

# Worshipping God with Our Spiritual Gifts

Romans 12:1-8 on January 14, 2024

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*Please read Romans 12:1-8 before going further in this transcript.*

Last week we dove back into the book of Romans and talked about “Worshipping God with Our Lives.” Romans 12 began by challenging us, in view of God’s mercy, to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. Today’s text picks up on this idea of worshipping God with our lives and applies it to “Worshipping God with Our Spiritual Gifts.”

Romans 12:6 says, “We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us....”<sup>1</sup> These different gifts come to those of us who’ve put our trust in Jesus Christ, and they come directly from God as He apportions them.<sup>2</sup> So in addition to the gift of our salvation, God also gives us particular gifts for carrying out the ministry of His church here on earth.<sup>3</sup>

A spiritual gift is: A God-given ministry/empowerment for believers.

So, whatever ministry to which God calls us, He first equips us with the particular spiritual gifting that we need, in order to accomplish that ministry. It can be helpful here to distinguish between spiritual gifts, versus natural abilities and acquired skills:<sup>4</sup>

A natural ability is: A capacity or talent that someone is born with. “genetic”

An acquired skill is: An expertise we can develop through practice and learning.

Ultimately, all three of these are gifts that come from God. It’s only by the goodness of God’s common grace that any of us are born with natural abilities, or that any of us can acquire further skills. And it’s only by yet another gift of God’s grace, that Christ-followers are given spiritual gifts with which to serve Him even better.

Now, you may have noticed that I put a forward slash between ministry/empowerment. I did that because spiritual gifts are both; they are a ministry and an empowerment. Taken in their broader Scriptural context, these different spiritual gifts aren’t just focused on the empowerment, but also on the ministry itself.<sup>5</sup> In other words, we have a tendency to forget that the ministry to which God calls us, is a gift. The fact that He includes

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<sup>1</sup> Gifts (χάρισμα) “that which is freely and graciously given, favor bestowed, gift... ⑥ of special gifts of a non-material sort, bestowed through God’s generosity on individual Christians.” William Arndt et al., A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1081.

<sup>2</sup> See 1 Corinthians 12, especially verse 11, “...he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.”

<sup>3</sup> Paul explains these spiritual gifts in greater detail in 1 Corinthians 12, but for this message we’re going to focus on what we learn in Romans 12.

<sup>4</sup> For those who like charts and graphs, a Venn diagram can help in visualizing how these three overlap.

<sup>5</sup> In fact, a Bible professor named Kenneth Berding insists that the Apostle Paul’s various spiritual gift lists in the New Testament “discuss ministries rather than abilities.” See his article, “Confusing Word and Concept in ‘Spiritual Gifts,’” JETS 43/1 (March 2000), p. 51. [https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/43/43-1/43-1-pp037-051\\_JETS.pdf](https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/43/43-1/43-1-pp037-051_JETS.pdf)

us in His work here on this earth, is in itself, a wonderful gift from God. Ephesians 2:10 says it this way, “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” So God not only gives us the spiritual gifts that we need to accomplish His good work in this world, but He also created us in Christ Jesus to do those good works. Our Heavenly Father equips and calls His children, to join Him in His work. What an incredible privilege to be part of what He’s doing!

## **Worshipping God with our spiritual gift...**

### **I. Should be done with sober self-assessment.**

Romans 12:3 begins, “For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.” Whether we’re spiritually gifted for up front ministries like prophesying or teaching, or whether we’re spiritually gifted to serve behind the scenes in ministries like serving and encouraging, God’s Word warns us against the pride and arrogance of thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought. Whether we carry the title of a pastor or elder or trustee, or the title of a dishwasher, nursery worker, or snow shoveler, each one of us is called to serve in Christ’s name with humility.

Verse 3 uses the phrase “in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.” Verse 6 later says “according to the grace given to each of us.” Together, these verses make it abundantly clear that none of us has come up with this faith, or this grace, on our own. It’s been distributed by God Himself; we’ve simply received what’s been given to us. So there’s no place for “hot shot” attitudes or braggadocious demeanors. We’re all saved by God’s grace alone, and each believer is gifted by God’s grace alone.

Now, I’ve read Romans 12 hundreds of times, and I even had the entire chapter memorized back in the day, but over all this time, I’ve missed an important nuance in verse 3, “think of yourself with sober judgment.” You see, I’ve always equated “sober judgment” with humility, basically contrasting with the idea of not thinking of yourself more highly than you ought. But after further study, and some personal reflection, I’ve realized that this phrase, “think of yourself with sober judgment,” actually highlights another important nuance: As much as we shouldn’t think too highly of ourselves, we also shouldn’t think too lowly of ourselves. I appreciate how Pastor Timothy Keller put it: “To be sober means to be... completely in touch with reality. Paul does not say here: Be humble or: See others as better than yourselves. ...he warns against thinking less of your abilities than is warranted. We need to acknowledge what we are good at and what we can do – because doing this makes us able to serve others. We are to

think straight about ourselves; neither too low nor too high.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, we shouldn’t sell ourselves short. It’s pretty crazy to realize that GOD Himself picked me, that He picked you, that He picked any of us, to have a particular spiritual gift, so we best not waste what’s been given to us! Now that’s... sobering; that’s heavy. We need to live our lives in such a way, that we honor the special gift for ministry that God has given to each one of us.<sup>7</sup>

The fact is, one of the primary ways that we find meaning in this life, is by determining our God-given ministry calling, and by using our God-given empowerment for ministry. If you’re wondering what your purpose is in this life, prayerfully pursue the spiritual gift that God has given you. And, if you’re not yet a follow of Jesus, consider becoming one, so that you can find your purpose, by joining Him in His good work on this earth.

### **Worshipping God with our spiritual gift also...**

#### **II. Unifies our individual gifts into one mutual belonging and shared purpose for Christ.**

Romans 12:4-5 says, “For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” Instead of the word “unifies,” I originally wanted to use the word “synergizes,” because I absolutely love the concept of “synergy.”<sup>8</sup> Synergy is when multiple organisms work together for a combined benefit that is greater than could have been achieved by working separately. So everybody comes out ahead when organisms work together. But here’s the problem with using this particular word to describe the church: the church isn’t made up of multiple organisms. Those of us who are followers of Jesus make up one single living organism. Yes, we’re individual members within that organism, but we’re one organism, one living entity. And as uncomfortable as it might make some of us feel, and as forward and presumptuous as it might seem, verse 5 states it boldly, “...each member belongs to all the others.” Friends, Christianity is not a solo sport, it’s not meant to be lived out alone. Jesus Christ has designed His church to be a gathered community, a collection of various members with differing gifts, all combined into one body. Our Heavenly Father has designed us to be an interdependent family. And for anyone who may be thinking that this kind of an interdependent model is highly unlikely to ever succeed, let’s be clear,

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<sup>6</sup> Timothy Keller, *Romans 8-16 For You*, The Good Book Co., India, 2015, p. 109.

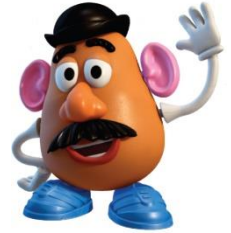
<sup>7</sup> “There is to be no false modesty that denies the existence of gifts or refuses to use them.” *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1911 footnote on Romans 12:6.

<sup>8</sup> “the combined power of a group of things when they are working together that is greater than the total power achieved by each working separately.”

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/synergy>

this only happens “in Christ.” Take a look at the beginning of verse 5, “so in Christ....” That’s the only way this one body will ever work!

One of my favorite illustrations for the unity of the body of Christ is Mr. Potato Head. As silly as this might sound, hear me out. God’s design for the church body comes with a built-in design of interdependence. If we resist God’s design for mutual belonging and shared purpose, then we miss out, on His good, pleasing, and perfect will. **Imagine this scenario:** Our hands and feet aren’t getting along with each other. It all started when we tripped because our shoelaces were untied, causing us to fall down and cut our hands quite seriously. Our hands are now insisting that our feet carry them to the Emergency Room so that they can get bandaged up. However, our feet are refusing to take our hands in, because we wouldn’t have tripped and fallen in the first place, if our hands had just done their job and tied our shoelaces. These individual parts refuse to serve one another the way they were designed to. Not only is it a complete mess, but it’s a missed opportunity to function in the good, pleasing, and perfect way that healthy bodies are supposed to function.



We do this same kind of thing when we fail to worship God with our spiritual gifts, when we fail to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, that’s holy and pleasing to God:

- > When our teachers don’t teach, then our children, youth, and adults don’t get fed from God’s Word. (*Our body doesn’t get food.*)
- > When our givers don’t give, then we don’t have the resources our body needs to do God’s work.
- > When our encouragers don’t encourage, then feelings of discouragement creep in and cause us to lose heart, and our body grows weary in ministry.
- > And so on...

There are two unfortunate consequences when any Christ-follower doesn’t use his/her spiritual gift. First of all...

**1 We miss our opportunity to please God.** Our spiritual gifts are given to us to help us accomplish God’s purposes on this earth and to bring Him glory. Last week Romans 12:1 called us to worship God with our lives, as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. This is our true and proper worship. The second unfortunate consequence is that...

**2 We fail to be faithful stewards of the grace that God has given us.**<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> In Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus tells His disciples “The Parable of the Talents” (Aka, The Parable of the Bags of Gold). The first two servants steward their gifts well and they share their master’s happiness. But the third servant takes what His master gave him, and buries it in the ground. The master has some harsh words for this servant, including calling him “wicked and lazy.”

1 Peter 4:10 says, “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” When we fail to worship God with our spiritual gifts, we fail to be the intended conduit of His grace toward others. We rob others of God’s blessings which are supposed to flow through us to them. Our spiritual gifts aren’t just for our own fulfillment, they’re meant to serve the needs of those around us. When we choose to worship God with our spiritual gifts, then not only is God glorified, but His kingdom is manifested on this earth.

> When those with the gift of serving serve, then the practical needs of real people are met.

> When those with the gift of mercy do it cheerfully, then the needs of those who are sick and sad and suffering are met.

> When those with the gift of leadership lead diligently, then we accomplish the mission and vision that God has set before us.

> And so on...

This leads right into our 3<sup>rd</sup> and final point...

### **Worshipping God with our spiritual gift..**

#### **III. Displays the outpouring of God’s multifaceted grace.**

Romans 12:6-8 lists 7 examples of how our spiritual gifts should be lived out, “We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.” Now this list isn’t exhaustive; in fact, none of the lists scattered throughout the New Testament are exhaustive, including the lists in 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4; and 1 Peter 4.<sup>10</sup> If we were to compile all of these various lists, they’d look something like this: serving, helping, mercy, hospitality, tongues, healing, financial giving, encouraging/exhorting, wisdom, knowledge, faith, evangelism, prophesying, teaching, pastoring, leadership, administration, healing, miraculous powers, and discernment. But even this compiled list isn’t really meant to be comprehensive. After all, what about gifts like music, intercessory prayer, or peacemaking? Couldn’t gifts like these also potentially be classified as spiritual gifts? Just because they didn’t make it onto any of the official New Testament lists, that doesn’t necessarily mean that God doesn’t distribute them to some of His people for His purposes.

What we can say about these lists, is that they’re a good representative sample of the kinds of gifts that God gives to His people. And we should also recognize that each one of these gifts displays God’s multifaceted grace. God reveals Himself to this world, through these various spiritual

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<sup>10</sup> See Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11,28-30; Ephesians 4:7-8,11-12; and 1 Peter 4:9-11.



gifts, especially when they're generously lived out, within the church, as well as outside of these church walls.

Well, that leaves us with just one closing question: **How do we determine what our particular spiritual gift is?**<sup>11 12</sup> Now, some of us already have a pretty good idea what our spiritual gift is, so we should simply worship God with it. We should fully embrace our God-given ministry and give it our best effort through the empowerment of God's spirit within us.<sup>13</sup> I would add just one caveat though: knowing our particular spiritual gift doesn't exempt us from serving in other areas:

- > Everybody can help set up and take down tables and chairs. And it doesn't hurt any of us to wash a toilet once in a while (in fact, it would probably be good for us!).
- > Every one of us can teach someone else something about God, even if it's not necessarily up in front of a big group.
- > Every one of us can give something financially, it shouldn't all fall on the shoulders of those who have the gift of giving.

But, what if we're not sure what our spiritual gift is? Well, let me suggest a few ways to prayerfully determine what ministry God may have empowered you for. To begin with...

**1) Prayerfully consider the spiritual gifts listed in Scripture.** (These are the ones that we just compiled onto one list above.) Some people have also found it helpful to take a spiritual gifts test, but there are mixed feelings out there about whether or not this is the best approach. Personally, I've found spiritual gifts tests to be a helpful tool as an initial starting point. But if we do choose to use one, it's important to use it in combination with a few other things. It's also important to be discerning about which test we use. I know Lifeway has a free version online, and we can send you the link to it, if you simply contact the church office.<sup>14</sup>

Another way of determining your spiritual gift is to...

**2) Serve in a few different ministries and see which one "clicks."** Try a variety of ministries and find out what you're good at. Pay attention to what kind of ministry brings you, and the people around you, joy. Eventually you'll probably find a ministry that's a good fit, and that will likely reveal your spiritual gifting. Don't be discouraged if you don't figure out your gift right away, hang in there and keep searching until you find it. Keep asking yourself, Where can I make a difference for God's gospel purposes in this world?

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<sup>11</sup> Back on October 8, 2017, I preached a sermon titled "Equip the Workers" from Ephesians 4:11-16. Shoot me an email @ [PastorJerry@efcbemidji.org](mailto:PastorJerry@efcbemidji.org) if you'd like a copy of that transcript.

<sup>12</sup> Here are some helpful, related articles: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-not-discover-spiritual-gifts/> and <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-do-i-discover-my-spiritual-gift/>

<sup>13</sup> See Colossians 1:28-29 and Philippians 3:12-14.

<sup>14</sup>

<https://s7d9.scene7.com/is/content/LifeWayChristianResources/Spiritual%5FGifts%5FAssessmentpdf.pdf>

A 3<sup>rd</sup> way of determining your spiritual gift is to...

**3) Ask people who know you well if there's a gift they see in you.** It's pretty tough for us to be genuinely objective about ourselves. But as we encourage each other, and spur one another on toward love and good deeds, we begin to discern each other's strengths and weaknesses. So don't be afraid to ask the people who know you best what spiritual gift they may see in you, or what ministry they think you might be good at.

After all this, if you're still not sure, then...

**4) Try the "Wedding Cake Test."** It begins by imagining yourself at your best friend's wedding. You want the very best for them and their new spouse, and you're working hard to make sure that their special day goes perfectly. That's when you look across the room and see the wedding cake being delivered to the church. It's one of those gorgeous, multi-tiered cakes with the little bride/groom figurines on the top. All of sudden, one of the guys who's carrying the cake into the reception hall TRIPS on a frayed edge of the carpet. The cake crashes to the ground, completely ruined!

Here's the test: What's your immediate, instinctive reaction?

> Do you grab some cleaning supplies and begin cleaning up the mess? If so, you may have the gift of serving.

> If your reaction is to salvage as much of the cake as possible, you may have the gift of helping.

> If it's to run out and grab a new cake, you may have the gift of hospitality.

> If it's to run over to the bride and give her a hug, and offer her a tissue, you may have the gift of encouragement.

> If it's to encourage the guy who tripped, by reassuring him that it could have happened to anyone, you may have the gift of mercy.

> If it's to offer to buy a new cake, or to make a donation toward new carpeting, you may have the gift of giving.<sup>15</sup>

You get the idea. When you first imagined that cake crashing to the ground, whichever problem stuck out to you, is a pretty good clue as to what your spiritual gift may be. Looking beyond the wedding cake test, whatever problems in this world trouble us most deeply, can be a window into discovering our particular spiritual gift. ***And once you've determined what your God-given ministry is, DON'T neglect your gift! Worship God with your life, by worshipping Him with the spiritual gift that He's given you!***

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<sup>15</sup> > If your response is to begin a training program for safer ways to transport cakes, you may have the gift of teaching. > If you saw the whole thing coming, before it even happened, you may have the gift of prophecy. (And, you could have warned us!)