

# Use Your Gifts

Romans 12:6-8

Kids message: game show - blindfold, ear muffs, mouth covered - we are going to play a game this morning that will require three of our elders to cooperate, each using their special ability to help the other accomplish their task.

Mute person acts out instructions to deaf person who explains what to do to the blind person.

[Please make each task a separate slide]:

- Task 1: Make a red heart out of play-doh
- [Blank slide]
  
- Task 2: Inflate a beach ball and toss it to the mute
- [blank slide]
  
- Task 3: Eat a cracker and then whistle "Jesus Loves Me"
- [blank slide]

Now, just as these guys had to work together to accomplish their tasks, so in the church we need to work together to accomplish the tasks God has given to us. We are a body and we need every believer in the church to do the part God has given to him or her so the whole body can do the jobs God has given to us.

Here is our verse of the month as we continue in our Serve the Church series:

"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order **that in everything God may be glorified** through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." 1 Peter 4:10-11

As we study spiritual gifts today I want to first provide two foundational principles. First,

### **It's All About God (not you)**

"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, **as good stewards of God's varied grace**: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order **that in everything God may be glorified** through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." 1 Peter 4:10-11

The gifts we have are **from God**. We are stewards of His grace. The word "gift" in the Bible is the Greek word charismata, a variation on the word charis - grace. The gifts you have were given to you by God to manage on His behalf. The gifts are not about you nor are they for you. God did not give us special abilities to build up our self esteem or make us think more highly of ourselves.

Rather, He gave us gifts because He is gracious and generous and loves to bless His children and through us to bless others. We are channels of grace, using what God has given us to bring glory and honor to Him. "That in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ." The purpose of the gifts is to showcase the power and goodness of Jesus. Your gifts are to help people be impressed with God, not with you.

Second,

### **It's All About The Church (not you)**

"Above all, **keep loving one another earnestly**, since love covers a multitude of sins. **Show hospitality to one another** without grumbling. As each has received a gift, **use it to serve one another**, as good stewards of God's varied grace..." 1 Peter 4:8-10

The purpose of a spiritual gift is to build up the body of Christ.

- If God has given you special mercy and **compassion for people** it is not so that you can feel good about what a loving and wonderful person you are, but so that you can care for the people here at Oakwood and out in the community - so that you can help the whole church become more loving and compassionate.
- If God has given you a special love for His Word and **ability to teach** the Bible it isn't so you can feel impressed with your knowledge but so

that you can equip the saints here to understand and apply God's Word to their lives as they see you doing so in your life.

- If God has given you **material resources** and the ability to make money in business, it is not so you can rest in your security in wealth and live a long, comfortable and materialistic life but so that you can give generously to the things that God cares about.

John Piper summed it up nicely:

"God did not give us spiritual gifts to make us unique but to uniquely equip us to serve others." John Piper

Our culture will say, "It's all about you!" You are special! You are unique! Embrace yourself and be all that you can be! The Bible, over and over makes it clear - it's not about you. We love to make it all about ourselves. But it's not. It's all about God and His glory and it's all about the church, the body of Christ.

So with those foundational principles in place, let's study Romans 12:6 so that we can better obey it:

"Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, **let us use them.**" Romans 12:6

The point of the message today is a very simple one: You have a spiritual gift (or two or three) so use it! Not to draw attention to yourself or advance your own agenda but to bring glory to God and growth to the church.

We have different gifts - all of them charismata - gifts of God's grace - so LET'S USE THEM. Write that down in your worship program today. Put it in your own writing: "Let us use them." Make a note in the YouVersion app. "Let us use them." You have a gift. So use it.

It sounds very simple because it is simple conceptually. But imagine if we all obeyed this verse? Imagine what that would do for our church? For our community? For the world? You have a gift. So use it.

Think about verse six - "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us." Here is a simple definition of a spiritual gift:

## **You have a Spiritual Gift**

- A ***Supernatural Ability*** from the Holy Spirit  
“***Having gifts*** that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.” Romans 12:6

Every Christian believer is a SUPER. You have a supernatural ability from the Holy Spirit. God’s grace to you at the moment you trusted in Christ not only washed away your sins and covered you in the righteousness of Christ, but His grace filled you with the Holy Spirit! And the Holy Spirit never comes into a heart empty handed - He always brings a gift or two. So if you belong to Jesus then you have a spiritual gift - you have a supernatural ability.

This is different from your natural abilities, though it could be related to those as well or connect with them in some way. For example, you may be naturally gifted as an athlete and because of your able body you love to work hard and serve others. Or you may be naturally gifted with numbers able to process math or work with computers in ways that mystify people like me who work with words. The Lord may use those natural abilities to complement your service to the church.

But spiritual gifts are not the same as natural abilities. These are SUPERNATURAL. They are divine enablements - literally super powers God has woven into your soul, mind, heart and body so you can bring maximum glory to Him and provide maximum blessing to the church. Again, your abilities are not for you - and they’re not about you. They’re about God and the church.

So now let’s walk through fifteen spiritual gifts that I’ve grouped into five categories. Romans 12 lists seven of these, so I’ve drawn eight others from the other key New Testament passages that teach about spiritual gifts. And even these 15 are not an exhaustive list. For example, leading worship is not on this list - but I do believe we have just hired a young man who is supernaturally gifted to lead worship, wonderfully complemented by his great natural ability to understand and play music.

You’ll also notice that the gift of tongues is not on this list, though it is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12. I am not taking a position on that particular gift - I actually believe it’s entirely possible for God to provide a temporary or permanent ability to speak another language in order to reach people with

the gospel and build up the church - but I think the modern church's practice of "tongues" in the church has confused that issue and I don't want to get into it in this message. I guess I am sort of taking a position there, but we'll leave that for now.

The point is, this list of fifteen is not exhaustive. On the church blog you'll find a link to a site that lists twenty gifts, including celibacy and martyrdom. If you're interested in one or both of those, check out the blog. Now let's walk through fifteen gifts in five categories to help us better obey Romans 12:6 - "Let us use them!"

First - pastoral gifts - mercy, exhortation and shepherding.

### **Pastoral Gifts**

- **Mercy** - show genuine sympathy for people in need and find ways to comfort and assist them

*"The one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness." Romans 12:8*

All believers are commanded to be merciful, for God is merciful. But some of you have a spiritual gift in this area. You have a supernatural ability to empathize with hurting people. You find yourself drawn to those in need both within the church and outside of it. You simply FEEL for them - your heart goes out to them. You love people.

And that love - that mercy - moves you to be with people, to comfort them and care for them. And it often moves you to help in some practical ways. When someone sets up a meal train after a baby is born or after a family suffers a loss, it could be a gift of mercy seeking to meet a practical need. (Or it could be a gift of service or administration - more on those in a minute).

If your gift is mercy - use it joyfully, with cheerfulness. That qualification in verse 8 is important. When you have special compassion for people the danger is being drawn into their pain and becoming negative, jaded and discouraged yourself. So keep your joy in the Lord and minister God's mercy to people in pain with cheerfulness! Be an agent of healing for broken people.

### **Pastoral Gifts**

- **Exhortation** - come alongside someone to help them move forward  
"The one who exhorts, in his exhortation." Romans 12:8

The word for exhortation is paraklesis - to come alongside. It is the name given to the Holy Spirit Himself, who comes alongside us to help us. I put this in the pastoral category with mercy, for the Spirit first comes alongside us in mercy to care for us, but then He always exhorts us and pushes us forward. Always.

Conviction is what the Spirit gives. Exhortation is what we can do for one another. Again, we are all called to encourage and challenge one another to keep growing and keep moving forward toward maturity in Christ. But some of you are spiritually gifted in this area. This gift is related to wisdom and discernment and is probably the primary gift for many Christian counselors - whether lay people or professional.

They are good listeners but they are also good at speaking a word of truth that gets to the heart of the matter. They can see past what you are saying, cut through your blame-shifting and denial and insightfully help you identify the root of your sins and struggles so you can make progress. Exhorters help us get unstuck when we are stuck. They push us to keep going. Praise God for the wise exhorters in the church family!

One more pastoral gift is shepherding itself:

### **Pastoral Gifts**

- **Shepherding** - lovingly care for people and groups to ensure their protection, nourishment and growth in the Lord  
"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." Eph. 4:11-12

Shepherds feed their sheep, protect their sheep and care for their needs. Sheep are not known for their intelligence. A sheep will actually walk back and forth in the same line, eating only the grass it can reach, until it dies. That's where the phrase, "stuck in a rut" comes from. Without a shepherd to lead them on to green pastures, sheep will die from sheer stupidity.

Brothers and sisters, the Bible - over and over - calls us sheep. Praise the Lord for the shepherds among us! Those who lovingly care for us, who watch out for us, who warn us of danger and who guide us to the green pastures and still waters of God's Word.

We are very blessed at Oakwood to have elders who are spiritually gifted for pastoral ministry.

- Mark, who has natural talents in music and with computers, is - I believe - gifted with mercy. He is our feeler. He has a deep and sincere empathy for people and when we process ideas and plans he often pauses and you can see his sympathetic wheels turning as he considers how different things could affect different people.
- John is also wonderfully compassionate for people, as a missionary who leads Cru at USF. But I think John has the spiritual gift of exhortation. Often he will sit back in a meeting and toward the end he will say something that accurately captures the sense we all have of God's will. He is not afraid to challenge the way the rest of us have been talking but will come alongside us and help point us toward the right way forward.
- Edson is a spiritually gifted shepherd, as many of you have experienced if you've been in his small group over the past 20 years. He is always concerned for the protection, feeding and care of the people of Oakwood - and works hard every week to ensure that we provide both the encouragement and exhortation that our people need.
- Rob is our fourth elder and I believe he has the gift of teaching, related to his love of Scripture, study and theology. More on that later.

Do you see the point? God has given Oakwood the wonderful gift of godly and gifted elders who shepherd the flock here with their mercy, exhortation and pastoral care. And that's just one kind of gift.

A second kind of gift is Practical. Some of you are very practically wired to serve, to give and to show hospitality. First - service.

### **Practical Gifts:**

- **Service** - see what needs to be done and do it, regardless how menial the task

*"Having gifts that differ... let us use them... If service, in our serving." Rom. 12:7*

Those gifted to serve see a need and can't help themselves - they have to go get a hammer or wrench or screwdriver and do something about it. One of our retired saints came in this week because he saw cabinets in TreeHouse that were out of whack - and he couldn't rest until they were fixed.

It doesn't matter the need - the spiritual gift of service sees what needs to be done and does it. Usually servants deliberately choose the opportunities that are not in the limelight - they don't want the flashy up front roles. They want to get outside and sweat. They want to move chairs and set up tables. They want to prepare things so others can lead the meeting well.

The next practical gift is giving.

### **Practical Gifts:**

- **Giving** - use material resources to bless people and advance God's purposes

*"The one who contributes, in generosity." Romans 12:8*

All believers are called to serve and to give, but God has supernaturally enabled some to serve and meet needs and others to give generously and sacrificially. Sometimes giving is connected to natural ability in business or a good sense of the economy and investing. But sometimes, with how the kingdom is upside down, the most generous givers are relatively poor. This gift can be connected with the gift of faith, which I put down under leadership gifts, but the gift of faith can supplement many other gifts by undergirding them with confidence in God's power, promises and provision.

Those gifted with generosity use whatever they have to bless others and to support God's kingdom purposes. It could be money or it could be, like someone here at Oakwood, FOOD. Givers use whatever God has given them to support God's work.

One more practical gift is hospitality.

### **Practical Gifts:**



- **Hospitality** - welcome and host people, attending to their physical and social needs

*"Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." 1 Pet. 4:9-10*

This is one of the great strengths of Oakwood. We have many people I believe are spiritually gifted to show hospitality. It's a big reason why this is such a welcoming church - there are many here who are supernaturally enabled to welcome and host people.

Those gifted in hospitality think of the physical and social needs of others and attend to them in lavish ways. Most of our small groups have one or more people gifted with hospitality. If you've been to the Wards or the Bustamantes or the Gordons or the Meyers or the Conners, you've experienced the gift of hospitality in action. Joanne Gordon leads our Hospitality Team and appropriately so, since she is gifted to welcome and host people.

Mike Wyatt is our head usher and one of our deacons. When we did our test run of two services Mike was the one who brought me various designs for chair setups, along with articles about how many chairs should be set up given certain attendance expectations. He is gifted to think about the best ways we can welcome and host all who come for worship each Sunday.

Several others helped with the chair set up and take down during our two services test run. Patrick and Sam worked with Mike to be sure the chairs were properly arranged, along specific lines. You can see the convergence of gifts of service and hospitality and how it blesses our church and all who come to visit.

As we got to know Sam Tison and his natural ability and experience in fixing mechanical things, along with his spiritual gift of service, the deacons just hired him to take care of the facility needs here at our campus. Sam is the last person who would want any fanfare and we'll probably have to con his wife into giving us a picture of him for the website - he just wants to take care of the physical needs of the church property and make everything run smoothly around here.

Praise the Lord for those with practical gifts!

A third category is speaking gifts including prophecy, teaching and preaching.

### **Speaking Gifts:**

- **Prophecy** - 1 on 1 conversation
- **Teaching** - small group interaction
- **Preaching** - large group instruction

*"Having gifts that differ... let us use them... If prophecy, in proportion to our faith." Rom. 12:6*

These aren't meant to be precise distinctions, but often it works to think of these three gifts being used with groups of increasing size. Prophecy can be 1 on 1, in conversation. Teaching can be with a small or mid-size group, with some dialogue and interaction. Preaching tends to be with a larger group and is mostly one way communication.

These are more obvious gifts so I'll cover them more briefly.

### **Speaking Gifts:**

- **Prophecy** - when prompted by the Lord, speak the right word at the right time in the right way

*"Having gifts that differ... let us use them... If prophecy, in proportion to our faith." Rom. 12:6*

I've had some more drive time since we moved up to Land O Lakes, so I've been listening to Pastor Colin Smith on his Unlocking the Bible App. This was his definition of prophecy, as he was expounding the prophet Joel, as fulfilled in Acts 2. Colin pointed out that in the Old Testament there were only a few prophets, supernaturally empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak God's Word. Then in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit was poured out on ALL BELIEVERS by Jesus Christ after He ascended into heaven.

All believers are prophets in the general sense of being anointed by the Spirit of God to proclaim the Word of God. But some of you have the supernatural ability to speak the right word, at the right time, in the right way. This could be closely related to the gift of exhortation - and could be

directed both toward other believers or toward non-believers, especially if combined with the gift of evangelism or missions.

A second speaking gift is teaching.

### **Speaking Gifts:**

- **Teaching** - study and present God's Word in ways that help believers grow in faith and obedience

*"Having gifts that differ... let us use them... The one who teaches, in his teaching." Rom. 12:7*

This is another strength of Oakwood, as a church that values God's Word and the study of Scripture, discussion and application of it. For this reason I believe a big part of our future engagement in missions will involve deploying our most gifted teachers to other parts of the world to help spread our passion for the God of the Bible and equip preachers and teachers to rightly handle God's Word.

As I said, Rob is one of our elders and is the most theologically minded. He reads Tim Keller and John Piper, probably in an effort to keep up with his wife, Kelsey and her love of God's Word and her gift of teaching. The best sign of a gift of teaching is a gift of learning, a love of study. You can't teach if you don't learn things.

One more speaking gift, closely related to teaching, is preaching.

### **Speaking Gifts:**

- **Preaching** - proclaim and expound God's Word with clarity and power

*"Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching." 2 Tim. 4:2*

The preacher's job is to make Scripture clear. As Howard Hendricks said, "It is a sin to bore people with God's Word." God's Word is life. It is like honey. It is sweet to the soul. We feed on Scripture for by it we hear from God - we learn about Him, we revel in the Gospel and fix our minds on the glory of the Lord.

All believers are called to speak God's Word - encouraging one another and sharing the Gospel with the people around us. But some are supernaturally gifted in these areas of speech.

That is not to say that any gift or type of gift is better or more important than any other. Don't ever think that the primary preacher is the most important person at the church. If we could see spiritual power we would almost certainly be surprised at who has more of it. Some who appear weak are actually bursting with spiritual power because they are people of prayer, empowered by the Spirit with the gift of faith.

Our fourth category of gift is leadership - including direction, administration and faith.

### **Leadership Gifts:**

- **Direction** - provide vision and guidance for a group that helps them move toward growth and fruitful ministry

*"The one who leads, with zeal." Rom. 12:8*

Some leaders provide direction, high level vision and oversight to help move a group or ministry forward. Other leaders are more detail oriented and turn vision into reality by planning and organizing the implementation of the crazy, ridiculous ideas from the visionary directors.

I think my primary gift is leadership. I see things - not like flying hippos and unicorns. I envision the future. I dream about what could be. I imagine the city of Tampa with 300 more churches and 300 more Christian ministries than it has right now - a city that has been turned upside down by the Gospel as believers experience revival and the Spirit is poured out in power throughout the Bay area.

By personality I am an optimist and God wired my brain to be a visual learner. So my natural abilities assist leadership gifting. But I do not have gifts of wisdom and discernment or of administration - both of which are supernatural gifts for my wife. She has exceptional discernment about which of my crazy ideas might actually have potential, and she has the wisdom to know when to just say, "Huh. Let's think about that one for a while."

She is also gifted with administration. I live in the dreamland of hazy ideas. She lives in the concrete world of "things that can actually happen."

### **Leadership Gifts:**

- **Administration** - plan, organize and supervise the implementation of programs and projects to turn vision into reality

*"And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, **administering**, and various kinds of tongues."* 1 Cor. 12:28

Those gifted with administration help visionaries get things done, along with servants. The pastoral types come along, making sure that people are cared for along the way. Isn't it wonderful how God has poured out His grace on the church, according to His perfect wisdom and all-encompassing love?

If you come by the office during the week, or just call in or email, you'll see the gift of administration at work in Martha. She keeps the office running smoothly and helps us plan, communicate and implement all of our different programs and events, right down to the programming of our 24 thermostats to ensure maximum efficiency in our electric bill. That is the gift of administration. That is someone who supervises the details!

Dave combines both direction and administration - coming alongside our ministry leaders and helping them move the church forward toward growth and fruitfulness for the Lord, turning our church vision into reality.

### **Leadership Gifts:**

- **Faith** - trust deeply in God's power and promises to accomplish His purposes and share that confidence with others

*"For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, **to another faith by the same Spirit.**"* 1 Cor. 12:9

As I said before, faith could be a stand alone gift, applied through a prayer warrior who does battle in the spiritual realm every day. And it can also strengthen and supplement any of the other gifts.

Of course, all believers exercise faith and are called to grow in faith. Last week we saw the importance of measuring our progress in FAITH as opposed

to measuring and taking pride in our abilities. But some people are supernaturally gifted with faith.

They trust God even in the darkest of times. When others around them are shaking with fear and letting worry overcome, those gifted with faith are the ones who stand firm. Who say, "It's going to be ok. God is in control."

As we were in our search process for a worship pastor earlier this year, having discussions among the elders and deacons about the budget and what we could afford, I vividly remember one meeting. I was advocating that we hire a full time pastor of worship and student ministry. All of the elders and deacons were humoring me, going along for the ride. I see a bright future for Oakwood with several more staff members helping to lead the congregation toward greater fruitfulness for the kingdom. What is less clear to me is the timing and the specific nature of each role.

The detail oriented administrators on the deacon board were running the numbers - we have one deacon in particular who is supernaturally gifted in data analysis, showing us 7 year trends and seasonally adjusted averages each month.

But when it came down to decision time; when we had run the search process far enough that we had to fish or cut bait; Another Deacon spoke a word of faith and wisdom. He summed up the historical view of the deacons and their preference to have 3 months of budget in savings and how we currently have 1 or 1.5 months in the bank. But then he said, "God will take care of it. If it's God's will for us to make this stretch, it will work out. He will take care of it."

I'm not sure that's a direct quote, but I remember being moved by the FAITH that was behind it. There was a deep and sincere confidence in the goodness, faithfulness and provision of God. He will take care of it, because He will take care of us. We are His people. We are His children. That is the gift of faith.

One final category is outreach gifts - like evangelism, missions and advocacy.

### **Outreach Gifts:**

- **Evangelism** - share the Good News of Jesus in clear and compelling ways (Eph. 4:11)
- **Missions** - cross cultural and/or geographic boundaries with the Gospel (Eph. 3:7-8; related to gift of apostleship, Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:28)
- **Advocacy** - fight for justice locally, nationally or globally for a neglected or abused people group (Amos 5:24)

All believers are commissioned to share the Gospel, support missions and ministry God's love and justice in a dark and broken world. But some people are especially gifted and vocationally called to give their lives to these tasks. We praise God for the evangelists at Oakwood who keep pushing us to find ways to lovingly engage our community with the Gospel. We praise God for our missionaries who have devoted themselves full time to crossing boundaries with the Gospel. And we praise God for those in the fight for life here in Tampa and reaching out to refugees and engaging in the political realm.

We pray the Lord will raise up more workers for His harvest field.

You have a gift! Use it to glorify God and build up His church. We need each other - we need you - for our church body to be as effective and fruitful as we can for the glory of God.

The rescue of the 12 soccer players and their coach from that cave in Thailand was an inspiring story. What a blessing that all of them made it out of there and are doing well!

To accomplish that rescue it took over 100 divers from six different countries, including 60 navy seals from Thailand. The Thai Army mobilized 1,000 troops from their army and nearly 10,000 people came to the area around the cave to support the rescue effort by bringing meals, providing transportation and other supplies. Think about the diversity of gifts and abilities that it took to get the 13 who were trapped back into the light of day.

Coach Ek was uniquely equipped to go 9 days without food and without panicking.

Governor Naronksak was familiar with that area and was the leader needed to coordinate the whole mission.

Samarn Kunan was a brave Navy Seal who gave his life to place oxygen tanks along the rescue route, inspiring all the others with the importance of the task, and the dangers of it.

Dr Pak Loharnshoon was an Army doctor who had also trained as a Seal, so he was especially helpful as one of the first to enter the cave, staying with the team to nurse them back to health for the rigorous swim out.

Engineers brought massive industrial pumps to reduce the flooding and prevent the water from rising more.

And an array of medical staff swung into motion as soon as the players were out, helping to get them healthy again.

What a picture of many gifts devoted to accomplishing an important task.

May we follow that example as it is not just bodies at risk, but the souls of billions at stake. As those who have been entrusted with the varied grace of God, let us use our gifts to serve the church and bring glory to our gracious and generous God!