

Faith and Transformation

Devotional Reading: [Ezekiel 11:17–21](#)

Background Scripture: [Romans 12:3–8](#)

[Romans 12:3–8](#)

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 judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴ 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. ⁶ 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; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ 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.



Key Text

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.—**Romans 12:6a**

Faith That Pleases God

Unit 2: Learning About Faith

Lessons 6–9

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List several spiritual gifts.
2. Compare and contrast the printed text with the gift lists in **1 Corinthians 12** and **Ephesians 4**.
3. Create a plan to use a spiritual gift more effectively.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Where's My X-ray?
- B. Lesson Context

I. How to Think (Romans 12:3–5)

- A. About Self (v. 3)
- B. About Others (vv. 4–5)

Team Moon

II. How to Serve (Romans 12:6–8)

- A. With Well-Defined Gifts (vv. 6–8a)
- B. With Less-Defined Gifts (v. 8b–8d)

Striking Mercy

Conclusion

- A. All Gifts Matter
- B. Your Gift(s)?
- C. Prayer
- D. Thought to Remember

How to Say It

Beatitudes	Bee- <i>a</i> -tuh-toods (<i>a</i> as in <i>mat</i>).
<i>caveat emptor</i> (Latin)	ka-vee-ought em-tor.
Claudius	<i>Claw</i> -dee-us.
Colossians	Kuh- <i>losh</i> -unz.
Corinthians	Ko- <i>rin</i> -thee-unz (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).
Ephesians	Ee- <i>fee</i> -zhunz.
Galatians	Guh- <i>lay</i> -shunz.
Gentile	<i>Jen</i> -tile.
Pentecost	<i>Pent</i> -ih-kost.
Titus	<i>Ty</i> -tus.

Introduction

A. Where’s My X-ray?

My four-year-old son, Valor, is fascinated by the human body. His favorite book to have me read is about the human body and its different parts. He loves opening the little tabs in the book to reveal the internal organs and bones of the “body.” A local medical clinic recently provided free medical exams, and Valor was excited. He listened carefully as the doctor’s assistant explained how the spine and nerves fit together. He got very excited about getting an X-ray, and that’s where things got difficult. He wasn’t old enough for an X-ray, but his sister and brother were.

That upset him. He wanted the picture of how his body fit together! For much of the trip home, he begged us to go back to get his X-ray picture taken.

It’s too bad that Christians don’t concern themselves this much with how the body of Christ fits together. Maybe if we did, we would have healthier churches as members appreciated each other more.

B. Lesson Context

The book of Romans was written by Paul in about AD 58, probably toward the end of his third missionary journey. At that point, Paul had not yet been to Rome, but greatly wished to visit ([Romans 1:11–15](#); [15:23–24](#)). He would do so, but in chains as a prisoner, as [Acts 27–28](#) records.

He made it to Rome by about AD 61 but remained under house arrest, unable to move about the city as he might have wished ([Acts 28:16](#), [20](#), [23](#), [30](#)). Paul wrote his letter to the church at Rome to introduce himself and his teaching prior to a personal visit there. The church likely had been established not long after the day of Pentecost, some three decades earlier ([2:1](#)). Some of the Jews who heard Peter’s sermon that day were from Rome ([2:10](#)), and it’s easy to imagine that they were the ones who started the church after returning home to Rome. There can be little doubt that the Roman church had heard of Paul ([28:15](#)) and looked forward to meeting him.

One of the great debates concerning the context of the book of Romans is the demographic composition of the Roman church when Paul wrote. Were the members primarily of Jewish background, of Gentile background, or evenly split? Although it is highly likely that the church was founded by believers of Jewish background, Paul seems to suggest that the church was composed primarily of Gentiles (see [Romans 1:5–6, 13](#)). The Roman emperor Claudius expelled Jews from Rome about AD 49 ([Acts 18:2](#)), which would have resulted in believers of Gentile background coming into greater prominence.

But by the time that Paul wrote this letter, Claudius had died and the expulsion order was rescinded, allowing Jews to return to Rome. How many believers of Jewish background constituted the Roman church is uncertain, but Paul does spend [Romans 9:1–11:12](#) speaking about the nation of Israel. Even so, that section depicts a direct address to Gentiles in [11:13](#). The weight of the evidence therefore points to a Gentile majority in the church in Rome.

The book of Romans falls into two major sections. The first part, [Romans 1–11](#), features some of the most doctrinally heavy thoughts in all of Scripture. A shift comes with [Romans 12–16](#), which addresses how Christians should then live in light of the truth of those doctrines. Today’s lesson comes from this second section.

I. How to Think

([Romans 12:3–5](#))

A. About Self (v. 3)

3a. For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought,

This verse starts with a conjunction by which Paul introduces the logical explanation for what he has already said. The ability to discern the “what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” ([Romans 12:2](#)) begins with the correct thought of ourselves. The word *for* seems to introduce the way people should think of themselves in the appropriate manner: by being “made new in the attitude of your minds” ([Ephesians 4:23](#)). Paul is able to offer this imperative because of *the grace given* to him—an expression he never tires of using (see [Romans 15:15](#); [1 Corinthians 15:10](#); [Galatians 2:9](#); [Ephesians 3:7](#); [4:7](#)). That phrase establishes his authority as coming from God.

3b. but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

For a person to *think* soberly is to think rationally and appropriately (compare [Mark 5:15](#); [2 Corinthians 5:13](#)). Paul introduced the common standard of measurement by which to evaluate oneself: it is the measure of *faith*. But there is debate over what kind of faith Paul had in mind. The two main possibilities are the “common faith” that every Christian has (see [Titus 1:4](#)) and “distributed” faith, which is given for differing capacities for service (see [2 Corinthians 10:13](#)). There are strong arguments both ways. But notice that in either case, the measure is not that of one person compared to another person—the natural and unhealthy tendency.

What Do You Think?

How do you determine whether you think too highly of yourself or underestimate yourself?

Digging Deeper

How will you use an accountability partner to help consider yourself with sober judgment?

B. About Others (vv. 4–5)

4. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function,

Paul uses this analogy to the human *body* also in [1 Corinthians 12:12–14](#) and [Ephesians 4:16](#). It should be obvious that not all parts of the *body* perform the same function. A hand does not function as an ear and vice versa.

5. so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Paul desired his readers to think in terms of *one* as a collective singular of *many*. As Christians cannot serve effectively apart from other Christians, so also *one body* cannot operate independently of the head, who is *Christ*. These themes are so important that Paul repeats them in several places (see [1 Corinthians 12:27](#); [Ephesians 1:22–23](#); [4:12, 25](#); [Colossians 1:18, 24](#)).

What Do You Think?

How do you discern your function within the body of Christ that is the church?

Digging Deeper

How do [Ephesians 4:11–16](#) and [1 Peter 4:10–11](#) inform your process of discernment?

Team Moon

Trivia question: How many people landed *Apollo 11* on the moon in 1969? According to Catherine Thimmesh, the answer is 400,000!

In her book *Team Moon*, Thimmesh highlights the diverse roles that were essential to the mission. Seamstresses stitched 22 layers of fabric on each spacesuit. Engineers designed an array of systems, which were then built by skilled technicians. Safety inspectors, physicians, mission-control personnel, and others made the mission possible and successful. But as people gathered around their television sets to watch the drama unfold, they saw only three astronauts in space and only two of them land on the lunar surface.

My wife and I used to be missionaries in rural Africa, which in some ways felt like being an astronaut in an unknown world. We also stood in the spotlight as we reported to churches. But when our daughter was born with severe cerebral palsy, our roles changed—we became part of the support team based in the United States.

I'm ashamed to admit that I once thought the overseas missionary role felt more important than the roles of the support team. The accountants, trainers, fundraisers, administrators, and media cre-

ators are all members of the same body; if they weren't essential, they wouldn't be on the team. Also members of the team are the thousands who pray and donate funds. Which mistake are you more likely to make: overrating your role in the body of Christ or underrating it?

—N. G.

II. How to Serve

(Romans 12:6–8)

A. With Well-Defined Gifts (vv. 6–8a)

6. 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;

The echo of [1 Corinthians 12:4–11](#) is quite strong here and in the two verses that follow (compare [1 Peter 4:10–11](#)). With the word *prophesying*, Paul begins a list of seven *different gifts*, which fall into a group of four and a group of three. The gift of prophecy is also found in [1 Corinthians 12:28](#) and [Ephesians 4:11](#). Paul prized the appropriate display of this gift (see [1 Corinthians 14](#)).

When we see the word *prophecy*, we often think of predicting the future (as in [Acts 11:28](#); [21:10–12](#)). But that is not its main impulse in the New Testament era; rather, prophecy more often involves proclaiming information divinely revealed for the church's edification (compare [1 Corinthians 14:3, 24–25, 30](#)). Moreover, the message of a prophet was evaluated by others having the same gift ([14:29–32](#)).

We pause here for a caution: as Paul begins his listing of spiritual gifts, it is tempting to jump in hastily and compile a list of such gifts according to this text and others. But to do so runs the risk of missing the bigger picture. That bigger picture is that spiritual gifts serve as an example of a church that is united in its diversity. Spiritual gifts are not given merely to bless the person receiving the gift, but to build up the church as a whole ([Ephesians 4:11–12](#)). Most of all, these gifts are intended to be displays of love between believers (see [1 Corinthians 13](#)).

What Do You Think?

What steps will you take to either (1) discern your spiritual gift or (2) discern how to use your gift for the church?

Digging Deeper

Who will you ask for insight and guidance in this regard?

7a. if it is serving, then serve;

We move to the second gift in Paul's grouping of four. "Service" was the usual way to describe the work that Christians did on behalf of others. As Paul uses this word, he can refer to various types of service:

- Christian ministry in general
([Romans 15:25](#); [Philemon 13](#));

- The ministry of Christ
(Romans 15:8; Galatians 2:17);
- Specific Christian ministries
(Romans 11:13; 2 Corinthians 9:12–13);
- Ministry of the office of deacon
(Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8–13);
- Ministry of a secular authority
(Romans 13:4).

Since the other gifts Paul names in our text involve specific functions, he was likely thinking of a specific gift of service that qualified a person to be in the office of deacon.

7b. if it is teaching, then teach;

The gift of *teaching* is also noted in 1 Corinthians 12:28–29 and Ephesians 4:11. In the text before us, Paul is focusing on the person who teaches rather the gift of teaching as such. Why he makes this switch is unclear. What is clear, however, is that teaching is distinct from prophesying. Prophecy is based on revealing the information that God has placed in the prophet’s mouth; teaching, on the other hand, involves communicating the truth of the gospel (see 2 Timothy 2:2; 3:10).



Visual for [Lesson 9](#). Point to this visual and ask for volunteers to share how their spiritual gifts can be used to serve the church.

Teaching was critical for the first-century church, where many people were not formally educated. They learned from auditory instruction rather than reading. Therefore, it was and is a primary task of the eldership ([1 Timothy 3:2](#); [5:17](#)).

8a. if it is to encourage, then give encouragement;

We come to the fourth gift in Paul’s subgrouping of four well-defined spiritual gifts. He uses the verb translated *encourage* and the noun translated *encouragement* a total of 80 times across his letters. The primary ways he uses the verb in its 60 occurrences are usually translated “comfort(s)” (example: twice in [2 Corinthians 1:4](#)), “urge(d)” (example: [2:8](#)), or “encourage” (as here). The 20 times he uses the noun are usually translated as “comfort” (example: [1:4](#)), “appeal” (example: [8:17](#)), or “encouragement” (as here).

Putting this all together, we get the idea that Paul is challenging those with this gift to use it in terms of being a bit stronger than merely “requesting” something of someone else but a bit less strong than “commanding” that person.

B. With Less-Defined Gifts (v. 8b–8d)

8b. if it is giving, then give generously;

We come now to the first in a subgrouping of three spiritual gifts—gifts that are less-defined than the previous four. To give is to share with another or the church what one has. This is an expectation of all believers ([1 Corinthians 16:2](#)). The word translated *generously* occurs eight times in the New Testament, always in Paul’s letters (examples: [2 Corinthians 8:2](#); [9:11](#), [13](#)); other translations are “integrity” ([1:12](#)) and “sincere” or “sincerity” of heart ([11:3](#); [Ephesians 6:5](#); [Colossians 3:22](#)). Understanding “generously” to reflect “singleness of purpose” seems to be the idea. There are to be no ulterior motives for giving (contrast [Acts 5:1–4](#)).

What Do You Think?

In what ways can a believer utilize the gift of giving without always focusing on financial giving?

Digging Deeper

Who can be the recipient of your non-financial giving?

8c. if it is to lead, do it diligently;

As with the word translated *generously* ([Romans 12:8b](#), above), the Greek word translated *lead* occurs eight times in the New Testament, always in Paul’s letters. It is used of church leadership ([1 Thessalonians 5:12](#); [1 Timothy 5:17](#)), family leadership or household management ([3:4](#), [5](#), [12](#)), and self-management ([Titus 3:8](#), [14](#)). The overall idea is that of “one who presides.” To be such a person is to be in control in a godly sense.

8d. if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

To show *mercy* requires both action and a proper attitude. As such, showing mercy involves more

than merely offering lip-service sympathy (compare [1 John 3:17–18](#)) or forgiveness. In the Beatitudes, Jesus stated, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” ([Matthew 5:7](#)).

No specific ways of being merciful are listed in the text before us, and Paul seems intentionally to want the general sense. As one who had received mercy, the importance of being merciful was quite personal to him ([1 Timothy 1:13, 16](#)). Indeed, the mercy we ourselves have received from God is the basis for our own acts of mercy, as Jesus’ parable of the unmerciful servant makes clear ([Matthew 18:21–35](#)). We see the cheerfulness aspect of showing mercy also reflected in giving ([2 Corinthians 9:7](#)), such giving being a specific kind of merciful act.

At this point, this list of spiritual gifts ends. But the very next verse ([Romans 12:9](#)) relates love to spiritual gifts in much the same way [1 Corinthians 12–14](#) does. Love is the touchstone for how any spiritual gift is used.

As we wrap up our consideration of this subgrouping of three gifts, we should consider a possible implication regarding these gifts being less-defined than other gifts. That implication is that these three are expected of *all* Christians. Think about it: Shouldn’t everyone give with sincerity ([2 Corinthians 9:7](#))? Shouldn’t everyone rule or manage at least his or her own life to keep from being unproductive ([2 Peter 1:5–8](#))? Shouldn’t everyone be merciful ([James 2:13](#))?

What Do You Think?

How might you demonstrate the gift of mercy in the upcoming week?

Digging Deeper

What might prevent believers from wanting to show mercy, even if they have the gift for doing so?

Striking Mercy

One of the earliest displays of mercy that I remember came during recess in the sixth grade. As the group played soccer, two kids ran up to the soccer ball and kicked it at the same time. One child lost his balance mid-kick and fell down to the ground. It was truly an accident—and comical at that. But the embarrassed child did not think so. It seemed that he thought that the other child had committed a grievous error. As soon as the child got off the ground, he stormed to the other child and struck him in the face.

However, the hit child didn’t retaliate; he didn’t show any anger or fear. Instead, he just picked up his glasses and kept playing soccer. No fight would occur that day. The coach saw the incident and pulled the other kid off the field to address his behavior. What did that youngster need in that moment: correction or mercy? Maybe he needed both! (Compare and contrast [Acts 15:36–40](#).)

Are you in a position of being able to extend mercy to someone else? If so, do so cheerfully!

—N. G.

Conclusion

A. All Gifts Matter

We understand that all spiritual gifts are important. But at the same time, we know that not all such gifts are equal (see [1 Corinthians 12:31; 14:1](#)) and that not all believers are equally gifted (see [Matthew 25:14–15](#)).

As a result, our natural tendency is to pay more attention to the gifts that are more visible, more “out front” to the public. The highly visible preacher of the church usually gets paid more than the less visible custodian who cleans the church. But here’s where Paul’s illustration of body members working together (unity in diversity) comes in per [Romans 12:4–5](#): I don’t think you would want to go to a dirty and smelly church any more than you would want to go to a church with a horrible preacher! The functions of one’s hands are much more varied, useful, and visible than are the functions of one’s elbow. But a nonfunctioning elbow will severely limit how the hand can function (compare [1 Corinthians 12:12–27](#)).

Pride is a danger to those having the more visible gifts (see [Proverbs 16:18](#)). Also a danger is that those who have the less visible gifts won’t use them, perhaps figuratively “burying” them ([Matthew 25:25](#)). But just as no human body functions to its highest potential unless all of its parts work together, so also the church—the body of Christ—does not function at full potential until all of its members use their spiritual gifts. The cure (or preventative) for both pride of gifts and non-use of gifts is [Luke 17:10](#): “So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’”

B. Your Gift(s)?

A popular tool that churches and ministries have turned to since at least the 1980s is a spiritual-gifts assessment inventory. I took several of these inventories (or “tests”) during my time as a student in Bible college and seminary. Most of the time, they told me what I suspected already: that teaching was one of my spiritual gifts.

Occasionally, an inventory would indicate that I had a secondary gift that I didn’t realize. One such result was that I had the gift of administration. I found that to be exceptionally funny, given the reality of the piles of books, articles, and papers piled on my desk, floor, and couch!

This goes to show that these inventories aren’t perfect—they can even be misleading. The axiom *caveat emptor* (“let the buyer beware”) applies in more ways than one!

An assumption behind those inventories is that helping people identify what their giftings are will mean that those who have been thus enlightened will automatically start using those gifts. But that is not always so. People will need encouragement to use and otherwise develop their spiritual gifts. Sometimes, people need the wisdom and insight of others to help discern which giftings are present.

Another assumption is that such inventories are even needed for people to be able to identify their areas of spiritual giftedness. A more accurate indicator may be personal experience. What types of Christian service do your personal experiences tell you that you have been best at? Where have you fallen flat?

C. Prayer

Father, you have called all of your servants to serve. Help us to realize our gifts and give us the courage to develop and use them for your glory. Help us to remember that no matter what our gifts are, we are all members of one body, and that no one is unimportant to your church and to you. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

D. Thought to Remember

Know your spiritual gifts and use them with humility.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with *NIV Bible Student* (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the *NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition*).

Into the Lesson

Bring to class time a game or toy in multiple pieces, such as a jigsaw puzzle, a disassembled toy, or a small model kit. Distribute pieces to each learner so that everyone has at least one component. Instruct the class to work together to assemble the pieces into a complete product. After no more than 10 minutes, lead a whole-class discussion regarding the ease or difficulty of putting together the object with many people involved.

Alternative. Divide participants into groups of three. Distribute copies of the “Common Goal” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have groups work together to complete the activity as indicated before bringing the groups together to talk about their experiences.

Say, “God has given us value and purpose, but he has also designed us to need each other. In today’s lesson, think about how this truth is especially relevant in the church, among the body of believers.”

Into the Word

Option. Divide learners into pairs to play a game of “10 Questions.” Invite each learner to think of a way for a person to serve in the church (examples: play an instrument, teach a class, etc.). Tell learners to keep their examples to themselves. Partners will go back and forth, asking each other yes-or-no questions to determine the service thought of by their partner. Each learner will ask up to 10 questions until one learner can correctly guess. Conclude by challenging learners to identify one thing they can do to serve other church members.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud [Romans 12:3–5](#). Ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1—In what ways is the human body a fitting comparison to the church? 2—Why is it essential to recognize what we can do well? 3—What is significant about acknowledging the things we cannot do

well?

Ask a volunteer to read aloud [Romans 12:6–8](#). Divide learners into seven small groups and assign each group one of the following spiritual gifts to discuss: (1) prophesying, (2) ministering/serving, (3) teaching, (4) exhorting/encouraging, (5) giving, (6) leading, (7) showing mercy. Ask groups to discuss the following questions in their group: 1—What might the church be like without the presence of this gift? 2—What might the church be like if this were the only gift present? 3—How might the church encourage people with this gift? 4—How do [1 Corinthians 12:12–31](#) and [Ephesians 4:1–16](#) help inform the use of this gift? After 10 minutes, have a volunteer from each group share their conclusions with the whole class.

Into Life

Divide learners into groups of three. Distribute index cards and pens to learners. Ask each group member to list spiritual gifts that they recognize in the other members of their group and write examples of those gifts in action in that person. Ask each learner to write down the spiritual gifts others identified he or she has. Give the groups five minutes to brainstorm different ways each group member can use his or her gifts within the church. Challenge learners to consider one gift identified in them and think of a way they can practice that gift more effectively in the coming week. Close class with group members praying for encouragement for their group to use their gifts in service to God in the upcoming week. (*Option:* Set aside time at the beginning of next week’s lesson for learners to share how their plans worked.)

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Badge of Gifts” activity from the activity page. Have learners complete the activity as indicated. Allow time after the pages have been completed for partners to pray for each other. Start next week’s lesson with participants sharing about how they are sharing their gifts to help the church.