

“Gifted” // Romans 12:3–8 // Romans #25

Two very special people: Carl & Nancy Scott

- Carl was on the **PSC** that called me
- He and Nancy were **part of that 300** that sacrificed so much to see us here today
- Carl has served as **one of our elders** and has been **my faithful friend** since the beginning
- I can say there is **nobody more excited about CPC** launch than Carl...and **they’re staying at BCC**, where Nancy serves on the greeting team.
- So I asked him, as a representative of an entire generation at TSC that trusted God, submitted to him, and prioritized the gospel above all, to offer our **prayer of dedication...**
- **PRAYER**
- At all campuses, **will you let them** know how much we appreciate them?

I’ve heard it said that “Unless your dreams are bigger than your memories, you have no future.” Carl and Nancy and their generation epitomize that.

- **And now, Summit, we want to follow in their footsteps.**
- What we’ve **seen God do here is significant**; our expectations about what he will do in the future are **even greater.**

For us, **this campus building, as with all our campus buildings**, is just a staging point to begin ministering to our community. *The vast majority of what we want to see happen here is not accomplished by the building of this building.*

Last week I told our BCC: “The church is at its best when the buildings we occupy are empty.”

- 39/40

- We gather here to hear the word each weekend, build each other up, and then we send each other out to take God’s healing power into our community.

Which actually **sets us up very well** for where we are going to be today:

Romans 12:3–8

(**5K yesterday**: Is this going to be divine judgment? On the weekend we open, an army of cats have organized to obstruct our services? But beloved, not even cats can hinder the work of God he’s started. Amen?)

If you’re new here we’ve been working our way chapter by chapter through one of the most important books in the Bible: the book of Romans.

- BTW, one of the **nice things about a campus launch** is that **everybody’s new at Capital Hills.**
- It’s everybody’s **first week.** For some of you it’s a **good chance to start over.**
- I heard about a **sweet older lady** who came in to our 4pm service--she was a little late and asked the usher to be seated on the front row. And he replied, “You don’t want to sit on the front row, our pastor is very boring, he will put you to sleep and that might be embarrassing to you.” And she said to him, “Young man, do you know who I am?” He said, “No ma’am, I do not.” She said, “I am the pastor’s mother.” The man dropped his head in embarrassment. And then he looked up at her and said, “Ma’am, do you know who I am?” She responded, “No I do not.” And he said, “Thank God” and walked off.

So, everybody’s starting fresh.

If you're new, today we're at chapter 12 of Romans, specifically vs. 3 and following.

It's Paul's **discussion of the spiritual gifts**.

The **first thing to note** is that this discussion comes right on the heels of Paul's great summary of the Christian life in **Romans 12:1–2**: **He said**, "in light of the mercies of God extended to us in the gospel, we should offer our lives as a living sacrifice to God in an act of worship."

After **what God has done for us** in the gospel, after what we have saved us from, how could we hold anything back from him? We should offer our lives without restriction to him, and we should do this as an act of worship, because in the gospel he has shown us that he is worthy of our complete trust and devotion.

- **Jesus paid it all... ! Were the whole realm!**

And so, **for the next 5 chapters**, Paul paints a picture for us of what that kind of life looks like.

And the first place he starts is with **spiritual gifts**.

- (That's not incidental, btw, a life truly impacted by the gospel depends on the spiritual gifts.)
- **It's a short passage: only 6 verses**, which means it is not going to answer every question you have about spiritual gifts
- (Incidentally, if you want to dive more deeply into this, you could go back to a series we did a few years ago called **Rushing Wind** where I really unpacked these things in greater details.)¹

Now, before we dive into these verses, let me just acknowledge: There's **some variance in the body of Christ** around spiritual gifts.

- Some of you **grew up in churches where spiritual gifts** were talked about and practiced literally all the time; for **others of you, they were barely mentioned**, or if they were, it was more in the theoretical rather than practical sense--already you are **getting nervous, thinking**: "Oh no-- is someone bringing out snakes?"
- **One of the things I love most about The Summit Church** is the diversity of the background of people who attend:
 - We have a lot of you from Baptist backgrounds; some Presbyterian; Catholics; some Pentecostal. I'd ask you all to raise your hands to identify yourselves but the Pentecostals are tired b/c their hands have been in the air since the service started.
 - ~~True story: the 1st time I preached in a Pentecostal church...~~
 - We have **charismatics; non-charismatics;** not-really-sure-what-those-words-means-atics; and just plain addicts. **That's TSC.**
 - **And I love that diversity.** (*I tell people that with all the Baptists, Reformed people, and Pentecostals in our church, we are predestined to speak in tongues at a potluck dinner.*)
 - But **it does make people wonder** how we approach the subject of spiritual gifts.

So, again, **only 6 verses**, but in them Paul gives us **some important principles** for how to approach this important part of the Christian life:

³ For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly,

The place that **Paul starts this discussion**, interestingly, is with our pride.

- **Now, why would he start there?** Because, he's going to explain, if we are filled with pride, we won't realize how desperate we are for the spiritual gifts.

¹ That series turned into a book, btw, called Jesus, Continued...

The **gospel teaches us to think rightly** about ourselves. That word “**sensibly**” in Greek literally means accurately. Sanely. In your right mind.² **What has the gospel taught you about you?**

- **First, the gospel teaches you that you were so needy and so helpless** that God had to save you entirely through an act of grace, and by his power.
 - *(If you had what it takes, Jesus would not have had to come to die. He would have dropped an instruction manual or some coaching tips.*
 - *But instead he had to live the life you should have lived... and then **resurrect from the dead** offering you his power of new life*
 - *And that should **permanently** destroy any sense of **self-sufficiency or pride** that you've got what it takes to make life work. And that should shape how you approach the rest of your life, because just as you were dependent on God's grace to save you, you are now dependent on God's grace to sustain you.*
 - *So **don't think too highly** of yourself.)*
- **On the flip side, the gospel teaches you not to think too lowly** of yourself, either.
 - **God has saved you, and put his Spirit in you**, and given you specific gifts with a unique **role** in his Kingdom.

Let's keep going. Vs 3: ³*For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a **measure of faith** to each one.*

- (Most people assume “**measure of faith**” here means that God has given different amounts of faith to use, and Paul is telling us to base our opinion of ourselves on how much faith we have.

² <https://biblehub.com/greek/4993.htm>

- The word ‘measure’ is the Greek word **metron** (from which we get ‘meter’), and it means a **standard of measurement**.
- Paul is saying that God has given all of us the same standard of faith: faith in the finished work of Christ, and that faith makes us profoundly equal in God's eyes.
- Each of us with that faith possess the same righteousness of Christ; we are part of the same body, and we have received the same Spirit.³)
- We are **as righteous as the most righteous saint** who ever lived, and just as valuable, because we have the same righteousness they do and the same Spirit at work within us

So, again, don't think too highly of yourself: You were such a desperate sinner that Jesus had to die to save you;. **But don't think too lowly of yourself, either**, because through faith he's given you all his righteousness and put his Spirit in you.

And, **along with his Spirit he has given to each of you** specific gifts and a role in his Kingdom: ⁴*Now as we have many parts in one body, and all the parts do not have the same function, ⁵in the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. ⁶According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts:*

I love how C.S. Lewis illustrates this in **the Chronicles of Narnia...** After the children enter into Narnia (which represents their conversion), they are visited by FC... The gift corresponds to a role. *God has a role for you.*

And then, Paul lists out a few of the gifts:

Vs. 6: *If prophecy, use it according to the proportion of one's faith;*

³ Tim Keller, *Romans 8–16 For You*, 110.

- Now, **quick word on prophecy**: ‘prophecy’ has **different meanings** in Scripture.
- Sometimes it means **predicting the future**, like the OT prophets did
- Sometimes it means speaking the very words of God, like you are dictating the words of the Bible. You say, “Thus says the Lord.” **Nobody has that gift any more, bc the canon is closed.**
- Other times **it refers to the proclamation of God’s word; what I do up here**--I’m not giving you new revelation; I’m proclaiming to you revelation already given.
- Still **other times, the word prophecy appears to mean some word of encouragement or exhortation** that the Spirit gives you for someone else.
 - You just really have this sense that God wants to communicate something to somebody, to encourage them with some promise, to give them some warning, and you share that. This should always be done with humility, and never in a way that implies you carry the authority of Scripture. You are just saying what you think God has put in your Spirit. You can see **examples of this in Acts**.
 - **You should say**, “You know, I’m not totally sure; this doesn’t carry the authority of a Bible verse...”)

When Paul says “prophecy” here, it’s that last one he seems to have in mind. (The **reason I say that** is because when he says, “according to the proportion of one’s faith” scholars say he means *in ways that go along with the faith God has given you,*” or, in ways that don’t *beyond what God has already revealed in the Bible.*⁴

God sometimes uses members of his body to speak specific words of encouragement or warning and even sometimes guidance to people at specific times.

⁴ Keller, *R8–167FY*, 112. See also CSB Study Bible note on 12:6

- **We need more people sensitive to the Spirit like that** in our church.
- I’ve had people in my life say to me, “*I’m not sure why, but I think God really put this on my heart for you.*” And it was just what I needed to hear!

Paul continues: ⁷ **if service** (that means a sense of when and how to meet people’s physical needs), **use it in service; if teaching, in teaching** (explaining doctrine, truth); ⁸ **if exhorting, in exhortation** (that’s calling people to obedience--it’s different than teaching, just helping them understand what is said; it is calling people to obey); **giving** (This includes not only wealthy people, whom God has prospered so they can invest in his kingdom; but it also includes people who are not wealthy but just have a divine instinct), **with generosity; leading, with diligence; showing mercy** (working with the poor, the sick, and the broken), **with cheerfulness.**⁵

Now, whenever people **see a list like this**, they want to read like a spiritual-gift-Enneagram list. Oh I’m leading with a generosity wing...

And we’ll get to that. But for now, realize that this is **not intended to be** an exhaustive list. There is no real, exhaustive list of spiritual gifts in the Bible.

- **The NT lists different ones out in 6 different places, none of them are the same and no one list contains them all.** All in all, 22 are listed out.
- The **Apostle Peter lumps them into 2 basic categories**: those who speak FOR God & those who serve FOR God (1 Pe 4:11)

What I think this is showing you is that **spiritual gifts are not some tightly defined items in a catalogue that you get 1 or 2 of or**

⁵ Tim Keller says that list basically says there are speaking gifts, leading gifts, and serving gifts. *R8–167FY*, 112.

assigned like an Enneagram number (**don't know what I'm talking about** with all that? Drop your head right now and thank the God)

In **1 Corinthians** Paul refers to them simply as **'spirituals.'** It's a weird word that just 'Spirit manifestation.'

Here's how I'd define it: **A spiritual gift is whatever God wants to do in the world through his church.** It's whatever the Spirit wants to do at the moment for and through the church in pursuit of the mission of Jesus.

- **Sometimes the gifts are more permanent—for e.g. I have the gift of teaching and exhortation.** I hope that is permanent. Otherwise I might need to find a new job. **If I have an off-week...**
- Other times spiritual gifts **are temporary**—they come upon you for a moment, or a season, when God wants to do something.

So here's a few things we can learn about spiritual gifts from these few verses:

1. Each Christian has one (vs 3)

- The **context of what Paul says here is "to each one," vs. 3.** Whenever Paul talks about spiritual gifts in the New Testament (1 Cor 12, Eph 4), he speaks this way: Every follower of Jesus gets at least one.⁶
- **So here's the question: Do you know what yours is?** Because your Christian life won't really take off until you **start discovering** it and using it.
 - **It's like we say around here:** "Nothing helps you grow in your relationship with Jesus like helping someone else grow in their relationship to Jesus."

⁶ E.g. 1 Cor 6; Eph 4.

- **God created you for service.** God didn't save you to sanitize you and set you on his sanctified shelf; he saved you to send you into service.⁷
- **Serving unlocks God's deepest purposes** for you. And **when you discover your gift**, that's when your Christian life takes off.
 - No wonder Christianity is boring to some of you. Your Christian life basically consists of coming in here and having me yell at you and trying to cuss less and come to church more
 - Some of you have never discovered the joy of being used by God in the lives of others--
- Paul says in 1 Cor that **when we come together as a church, everybody should come with something** to offer.
 - There should be nobody who comes to church just to recharge their spiritual batteries to get on with their self-focused lives.
 - When you come to a church, you say, **"What role am I supposed to be playing** in this body?" and **"How can I serve?"**
- God didn't save you to sanitize you and set you on his sanctified shelf; he saved you to send you into service.

2. No one Christian has them all: we need each other (vs. 5)

- Paul's favorite analogy for the church is a body.
 - It's pretty brilliant... STOMACH
 - When people disconnect from the body... **they are like:** "God speak to me." (I CAN'T!) My kids (I can't)
 - **People sometimes say:** *"Well, I don't need a church to know Jesus."*
 - But do you know how the body works? "God, work in my marriage..." "Give me direction."

⁷ Heard this from somewhere. David Platt maybe?

- God has **intentionally set up his body** so that we need each other. It's one of the ways he combats our proclivity toward pride.

I think the **most valuable earthly gift God has given to me** outside of my wife is the community of this church. I learn more about God from being in this body than I did from seminary. **I love seminary**, but the body is the way God reveals himself in our lives.

- There are **times God raises up somebody** at just the right moment to speak a word of encouragement; a word of warning; guidance; to give a gift of love. To minister to me and my family.

The **working together of his body is also how God does his best work** in the world. Y'all, my favorite evangelism stories are those that involve multiple parts of the body of Christ:

I heard this awesome one the other day from our BCC: *An Afghan lady (head dress and all) show up to VBS. I'll call her Hadiya. With a very limited vocabulary, the mom lets us know she's there for her 5 yr old to attend the kids event. She opens up her phone and shows us a picture of a lady who she calls Amanda, and says that this lady invited her while she was at the park. And she had wanted to go, because she'd heard of the church before: a group from the Summit Church had randomly helped her move in when she came to America.*

Meanwhile, another of our members working at VBS overhears this lady struggling through English and asks on a whim if she speaks Urdu, and she does. Well, this member happened to be fluent in Urdu. So she gets her name and helps her son get dropped off every day of VBS.

One night at VBS, Hadiya is walking with this member and sees another woman checking her kids in, and she gets really excited and goes up and hugs her. She then tells this member of ours who

speaks Urdu that this lady was in line behind her at a Thrift Store in Durham a few months ago, and offered to pay for her pile of clothes she was buying for her kids.

Hadiya didn't speak enough English to ask her a very important question, but now through our member who speaks Urdu she says she has a very important question she needs to ask: "Why did you buy my clothes for me?" So, this 3rd Summit member explains the gospel to her. It's a response to the gospel.

Hadiya said, "That sounds similar to the people who first helped me move in when I came as a refugee from Afghanistan 3 yrs ago. Turns out, that group was also from the Summit Church.

So, to review: A Summit SG moved Hadiya & family into their apartment when they first came here; a Summit member randomly bought her kids clothes at the Thrift Store, a different Summit attendee invited her to VBS at the park, Summit Staff member spoke her language when she arrived.

So, do you believe in predestination or what?

I've seen it happen in the life of my "one." I'm talking to someone here and I'm like, "Wait, you know this person, too? You had what conversation with them?"

Again, hear this: God has designed it so that we need each other--and you are incomplete; insufficient for life--at least for what God wants from it--without deep and meaningful involvement in the church.

- **Listen: There's nothing more helpless and disturbing** than a disconnected body part. It's gross too. What happens to a body

part that gets cut off from the body? It shrivels up and dies. **That's the future** of a disconnected believer.

- **Listen: the Bible says in 1 Peter that Satan prowls around like a lion.** Yes, when God wants to depict Satan he chooses a member of the cat family. But have you **ever seen on the Discovery Channel** the way that lions attack? They look for prey on the outskirts of the pack, the wildebeests isolated from the others.

3. It is pride that keeps us from pursuing spiritual gifts (vs. 3)⁸

Again: Don't miss that Paul introduces this list by telling us that we should not think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think.⁹

- **You see, if we think too highly of ourselves, we won't feel the necessity of God working in our lives through the spiritual gifts of others** and we **won't pursue the intimate connections** in the church necessary to experience them.

Listen: pride is the root sin behind so many other sins and spiritual dysfunctions. C.S. Lewis called pride the **granddaddy of all sins**.

- If you are **not submitted** to God, it's because ultimately you think they are capable of making it through life on your own. You think you know better than God.
- If you are the kind of person **doesn't pray and fellowship with God** regularly, it's because deep down you just don't feel that desperate for God. You assume given enough time and energy you can make life work.

⁸ Joby P. Martin, "The Body", sermon on Romans 12:3-8, preached at ChurchofEleven22, July 22, 2018.

⁹ This is common for Paul; he often introduces the spiritual gifts this waySee 1 Cor 12-13

- If a person is **not generous**, it's because they assume they are the one primarily responsible for their successes.
- If you are **not connected to the church**, it's because you think you already possess everything they need to make life work.
 - For those of you who **frequent church on the weekends** but never get involved--never connect in small group or volunteering or community--at the root of that is the proud assumption that you just don't need the grace of God deeply and intimately at work in your life.

Y'all, pride messes up your life in so many ways. It keeps you from getting the help you need and just makes you end up looking stupid: Funny disease

- **Like Paul said in vs 3**, when you walk around in pride, you look "insane" to others:
- It's **like the story I heard about the Army Officer** who had just been promoted to Colonel. So you know he's feeling: He's pretty high on himself. He keeps catching himself looking in the mirror saying, "I'm a Colonel now" and saluting himself. So, as he is getting his new office arranged, he hears a knock at the door and he says, "Who is it?" The guy says, "It's Private Andrews." He thinks, "Oh, I'll impress this kid." so he picks up the phone, and says loudly. "Yes, Mr. President, I know Mr. President, I understand, Mr. President. Yes, I'll get right on it, Mr. President. Thank you..." Then he says, "OK, come in, Private." And he says, "I'm sorry I had you wait there, I had to finish up my conversation with the President. What can I do for you, son? The private said, "I'm sorry sir, I was just sent over by communications to hook up your phone."

Pride keeps you from acknowledging the help you need. And it keeps you from seeking deep connection to the church that you need if God is going to minister to you through spiritual gifts.

4. Spiritual gifts are (usually) a specialization in a duty given to all Christians (v. 6)

Notice the things Paul lists out--teaching, and encouraging, giving generously, serving, teaching, showing mercy--aren't these things commanded of all Christians?

Yes--but that's where the phrase in vs. 6 "**according to the grace given**" becomes so important. God gives certain believers an extra measure of grace in these things.

- We're all supposed to evangelize, but some people...
- We all give, but some...
- We all serve...
- We all pray, but some seem to know right when to pray... (my mom)

While we are all called to do everything on that list, we are not all called to everything equally or gifted equally for them.

- Around here we say, "Not everything that comes from heaven has your name on it." Something does, and you need to figure out what that is and devote yourself to it in the church.

Now, what I'm about to say next **only applies to about 10% of you**--but some of you struggle because you think you are called to everything equally.

- **I really struggled with this.** Like I was supposed to play every role, excelling in everything Christians did.
- I just had to reckon with the fact that **God did not make me an omni-competent one-man ministry** machine. He made me part of a body and gave me a role and few corresponding gifts and I serve the church best when I devote myself to them.
- **About 10 years ago, Veronica and I** got really moved about adopting... at least for now, you focus on this. Now, we're part of a

body that does this and we support those of you who show mercy in this way--praying for you, supporting you, Veronica and I have given financially to several people adoption.

Again: Not everything that comes from heaven has your name on it. Something does. Figure it out and devote yourself to it.

Which leads, of course, to the million dollar question:

5. How can I discern my gifts?

Do you **just read the list** and wait until you feel a **warm fuzzy** about one?

I've already noted, **some people love the "spiritual gifts" tests.** (Think personality quiz but with Bible verses attached.)

Those are fine but they have limitations. Paul didn't put quizzes into his Epistles.

- **Pastor Joby** was telling me that early on his ministry he went into a charismatic church and they handed him one: **I didn't even understand the questions!** It was like, "If your left foot was possessed by a demonic angel, would you cut it off or attempt to cast them out?" Like... I reject the question. I have no idea. He got the results back: **I've got the gift of martyrdom!** What do I do with that? I use it once and then I'm done.

Again, I'm **not saying there is no value** in those things. There can be. But let me give you **a tool I've found helpful:**

- **Venn diagram: 3 things:** Ability/affinity/Affirmation¹⁰

Affinity: What you are passionate about? *What needs am I drawn to? What kind of ministry feels satisfying to me?*

¹⁰ inspired by Jim Collins, *Good to Great*.

- For many of you, **reflecting on your past experiences** will be really helpful, because God allowed you to go through some painful chapter or unique experience so you could minister to others.
 - I know **members of the church who have walked through cancer**, or the death of children, or mistakes from their past that are uniquely gifted to minister to those in the same situations. Like **Paul in 2 Cor 1:4**, who said, “I suffered greatly--but it was so I could comfort others with the comfort wherewith I’ve been comforted.”
- **Sometimes you’re just aware of certain needs that others don’t see**
 - BTW: when you see something around here that is lacking, instead of just complaining about it, maybe that’s God’s invitation to do something about it.
 - Listen: **It doesn’t take a great leader to walk around** this place and point out what’s wrong. It takes 2 eyeballs and a pen and paper.
 - “Well, I don’t like that church because no one speaks to me.” Fine, see you on the FI team next week.

That’s Affinity. Ability (what you are good at) **and Affirmation** (where people affirm God is using you in their lives):

- **Affirmation:** Where do people really tell me God uses me?
 - God **gave his church to see what we can’t see**--both blind spots regarding strengths or gifts we don’t know we have.
 - The church can also warn you when something you think you’re good at, you’re not:
 - I’ve met **church planters and pastors** before who are convinced they have the gift of preaching, but **apparently nobody’s got the gift of hearing them preach**. So some of us don’t self-assess very well.
 - **Lady to me...** “Song for the church.” You have a song, I don’t think it’s for the church.

- **Sometimes that affirmation can occur miraculously**, through **words of prophecy**. Paul in his epistles refers to gifts that were put into people through the laying on of hands. or called out in them when they didn’t know it.
 - **Hold that in balance with the others--it can be wrong: *Illus. Bruce and me*** at small charismatic church.
 - I’m not saying this doesn’t happen. (We shouldn’t be turned off of the miraculous gifts just because some practice it poorly.¹¹)
 - **I’ve had it happen before** where someone called out, by the Spirit, I believe, a gift I didn’t know I had, or an opportunity that was coming my way that I wasn’t expecting that God wanted me to know was from him.
 - **So, always be open to the miraculous**. But usually it’s a confluence of all 3.

(MUSIC)

The **most important thing is to just get busy serving** and you’ll figure it out.

- **Wes Smith, our college pastor, who leads** in this better than anyone, regularly tell their students, *“Don’t focus on finding your gift. It’s okay if you aren’t sure what they are yet. They develop and are revealed in the context of ministry. It’s more important right now to develop the pattern of service than it is to pinpoint the specific gift. Start being the body to one another and the gifts will manifest.”*
- God steers moving ships! Ever try to **steer a sitting boat?** You have to get going forward before you can direct it. The same thing is true with spiritual gifts. **Get going forward in serving** and God will direct you.

¹¹ Sam Storms, *Practicing the Power* is a great read on this.

- So **study the Biblical lists**, yes, but get involved serving and you'll figure it out.

Challenge:

- Take this **Venn diagram** and fill it out.
- **Also: Map out the most spiritually significant moments in your life** (When did I learn the most about God? When was he the most real to me? When did my life change the most?) And see if through that God doesn't reveal an area he's gifted you in.¹²

And then just get involved!

But **let's not put the cart before the horse**. Before God reveals these spiritual gifts in you, you need to make sure you've received the greatest gift--the one he's spent 11 chapters talking about!

The gospel is that Jesus came to earth to die on a cross to give you forgiveness of sins and new life. That's the greatest spiritual gift!

Have you received it?

¹² Keller, *R8-167FY*, 114.

