



5. A Passion for Gifts 1 (Romans 12:1-8)

→ The Giving God

We have been exploring over the past few months a subject I have called *Heart of Service*. We have a Saviour who is a Servant King, who did not come to be served but to serve and give His life a ransom for many. We are a people created to serve and have entered into the service of God. We are called to serve one another as believers and called to serve others as Jesus has served us so that others may know the freedom we have in Christ and find the same eternal relationship in Him that we do. Being in the service of God is about obedience – doing His will.

All this is done against the backdrop of a God who has given even though we have not deserved it. The passage we had read for us in Ephesians again underlines the effort that God went to to secure our redemption. He's not been mean about it either: *And not just barely free, either. Abundantly free! He thought of everything, provided for everything we could possibly need, letting us in on the plans he took such delight in making.* We have a Master who freely gives to His servants all the benefits of His household – now that isn't something you get if you are a servant or employee – most masters or employers try to give you the *minimum* possible; but here we have a God who gives liberally and generously. Interestingly, the Greek for grace is *charis* and the Greek for gifts is *charismata*.

Things people say when they receive a gift

"Well, well, well, now, there's a gift!"

"Hey, as long as I don't have to feed it, or clean up after it, or put batteries in it, I'm happy!"

"You know, I always wanted one of these! Jog my memory -- what's it called again?"

"You know what? -- I'm going to find a special place to put this!"

"Boy, you don't see craftsmanship like that every day!"

"And it's such an interesting color too!"

"You shouldn't have! I mean it -- you really shouldn't have!"

What do these have in common - you really shouldn't have!" They're unwanted gifts! Why tell you all this? Because we have a God who lavishes us with gifts – gifts beyond human value – and we often treat them as worthless and unwanted! What sort of gifts does God give? The gift of His presence, the gift of His Son, the gift of eternal life and gifts that allow us to serve Him and His church.

Take a look at this. It's a generator. It's my birthday present. It's quite handy in power cuts and when we take our caravan away from mains electrics because it can generate 240V mains electricity. I think it's a nice colour too. It's a nice addition to any caravan site I think you'll agree. I'm grateful for the gift, but do you know what? It's completely useless unless I pull the recoil and start it. We have received spiritual gifts from God for us to be effective in service, but they are no good unless we USE them.

It's the same with the gifts that God has given us. We are called to service and God always equips us for service. What can we learn from the passage we had read to us?

4 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 who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

We' ve looked at the 1 Corinthians equivalent of this in a previous sermon. We are all part of one body *in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others* We are all embers of a body. Let' s not get the wrong idea about members here. We' re not members of a club – or a Baptist church for that matter – but in Christ we are members of one body – members here is the word *melos* which means limb or body part. If you believe this is the local church fellowship that God has brought you to then you are part of this body. You have a role and function here. If you don' t know your function here, or know it and choose not to exercise it, then the church is disabled. How many of you have had a fall and lost the use of a limb. You struggle around on crutches or with your arm in a sling!

That' s what churches can be like. We can hobble around as a church with a spiritual zimmer frame when God has made us to run a marathon and to win the race and receive the prize. Yet God has equipped each of us with a gift so we can fulfil the function in the body God has appointed us to do – to serve where He desires us to serve. What do we learn from this passage?

◆ Gifts are supernaturally given

3 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 judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

God gives us gifts – spiritual gift. Someone once defined these as: A Spiritual Gift Is A Supernatural Ability Given To Christians To Serve One Another. The gift may well relate to the natural talents you have. Something like prophesying is pretty obviously supernatural – people speak forth what God is saying through them. But prophesying is put together with others – serving, teaching, encouraging, contributing to the needs of others, leadership, showing mercy. We may have a talent for some of these but gifts from God are going to take us beyond those abilities as we shall see.

◆ Gifts are given according to God' s grace

6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.

In the case of these gift, they are grace given. God equips us to do His will by freely giving us the gift without prior merit. What this means is that you don' t have to reach a spiritual level to have a gift, you' re already equipped. You just have to use it! That' s your bit. It' s like the generator. It stands there looking pretty and useless until it is fired up – then it produces electricity.

We are all different. You may not have my gift and I may not have yours. But we are put together as part of one body so that we may complement and supplement one another and build up the people of God. The gifts are designed to be used together to make the body function – there is no such thing as a “lone ranger” in the church – our gifts will build one another up and extend God' s kingdom as we use them together.

◆ Gifts operate according to the measure of faith God has given us

3 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 judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

6 If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. 7 If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; 8 if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

So, we are called to serve using the equipment God has given. To make the gift effective we have to use it – rather like me and my generator. But to use it requires a step of faith. You may believe God has gifted you, but you don't make the gift effective unless you take a step of faith. Remember the example of the chair. You may believe it will hold your weight, but until you sit on it, you'll never know. You will never know the extent of the grace God has given you until you try to use it. And where does the faith come to do it. You don't even have to dig deep inside you – because God gives that to you too. If you see someone operating their gifts, then it isn't because they are super-Christians, it's because they have taken on board the grace God has given them and moved according to the measure of the faith God has given them. And that can be yours too. Don't wait to be Super-Christian. That time will never come! Take what God offers and walk in it!

Operating in God's gifts is part of the transformation God wants to bring in each of our lives

12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.

This kind of brings us full circle again to where we started a few weeks ago. As we come around the table this morning we remember God's mercy to us in the broken body and shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. As we see it, how do we respond? *offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.* For those of you with the Authorised / King James Version, those words spiritual service worship are actually translated "reasonable service". Literally, the Greek means "spiritual worship", but it's worship in a proactive sense – a service of worship. Our service is our worship – or our worship is service – we respond to His act of love by serving Him.

I've preached on this before. If you remember, we see worship not as singing and words, but something that changes or lives - *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.* It's connected to verse 1- our spiritual service of worship is all about being changed people. Do we want to worship? Do we want to do things God's way as His servants? Then we should be transformed – changed to do what we will know what God's will is so that we can obey it.

Transformation is from something to something else. I'm sure you see those Changing Room programs on TV when they change somebody's dull, drab old sitting room into something else. Usually it is a case of "what a change" and often not quite what the householder had in mind. God's ways are not our ways and the transformation He wants to bring about in our lives and in our churches is also something that maybe we never have bargained for.

But the transformation is from something else – don't be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world - *Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the*

inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you. God' s ways are not our ways – we need to let Him change us to be what he' s like. So often though, our lives are ones of conformity. Rather than recognising that God' s ways are different, it' s easy for us to make God conform to us, rather than letting Him transform us to be like Him!

We hear plenty of sermons on this don' t we. We' ve all heard the loving one another bit. We' ve all heard the bit about serving others. We' ve heard the living sacrifice bit and how that applies to us. But many Christians will always find some way of ignoring it as if it doesn' t apply to them.

Unfortunately, it' s easy to develop a kind of god is a “touchy-feely” god.

The “touchy feely god” says “It really doesn' t matter if you fall short of the mark, I' ll forgive almost anything anytime” because I haven' t really listened to the Bible and carried out what' s there.

He' s a god who says “you' re OK as you are, you' ve done your bit” when I really can' t be bothered with Christian things and have my own life to lead.

He' s a god who isn' t too bothered that I never get to prayer meetings because I pray at home – occasionally.

He' s a god who says it' s OK not to be a witness to those who are lost because “someone else will tell them and besides, it' s their own hard luck if they go to hell – even if that exists at all.”

That is not the God of the Bible. Our God is mighty and powerful. Our God transforms lives. Our God redeems. Our God is love. And He' s the God that challenges us with uncomfortable things – because He wants us to be people who are transformed into His likeness – people who do His good, pleasing and perfect will. People who will serve. People who will take the gift God has given to them according to His grace and use it.

You may be thinking - “Not him again going on about service. I' m too old. I' m retired. I don' t have the energy any more. Too true We all slow down as we age. But our gifts and our function is all connected to the grace God gives you. Just because you can' t do what you could 20 years ago does not mean God had retired you and thrown you on some sort of spiritual scrapheap. You had a calling and a function. God had changed that function and by His grace allows you and equips you to do something else. We still have the tools – we may just be called to use them in a different way. My generator produces 230V current, but it can also charge 12V batteries. Same generator, different task. We' ll keep that in mind for next week.

As an aside, I can only find one reference to retirement in Scripture: *Numbers 8:23 The LORD said to Moses, 24 “This applies to the Levites: Men twenty-five years old or more shall come to take part in the work at the Tent of Meeting, 25 but at the age of fifty, they must retire from their regular service and work no longer. 26 They may assist their brothers in performing their duties at the Tent of Meeting, but they themselves must not do the work. This, then, is how you are to assign the responsibilities of the Levites.”* I couldn' t tell you why Levites retired, but what we can see is that after they did, they still had a role to perform, so that the younger men who could do the work could benefit from their knowledge and experience.

What is God calling you to this morning? Do you know. If not, ask Him to reveal it to you. I haven' t looked at the gifts in any detail yet – that' s for next time!

However if you do know your gift and are not walking in it, then why not? We aren' t functioning as a church because your limb is not able to move properly. Let' s ask Him to minister to us this morning as we come around the table.



Preached by Mark Reid, Swaffham Baptist Church, 17/4/05
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