

Living Like A Christian By Using Our God-Given Gifts

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[0 : 00] What would you think of a tall, athletic member of a basketball team who never wanted to play in the game? Or what about a talented trumpet player who's in the band but never wants to play in a concert?

Neither would make sense, would they? Well, what do you think about a gifted Christian who joins a church but never uses their gift in any of the ministries of the church?

That really doesn't make sense either, does it? But most of us, we're sensible people. We are. So there must be a reason why every church member is not involved in the ministry of their church. It may be that they don't understand. It may be that some church members just don't understand that when God saved them, He gifted them.

Or maybe just chose to use the natural talent that they were born with and developed. But God has gifted them in some way to serve Him and other people in and through their church families' ministries.

[1 : 30] Well, what we're going to do this morning is educate those church members that do not know that. The only other thing could be a church member just doesn't care.

But I can't imagine a Christian who understands God has gifted them and that God has actually commanded them to use what He's given them in the life of their church.

I can't imagine them just absolutely not caring and saying, God, I'm not going to do it. So I want to give everybody the benefit of the doubt this morning that there's just some things you're unclear of if you're not involved in service.

And our prayer this morning is that God will open your eyes, clear up the uncertainty as we go through Romans chapter 12, verses 6 through 8.

We began looking at this two weeks ago under the heading, Living Like a Christian by Thinking Rightly About Ourselves and Our Church.

[2 : 41] But we didn't finish it last week. I wanted to wait until this week when we're doing the graduate recognition. And at one point later on in this message, I want to really focus on some things that I hope you'll think about as you think about what you're going to do next in your life.

Not just in church, but everywhere. Let's look. Romans chapter 12. Let's do a quick review of what we saw two weeks ago in verses 3 through 5.

First thing we saw was we need to think objectively about ourselves. Think objectively about yourself. He's talking about in verse 3. First, he says, don't think too highly of yourself.

Look at what he says. I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think. Don't be prideful. Don't be arrogant. Don't think more highly of yourself than you should.

But look what else he says. Instead, think realistically. Think with sober judgment is the actual phrase. Some people would have the idea, if when Paul writes, he says, don't think too highly of yourself, then he's talking about what we should do then is think just very low of ourselves.

[3 : 55] Well, no, that's not the case. Don't be arrogant, but don't think, I don't have anything to offer. I don't have any gifts or talents or abilities.

No. He just says think with sober judgment. New Testament scholar Leon Morris tells us what he's talking about there. Look at what he says. Being sober minded means recognizing what God has given us and being zealous in its use as well as humble.

Thinking objectively about ourselves will cause us to realize I'm not the most gifted and talented person in the church or wherever, but I am talented, I am gifted.

God has given me something that I need to humbly accept, take ownership of, and use in a way that will honor Him and help other people.

We also learned two weeks ago to think biblically about your place in the body of Christ. That's in verses 4 and 5. Paul explains that the church is the body of Christ.

[5 : 05] You may be more familiar with the idea that the church is the family of God, but either way, the church is not a building. One of the great mistakes people today think of is when you ride down East Main Street and you look over here, this is not Dickens First Baptist Church.

This is our church. We are the body of Christ together. We are the family of God.

The church is a group of individuals, like different parts of the human body. We come together and function like one body.

Look at what Paul says in verse 4. For as in one body we have many members or many body parts. Verse 5. So we, though many body parts, are one body in Christ.

On one hand, we're the church. We're the family of God. We're the body of Christ. We're one. But on the other hand, each one of us as individuals, we're a certain body part.

[6 : 22] Look at what he says in verse 4. The members do not all have the same function. Verse 6. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.

Every member of our church is important because every member of our church has been given gifts, talents, or abilities by God. And God wants you to use what he's given you like a part of your body works.

Some people in this room, from this analogy, you're like the hands of the church. Some are like the feet. Some are like the eyes.

Some are parts we won't mention this morning. The key to us being a healthy and effective church is for each of us to recognize what part we are and function accordingly.

So let me ask you, which part of the body are you? And I know we have people here today who are not part of our church family, but a lot of you are members of another church, so you apply it to your church.

[7 : 33] You're not off the hook this morning. This applies to you and how you serve the ministry you're involved in or should be involved in in your church.

That leads us to what we're going to look at new today, Romans 12, verses 6 through 8. Let's look at it. Beginning in verse 6, 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. Let's talk about giving encouragement or the word exhortation really sort of means firm counsel, direct instruction.

That can be encouragement and some translations use the word encourage here instead of exhort. Go back to where we were there, the one who contributes, the one who gives in generosity, the one who leads with zeal, the one who does acts of mercy with cheerfulness.

These verses are telling you to think responsibly about your spiritual gifts. Think responsibly. Paul's telling us, you've got gifts, use them, take responsibility for them.

[9 : 01] They're in verse 6. Now, what we're talking about is you're looking at verse 6, we're talking about gifts of God's grace, God's undeserved favor.

God chose to give each one of his children certain gifts. And God just, within himself, it's not because you deserved it, it's not because you have done something to earn it, no, God just chose you to gift you or give you the talent that you have because he wanted you to have it.

Because his plan was to use you and that gift to serve his purpose in this church and really in this world. Paul provides us with more details about these gifts in 1 Corinthians chapter 12.

If you ever want to do a serious study of spiritual gifts, things we're talking about this morning, look at 1 Corinthians chapter 12. There's a lot of things he tells us that'll help us better understand them. Here's two things. God assigns us the gift he wants us to have, we don't get to choose it. Look in 1 Corinthians 12, 11. He alone decides which gift each person should have.

[10 : 21] That's from the New Living Translation. Then God gives us the gift that he gives us for the benefit of the church. Not to make us a star if it's something where we're up in front of people.

But to benefit the church in some way, look in verse 7 of 1 Corinthians 12. A spiritual gift is given to each of us so that we can help each other.

Now, we're talking about spiritual gifts here. What is a spiritual gift? There's a lot of different ways people define that.

Some of you here have studied it. We've done studies at various times over the years Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night. Here's my favorite definition. It's from Wayne

Grudem, the theologian.

He defines these gifts as any talent or ability which is empowered by the Holy Spirit and able to be used in the ministry of the church.

[11:19] Your spiritual gift may be something, really, that God gave you at birth. A talent that you have developed. And when you became a Christian, God has channeled that talent or moved you to serve Him in that way.

Let's take for example, some people are just natural born singers. Now, they may develop that gift, but you may be when you were little. Some of you, y'all have grown up in children's choir. Grew up singing. Some of you playing instruments. Some of you still do it every Sunday. Well, some of you had this talent, this musical ability.

And as time has gone on, God's just used it as you have become a Christian and started being serious about living after your faith. God's using you with a talent He gave you many years ago to serve Him.

Some people, though, when God saves them, He gives them a new gift, something that's maybe totally out of character from the way they used to be. I know a man today, one of the most kind and easygoing guys you'll ever meet.

[12:32] He has the gift of service. He just wants to serve people, meet people's needs. He also has the gift of mercy. He has a real heart for people. He cares as well as serving.

That guy told me when he was younger, teenager, growing up and in the military, in the Navy. He said, back in those days, I was not what I am today. God has changed me.

Back in those days, I was basically mean, I was selfish and self-centered and the way he put it is, I didn't take anything off anybody. But when God saved him, God changed him in ways that a lot of people never change.

Instead of being that selfish, self-centered, I don't take anything off anyone kind of guy, he became a more humble, focusing on the other person, recognizes when people have needs, they're hurting, his heart goes out to them, and he really wants to help.

He really cares. It's his gift to serve people. It doesn't matter where it comes from. If you want to call it a talent, a gift, or an ability, a spiritual gift can be any talent or ability which is empowered by the Holy Spirit and able to be used in the ministry of the church.

[13:50] But let's don't forget something. Throughout this whole message, the key statement, use your gifts. Verse 6, having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.

That's what we're talking about. Using our gifts. Then Paul gives seven examples of spiritual gifts in verses 7 and 8. He wants to emphasize whatever your gift is, just do it.

Use it. Now, the fact is, if you read these verses, you see seven gifts. If you can read 1 Corinthians 12, you see a bunch more.

If you read Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 11, you see four more actually gifted people God gives to the church. If you put all these lists together, there are some duplications and some people would even debate what is duplicated.

But all the gifts that you read that Paul writes about, there's probably 18 or 19 or even more of them. And the point I want to make is, when you read about the spiritual gifts in the New Testament, in Paul's letters, Peter has something to say about it too in his first letter, chapter 4.

[15:02] The gifts are always, there's a different group of them every time. Some of them are in different groups. But there's never just one list of spiritual gifts.

Some are listed here. Some are listed here. Some are listed in different orders. What that means is, when Paul is writing about spiritual gifts, he's not trying to tell us what they all are.

He's just trying to say there's a bunch of them. And what you need to do is, be aware of which one it is that God has given you, or which ones God has given you.

Now, in this list we're looking at in Romans, verses 7 and 8, prophecy is the most difficult one to understand. The ESV study Bible has this comment explaining what he's talking about here.

Prophecy here, speech that reports something that God spontaneously brings to mind or reveals to the speaker. But since this is human speech, we're not talking about an infallible word from God.

[16:09] Because it is human speech, it must be tested or evaluated as 1 Corinthians 14, 29 points out. Now, there's differences of opinion of what the gift of prophecy is in today's church.

Some people would say it's just clearly, plainly, boldly preaching the word of God. Either way, Paul's point is that this is your gift.

Use it in proportion to your faith. Use it to the extent that you believe God is leading you. The other gifts are basically self-explanatory. And if you just read it, you understand.

Paul is just saying this is a representative list. If your gift is this, just do it. He's saying to us, recognize what your spiritual talent, gift, ability is.

Recognize it. Acknowledge it. And use it. If it's to teach, teach. If it's a gift of service, serve. Whatever it is, do it.

[17 : 17] Now the question is, the question we need to be asking ourselves right now, am I? Am I using the gifts, the talents, the abilities that God has given me in the ministry of this church?

And we have a lot of people who are. You've seen some people this morning already. They have been exercising their gifts in helping us worship. Some people you've heard sing, teach.

Some people you've just seen what they're doing. Things with a screen. Things with a sound. There are some people whose spiritual gift is such, you see them or you see what they do on Sundays.

Some people use their gifts and you never see them on Sunday. They're serving the Lord during the week outside of our gatherings. Some people, let me rephrase that for an example.

We've got over 70 people, 70 members of our church who have volunteered to use their talents, gifts, and abilities, and time in our Truth Journey sports camp that's coming up in just a few weeks out at J.C. Park.

[18 : 32] Over 70 members of our church are using the talents, gifts, and abilities they have.

They're doing everything from teach children. Some of them are not going to teach. They're going to try to herd children.

Some of them are going to set up games. Some of them are going to come up here and get water and ice and bring it out there for people to have. Some people are going to do security.

Some people are going to run the games, make sure everything is in order what it's supposed to be. We've got also over 40 individuals who have signed up to use their gifts and abilities in a music camp that'll be a couple of weeks after the sports camp.

Now some of those, some people, some people are gluttons for punishment and they're doing both weeks. And we thank you so much that you're a glutton for punishment. But not all 40 who are doing the music camp are doing the sports camp.

I say all that to say there's a lot of people in our church who are using their gifts. They are using the talents God's given them.

I say all that to say there's a lot of people in our church who are using their gifts. They are using the talents God's given them.

[19 : 43] They are using what they have learned, what they have developed, their abilities. And in all of this, I want you to think, what these people are doing, they are choosing to use their time to serve God this way and serve other people.

sometimes on Sunday, sometimes during the week, sometimes both. Now, many people in our church are involved and that is great.

But are you? We're not talking now about many people. I want you to think, what are you doing if you're a Christian with the gifts, talents, and abilities that God has given you for the purpose of, according to His Word, serving in or through the ministry of this church.

Now, it may be, as I said at the beginning, you don't really understand this or you don't know how or where you should be involved.

And I want to try to help here. Rick Warren has put together what I think is the best little tool to help a person understand how they're gifted and where they ought to serve.

[21 : 13] And it's a one-word acronym, SHAPE. You know, a lot of us, we don't want to really think about how we are shaped this morning.

But all of us can look at how God has shaped us for ministry and profit from it. We can be either affirmed in what we're doing or we can learn how God wants to use us.

So right now, let's real quickly, I want you to think about your shape. As we go through this, you graduates, I hope you'll think about how God shaped you to serve in this church.

But also, I want you to think about how God has shaped you to work in this world. What I want to show you here is very practical. It can help you if you don't know what you need to be doing.

This can help you see how God's made you and maybe help you zero in on where to go to school, what to major in, what kind of profession, what kind of job to pursue.

[22 : 23] One thing, it's not going to come out in this that I want to say here so I don't forget it.

Whatever you do, whatever you think your shape is when it comes to working in this world, you make sure you can make a living at it.

God has not shaped you to go out and spend four years and a ton of money for an example, majoring in philosophy just because you want to be a deep thinker.

There are very few jobs even for PhDs in philosophy. I give that as an extreme example because I don't think any of y'all are going to do that. But I also want to say to parents, you students, you're making an investment as you go to college, you go to tech school, you go to whatever you're going to do next.

You parents, you're making a big financial investment. It's none of my business but I'm going to say it anyway. I wouldn't invest my money in something that there's absolutely zero percent chance of them being able to make a living at.

That's foolish. They need to be able to work in this world and get off your payroll and make a living. But don't just find something that pays a lot of money.

[23 : 40] That is not the way. But whatever you are shaped to do, you've got to be able to make a living. You can't live with your parents forever. And if they're smart, then it won't let you live with them forever.

Now, let's think about our shape. Number one, spiritual gifts. We've been talking about that. Any talent or ability which is empowered by the Holy Spirit and able to be used in the ministry of the church. Listed in the scriptures as we point out here, still on the screen.

If you don't know what your spiritual gift is, try something. Experiment. What gifts do people affirm you in? What gifts do you just sense this is what God made me to do?

Think about it that way. Number two, heart. You're thinking about your shape. How has God gifted me to work in this church? How has God gifted me to do whatever I do with my life?

Think about your heart. What's your heart's desire? What's your passion? What do you enjoy doing? Now, that doesn't mean it's easy. Some of the things you enjoy doing, it takes a lot of time.

[24 : 46] It takes a lot of sweat. It takes a lot of mental toil maybe. But what are you passionate about? What excites you? You're thinking about your spiritual gifts or in the case of your job, think about your strengths.

Next, think about your heart. What do you want to do? What are you passionate about? Number three, your abilities, your natural talents, your developed abilities. What can you do? What are you good at?

What do other people affirm? I can think in my mind that God's given me the gift to sing. And I can be passionate about it.

I can sing the top of my lungs in the shower because it thrills my soul. But I can't do it. Last week, I had the opportunity, I was asked to sing with those twins, Stewart girls.

I only had two words, one line. He said, I said, no, I can't do that. When they sung it and Brian did that part, Lisa looked at me and said, I'm glad you didn't do that.

[25 : 52] So I'm saying, that's all that to say, your shape will include what you can do. This is not talking about some kind of wishful thinking, pie in the sky stuff.

If God's given you a spiritual gift or a strength, he's given you a heart's desire, you will be able to do it. You may have to work at it. You may take some time to develop it. But you need to think about what can I do?

What are my abilities? Number four, personality. Your uniqueness, your temperament. Are you an outgoing person? Are you a people person who thrives on interaction with people?

Or are you a more task-oriented person? You don't want to be around a lot of people. You don't want to, for certain, get up in front of people. But you love to be quiet.

You love to be behind the scenes. You love to work on something, do stuff. This doesn't require a whole lot of people interaction. That's how you're made. There's nothing wrong with that.

[26 : 51] There's people in this world who are people-oriented and they do well. There's people in this world who are task-oriented and they do well. Number five, experiences. What have you done?

God sometimes prepares us for a particular ministry in the church or vocation even by enabling us, causing us to have certain life experiences, good and bad.

That's why it's important. This is sort of on the side here. All of you, I don't know what all of y'all have done, but I know some of y'all have done a lot of stuff. I don't mean the bad stuff now.

I know you've done that too. We're talking about good stuff you did. You know, you worked different kinds of jobs, tried different things. That's good. You've learned some things that you like and that you don't like.

You've learned some things that you're good at and some things you aren't good at. That's what every person ought to learn. You ought to get your children. Don't let children just sit in the house and watch TV, play video games. They need to get out and learn some things about life.

[27 : 51] Get life experience. That is vitally important for all people. It helps us to understand who we are, how we're made, what God wants us to do in the church and in the world.

If we will seek to serve God according to our shape, our gifts, our heart, our abilities, our personality and experiences, if we'll seek to serve God faithfully in the church and in the world, we will not only honor God, but we'll find joy and satisfaction in what we do.

We'll like it. And we will make a difference in some people's lives because we're doing what God called us to do and what means something to us. If you're doing something right now in ministry that you find no joy or satisfaction in, you just dread coming, you hate it, you don't see that you're doing any good, you probably are not shaped for that ministry.

So don't do it. You shouldn't do things in the life of the church just because somebody else wants you to do it. Because your friend does it, you think you've got to do it with your friend.

Because somebody inflicted guilt on you. Serve God according to the way He has shaped you. And there is a way He has shaped you that you can plug in to some way of ministry, some type of ministry in our church that'll matter to you and it'll matter to the people who are involved.

[29 : 16] And you'll look forward to doing it. People will look forward to you doing it. Serving God according to our shape, let me reemphasize, it is not always easy. It may take a lot of time, it may be a lot of work, but serving God according to our shape will be worth it.

It might be a labor of love. Now if you haven't figured out what your ministry is, or you haven't figured out what your calling in life is, take the time to just talk to God about it on a regular basis.

Ask God to help you to understand how He has shaped you. Seek His guidance. Pray. Ask God for wisdom. He wants to give it to us. Evaluate what we're looking at this morning.

Take some time. Ask some other people. Experiment. Ask other people who know you well and will tell you the truth. You know, a lot of people will just tell you what you want to hear.

A lot of people will tell you things that make you feel good, especially when you're young. A lot of times people don't, people are just not willing. They may love you a lot. They're just not willing to say, you stink at this.

[30 : 27] Or you just can't do this. Or you got a long ways to go. When I was first called to preach and I used to preach and different people take the risk and let me preach when I was 20 years old.

Everybody used to come up to you after. No matter what. Oh, you did just a good job. Blah, blah, blah. Just making you feel good about yourself. Well, I went to one church one time. There was this older lady there. She knew my family. Thought she knew me. But I didn't know her.

Well, I was there and people came up making you feel good. She came up to me and looked me in the eye. She said, don't worry about it, son. You're going to get better. And that's the exact word she said.

I remember to this day. Don't worry about it, son. You're going to get better. She was telling the truth. And I needed to hear that. Our children, people we're trying to influence, they need to hear the truth.

It's spoken kindly. She wasn't mean about it. She was just matter of fact. A healthy physical body requires all the individual body parts to function properly, doesn't it?

[31 : 27] Well, healthy church body requires all the individual parts to function properly as well. I want to encourage everyone here. Use your God-given gifts, talents, and abilities in the life of our church.

Whatever that means for you to do, whether it's on a Sunday, during the week, once a week, once a month, whatever it is. And I believe when we all use what God's given us the right way, three things will happen.

Other people will be helped. God will use us to touch other people's lives in a meaningful way. Number two, we will be fulfilled. We'll be satisfied.

We'll be content because we're functioning as God designed us, as God shaped us to function.

Number three, and most importantly, God will be glorified. God is pleased when His children serve Him like He made them and intended them to serve.

Question again, one more time. How are you serving God in the life of this church or some other church? Let's pray together. Dear God, we thank You that You love us and have made us like we

are as individual parts of this body.

[33 : 00] Help us, dear God, to understand who we are, how You've shaped us, and help us to serve. Lord, I pray that You will affirm each person in this room who is serving You this way, and many people are.

I pray, dear God, that You'll just give them a sense of just rightness. They're seeking to please You with what You've given them. Father, if there are people in this room who are not serving, help them to know that there is no excuse.

Help them to know that for them to be a Christian and a member of a church and not serve makes no more sense than a person who chooses to be on a baseball team and never wants to be in the game.

Convict them, dear God, of the need to serve You in and through this church or whatever church they're a member of. Help them, dear God, to get serious about discovering how You've shaped them and then get involved in some kind of ministry.

Father, for people in this room this morning who think to themselves, I don't have a clue as to what's been said. I don't understand. Help them to know, dear God, that it's because they're not a Christian.

[34 : 24] Your Spirit does not dwell in them and they can't understand the things of God, the things of the Spirit, the things of gifts. But I pray, dear God, that You will use this message to give them what they need to understand.

They're separated from You. They don't have a relationship with You. They're doomed unless something changes. Help them to know that what needs to change is for them to admit their situation, to turn from their sin, to change their mind about it, to grieve over it, and to put their faith and trust in Jesus that when He died on the cross He actually took their punishment.

Help them, dear God, right now to call upon Jesus to save them. Help that man or woman or young person to commit their life to Jesus as their Savior and Lord, leader of their life.

And just in an attitude of prayer, let's listen to the Lord, all of us, and respond to Him in obedience. I'll be here at the front of the Lord. I want to pray with you. Be happy to do that if you'll come during this time. But the main thing is that we just do what God tells us to do and make the kind of commitment He's made clear to us.

Amen.