes the church as a body as we saw Paul do in 1Corinthians 12

We know how God uniquely and wondrously designed each member of our physical bodies to fulfill a specific function and how each member of our bodies is designed to work in harmony with the other members for the good of the body

And we know all too well what happens when one of our members fails to function as it should – our whole body suffers!

I'm sure we've all experienced something like an injured foot that caused us to need to use crutches which led to sore arms and shoulders or maybe it just forced us to walk with a different gait causing us to suffer back or hip pain

Every part of our body is essential to the health and well-being of the body and when one member fails to do its part the whole body suffers

The same is true of the Body of Christ because every member is gifted to carry out their task within the body in a way that no one else can

We should also consider two additional truths that are vital to our understanding of how the church is a body

First, the various members of our physical bodies carry out their functions for the good of the body; not just for themselves

An eye takes in light and sends information to the brain to inform the rest of the body as to what is going on in the world around the body

A liver serves to filter impurities out of the bloodstream for the benefit of the body not merely for the sake of being a filter

Second, all the various parts of our physical bodies are meant to be united together into a body

We would think it quite strange and probably a more than a little disgusting if we were to see an eye or an ear or a liver out on its own doing its own thing

The same thing should be true of every believer

Every believer is a member of the Body of Christ and they should be attached to a local body of believers where they can use their God-given gifts appropriately as a functioning member of the body

We know that these things are true and they are what Paul turns to as he describes the interconnectedness and dependence of the various members of the human body as a metaphor for the church

Look again with me at **Romans 12:5** which says – *“so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another”*

The gifts that God has given to each believer are meant to be used in connection with other believers and their gifts for the benefit of the body as a whole so that the body properly functions as the Body of Christ according to God’s purposes

II. Functional Concerns

Still, while it's clear that we all have a gift or gifts that God has graciously given us according to his purposes we still sometimes struggle with properly putting the gifts to work

So let's turn our attention to a couple of **functional concerns** regarding our gifts

A. Having a proper appreciation of our gifts

And the first concern we need to address is **having a proper appreciation of our gifts**

First, we need to recognize it's possible to ignore the gift God has given you

Far too many believers have no idea what their spiritual gift or gifts might be

Christmas is fast approaching and in many homes gifts of various sizes and shapes will begin to accumulate under the tree or they will appear overnight on Christmas Eve to be discovered on Christmas morning **[show picture]**

The gifts will likely be wrapped in brightly colored paper, ribbons, and bows that serve to hide the gift inside

Imagine someone waking up on Christmas morning and upon seeing the gifts with their name on them just waiting to be opened and enjoyed instead of happily opening them turning away from them and going about their normal, morning routine leaving the gifts hidden beneath their wrapping and unused **[show picture]**

It seems inconceivable doesn't it?

And yet, that's how many if not most believers are when it comes to their spiritual gift

Perhaps that's because we don't teach on the subject often enough or perhaps they simply aren't interested in discovering and using the unique gift God has given them

But whatever the cause, the unavoidable truth is that many believers have heard there are spiritual gifts and may even accept that God gave them one but they are content to go through life never knowing what is under the wrapping paper

And so those gifts are never properly received and used to the detriment of the individual believer and the church as a whole

Then, it's possible to misunderstand the gift God has given you

Spiritual gifts are a marvelous combination of the supernatural and the natural

They are supernatural in that they are given by God exclusively to believers and because their use results in spiritual fruit

But the gifts also have a human element in that they require the recipients of the gifts to make use of them

The exercise of all spiritual gifts requires human effort – even as the human effort is spiritually empowered

One who has the gift of teaching still must study, prepare, and actually teach the lesson

A person still needs to obtain ingredients, cook the meal, and deliver it to its recipient – even if they have the gift of hospitality

Then we need to understand that the same spiritual gift can look different for different believers

Spiritual gifts are not a one-size-fits-all proposition

The same gift of teaching may be given to a skilled orator or a stuttering introvert

A teacher may stand before thousands or quietly teach a co-worker during their lunch break

They might teach adults, teens, or preschoolers; men, women, boys, girls or a mixture of any or all

But the same gift of teaching is being exercised in each case

And the same is true with all of the spiritual gifts as the same gift can manifest itself in very individual ways

This keeps us from being able to strictly stereotype the gifts and allows for freedom in expression of the gifts as God directs their use in various people and circumstances

We also need to understand that spiritual gifts often need to be developed and refined

The receipt of a spiritual gift doesn't excuse a believer from preparing and practicing in the use of that gift

Just as natural talents and abilities must often be developed and refined over time so too will a spiritual gift benefit from exercise and often will improve with time and use

Lastly, concerning proper appreciation of our gifts, in [Romans 12:3](#) we see it's possible to have a wrong opinion of your gift

Paul addresses the specific error of thinking too highly of your gift but the opposite is also a danger to be avoided

He says we are to think of our gifting with "sober judgment" which means to have a proper opinion that is not too high or too low

In effect, Paul says to have a wrong opinion of your gift is to be mentally unsound

We are in error when we overrate ourselves and try to do things we aren't gifted for but also when we sit back and say we are not able to do anything so we will do nothing

Because Paul closes out [verse 3](#) by saying that we all have the God-given ability to rightly understand how God has gifted us and what our place and our function is within the body – that's what "measure of faith" means

God has gifted each and every believer just as he desires and while God gives to each in varying degrees, each believer has just what they need to fulfill God's purpose for them in the Body of Christ

B. Being guided by need and not giftedness

That leads us directly into our second functional difficulty which is **being guided by need and not giftedness**

Most churches have pretty standard ministries and ministry slots that need to be filled to carry on those ministries

And people are often tapped to be enlisted into one of those slots with minimal, if any, consideration of their gifts

In many churches the only requirement for filling a ministry position seems to be the inability to say "no" quickly enough

Now I do want to quickly point out that short-term needs do arise in the church on occasion

People may be asked to stretch or even to step outside their giftedness at times to help out in an emergency and doing so can be okay

But the need of the institution should never outweigh the giftedness of the believer when regularly filling ministry positions

I am a firm believer that God provides for what he purposes

So, if God wants Brick Church to have a particular ministry he will provide the right people, people he has gifted, to take on the work of that ministry

Conversely, that means when the people aren't here then we aren't meant to be doing that ministry at that time and we shouldn't try to shoe-horn people into it just to make it happen

Trying to function outside one's God-given capabilities does nothing but lead to stress, discouragement, frustration, feelings of guilt, mediocrity, and ultimately, failure

A believer who is trying to serve outside their giftedness is kind of like a "post turtle"

You don't know what a post turtle is? **[show picture]**

Well, imagine you're driving down a country road and you see a fence post with a turtle balanced on top, that's a post turtle. You know he didn't get up there by himself. He doesn't belong there; you wonder who put him there; he can't get anything done while he's up there; and you just want to help the poor, dumb thing down.

Every believer should be involved in service to some ministry in the church but believers should serve where and how they are gifted not where they have been drafted – the church doesn't need any "post turtles"

III. Finding a Fit

And that leads us to our final main point which is: **finding a fit**

I'm hoping that none of you are still questioning *whether* you should be serving as a functioning member of the body but perhaps some of you are wondering *where* you should be serving

And that is the precise question a message like this should provoke

You should most certainly ask that question if you aren't serving anywhere, in any capacity, on a regular, ongoing basis

But you should also ask that question even if you are faithfully serving already

Because it's not at all unusual for God to call his servants to a different area of service –

Faithful believers often undergo kind of a “career change” within the church after serving in a particular ministry for a time

Simply changing up how one uses their gifts by shifting to a new ministry focus can bring about an increased level of excitement, freshness, and revitalization that leads to increased effectiveness and satisfaction

All while still being faithful to how God designed you and using the gifts God has given you only in a new way

We never want to wind up like this poor volunteer **[picture]**

So, how can you go about finding your fit in ministry?

First, you need to know how God has gifted you

You likely know where your talents and interests lie and those will be helpful as you begin to refine just *how* to put your gift to use

But if you don't yet know what spiritual gift or gifts God has given you – come and see me and we will take steps to find out

It really isn't all that difficult and won't take a really long time although we will take some time in talking about gifts and God's expectations of believers and their giftedness along with the assessment

Then once you know what your spiritual gift is there are **five questions** you should answer when determining whether a particular ministry is a fit for you personally

1. What will my service accomplish for the kingdom of God?

If you cannot answer what kingdom-advancing impact your service is aimed at the ministry isn't likely a fit

If you don't have a planned destination how will you ever know if you've arrived or even whether you're headed in the right direction?

The church isn't in the business of busy-ness and our efforts must be directed toward fulfilling our mission

So, it's vital that you evaluate what kind of impact your service will make, and whether it is the kind of impact that God wants you to make

2. Has God uniquely gifted me to do this work?

You should determine whether your spiritual gifts contribute well to this particular ministry

If a person has the gift of hospitality then asking them to paint the nursery would probably not be the best stewardship of their gift

However, being a part of the Greeter Ministry would utilize their gift and have the potential of a good return for the kingdom though their investment of time and effort

As I said earlier, the ways a spiritual gift can be used is infinite and limited only by our creativity but there are plainly some ministries that are better suited to some gifts than others and you will want to be sure your gifting fits the work

These next three questions are a bit different as they begin to delve into considerations that are more personal than spiritual

3. Will my agreeing to serve keep someone else from serving?

Churches tend to operate on what is known as the 80/20 rule where 80% of the work is done by 20% of the members and in some churches that ratio is more like 90/10 where very few do virtually everything

And part of that is simply because it's easier to get an already busy person to do more than it is to get someone serving from off the bench so ministry leaders tend to go to those who are already serving as new ministry needs arise

Availability to God and openness to his guidance are important but it's also wise to discern whether God may be trying to get someone else involved

You will always do well to remember that just because a great idea presents itself, even if it has great kingdom-building potential and sits right in the sweet spot of your giftedness, you may not be the person God wants doing it

But, let's say you are a person who's already busy and you still believe God would have you take on some new thing the next question you should ask is:

4. Is there some other area of service I should surrender to do this?

You are only human and even when spiritually empowered you will find that the human capacity for ministry is limited

No one is expected to die for the church – Jesus already did that so you don't need to kill yourself trying to do it all

It's not only perfectly acceptable but even appropriate to surrender one thing to take on something else

This goes back to the idea of career change in the church

And, who knows, by giving up a ministry spot you may well be vacating the spot where God wants someone else to get plugged in

The last question you should ask when determining whether a ministry is a fit for you is:

5. Can I devote the time and energy to do a quality job?

God's work deserves our best

So having made sure of our gifting which gives us the ability to do a quality job we always need to make certain that we can also commit the time and energy required

We need to realistically assess how much time and energy the ministry will need and how much we have available

As we assess the resource of time we do well to look at it under the umbrella of stewardship

Unlike material possessions, God gives every person the exact same amount of time each week

And like material possessions we can spend our time, waste our time, or invest our time – the only thing we can't do is save our time for later which I think is a real shame

For the sake of assessment let's look at our allotment of time on a weekly basis and see that God gives us all 168 hours per week

Let's allow for 8 hours of sleep each day which leaves us 112 hours

Then if we subtract 50 hours for work and commuting back and forth we are left with 62 hours

Now, if we take a tithe of those "discretionary" hours and commit to use them for ministry we come up with a round figure of 6 hours which leaves us 56 hours a week or 8 hours a day to do everything else we want and need to do

Remember, that's after allowing for sleep and full-time work

Do I have time for ministry? I think for most of us the answer will be "yes" because we have more time available for ministry than we may have realized but we still need to ask the question and answer it honestly

Just think, though, what the church would be able to do if everyone committed to ministering for 6 hours per week!

Conclusion

Unwrapped/Unused Gifts

So, what about you?

Do you know what gift God has given you or does your gift remain wrapped and unused?

Spiritual gifts aren't mysterious and God wants you to know what he has graciously made available for you

And you have to know your gift in order to be a good and faithful steward

If you don't know or if you aren't sure you know, let's set up a time to discover it together

Misused Gifts

Perhaps you know what your gift is but you're presently laboring in a ministry that doesn't fit

And like a post turtle you're looking for a way out so you can get involved with a ministry where you can flourish

Or maybe you're looking to have a career change here at church and feel God is directing you to switch your ministry to a new opportunity

Let's find a time to get together and sort it out

Unused Gifts

Or maybe you know what your gift is but you aren't currently using it

Perhaps that's because you wish your gift was different or "better" and you aspire to what you see as a more important role in the church

You need to remember that God gives the gifts and being true to God's purpose is the highest thing any person can achieve – regardless of what that purpose is

I read about two brothers who lived in the same city; one was a famous concert violinist and the other was a bricklayer. One day a woman was talking with the bricklayer about how wonderful it must be to be the brother of the noted musician. Then, not wanting to insult the bricklayer, she quickly added, "Of course we don't all have the same talents and even in the same family some just seem to have more ability than others."

"You're telling me," answered the bricklayer "that violinist brother of mine doesn't know a thing about laying bricks. And if he couldn't make money playing that fiddle of his, he couldn't hire a guy like me to build a house for him. If he had to build a house he'd be homeless."

God has gifted us in different ways and our responsibility is to exercise the spiritual gifts he has given us

But perhaps you don't know how your gift fits here at Brick

Since I don't believe God makes anything for which he doesn't have a purpose, and since he gave you your gift and brought you to Brick Church, let's get together and find you a place to serve

Remember that the variety of gifts is only outdone by the countless ways each gift can be used and I'm certain that we can find where you fit

And, if we truly don't have a current ministry that fits you and your gifts we need to start one

My challenge to each of you this week is to begin looking through the lens of giftedness and get connected to a ministry

Let's pray