

The Body of Christ, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 5: Gifts and Service for the Common Good

Romans 12:3-8

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The doctrine in view is the priesthood and service of every member: that God distributes gifts of grace across the whole body so that every Christian has a role to play for the common good. Paul roots this in two truths, humility (sober self-assessment by the measure of faith God assigns) and unity (we are one body, members of one another). The diversity of gifts serves the unity of the body, never personal status. What is at stake is a right understanding of ministry: not a clergy who serve while the rest watch, but a whole body in which every member works. This stands against both pride (treating gifts as personal achievements or grounds for superiority) and passivity (leaving the work to the few).

Keep two emphases doctrinally clear. First, the gifts here are functions of grace for service, listed plainly as teaching, serving, exhorting, giving, leading, and showing mercy, the ordinary, abiding ministries of the body, not the miraculous sign gifts addressed in Lesson 3. You need not raise the cessation question here unless asked; this passage is about the everyday service of every member. Second, gifts are stewardship, not status (1 Peter 4:10). They are given, not earned, and given for others, not for self. This guards against both boasting and the false humility that refuses to serve.

The formational aim is to move every student from spectator to servant. Many believers carry distorted self-assessments, some thinking too highly of themselves to do humble work, others thinking too lowly to believe they have anything to offer. Paul's call to sober judgment corrects both. Help each student identify a gift and a concrete way to use it, and press not only the act of service but its manner: generosity, zeal, and cheerfulness. The goal is a congregation where every member is engaged, serving gladly with what God has given, so the whole body grows.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul begins this section on service with a warning: "do not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment" (v. 3). Why does Paul ground all Christian service in humility, and what happens to service in the body when pride rather than sober self-assessment is at the root?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul opens the subject of gifts with humility, not ability. Before he lists a single gift, he warns against thinking too highly of ourselves and calls for “sober judgment.” The order is deliberate: humility is the soil in which healthy service grows.

Explain why pride poisons service. When service springs from ego, it becomes a platform for self-display, breeds comparison and rivalry, and despises humbler roles. The gifted become proud and the less visible become resentful. Pride turns the body into a competition.

Note the link to the measure of faith “God has assigned.” Even our capacity to serve is a gift assigned by God, not a personal achievement. This cuts the root of boasting before it can grow.

Apply it pastorally. The most gifted servants in a healthy church are often the most humble, precisely because they know their gifts are grace. Sober self-assessment frees us to serve without needing to be seen.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Humility as the foundation of all Christian service.
- Sober self-assessment by the measure of faith God assigns.
- Pride as the poison that turns service into self-display.
- Even our capacity to serve as a gift, not an achievement.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul start with humility before listing any gifts?
- What happens to service in a church when pride is at the root?
- How does knowing our gifts are assigned by God cut the root of boasting?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul tells each member to think with “sober judgment,” neither inflating nor despising himself. Which direction do you more often drift, thinking too highly of yourself or too lowly? How does that distortion affect your willingness and ability to serve?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question takes “sober judgment” into honest self-knowledge. Paul warns against both directions: thinking too highly, and (implied) thinking too lowly. Both are failures of sober judgment, and both hinder service.

Help students see how each distortion disables service. Thinking too highly makes us proud, unteachable, and unwilling to do humble work. Thinking too lowly makes us believe we have nothing to offer, so we withdraw. Both are forms of self-focus.

Offer the corrective: sober judgment looks away from self to God's assignment. The question is not "how impressive am I?" or "how worthless am I?" but "what has God given me to do?"

Aim for honest self-assessment leading to action: naming the usual distortion and one way to act on the truth that God has given them a real, usable measure of faith.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The two distortions: thinking too highly and too lowly.
- How each distortion disables service.
- Sober judgment as looking to God's assignment, not self.
- Honest self-assessment that leads to action.

Discussion Prompts

- Which way do you more often drift, too high or too low?
- How does that distortion affect your willingness to serve?
- What is the sober truth about what God has given you?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul says we are "one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (vv. 4-5), and on that basis we have differing gifts. Why does Paul ground the diversity of gifts in the unity of the body, and what does it mean that your gift belongs not just to you but to the whole body?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul grounds the diversity of gifts in the unity of the body: "we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (vv. 4-5). The gifts differ, but they belong to one body.

Stress that this echoes 1 Corinthians 12 (Lesson 3). The same logic applies: many members, one body, different functions, mutual belonging. Diversity exists to serve unity, not to fragment it.

Draw out the striking phrase "members one of another." We belong not only to Christ but to each other. Your gift is not private property; it belongs to the whole body, given for their good.

Apply it against both individualism and self-importance. Because we are members of one another, hoarding or neglecting a gift is not a private matter; it deprives the body. And because the gift is for the body, it can never be a ground for lording over others.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Diversity of gifts grounded in the unity of the body.
- Believers as "members one of another," belonging to each other.

- Gifts as belonging to the whole body, not private property.
- Neglect of a gift as a loss to the body, not a private matter.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul ground differing gifts in the unity of the body?
- What does it mean that you are a member of the others, not just of Christ?
- How does it change things to see your gift as belonging to the whole body?

Question 4

Student Question:

Paul assumes every member has a gift to use, not just leaders or the specially talented. What gift or ability do you think God has given you for the good of the body, and what keeps you from using it more fully?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question presses Paul's assumption that every member has a gift. Paul does not address only leaders; he assumes the whole body is gifted and expected to serve.

Help students actually identify a gift. Many have never named theirs. Offer Paul's own list as a starting point: teaching, serving, encouraging, giving, leading, showing mercy. Ask what they find themselves drawn to, what others affirm in them, what needs they notice.

Address the obstacles to using it: lack of confidence, busyness, fear of commitment, never having been asked. Naming the obstacle is the first step past it.

Aim for a concrete connection between a named gift and a real need in the body, with a first step toward using it more fully.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Every member gifted, not only leaders.
- Identifying one's own gift, often for the first time.
- Obstacles that keep gifts unused.
- Connecting a gift to a real need in the body.

Discussion Prompts

- What gift do you think God has given you for the body?
- What keeps you from using it more fully?
- Where in the body might that gift meet a real need?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul says our gifts differ “according to the grace given to us” (v. 6). What does it mean that our gifts are matters of grace rather than personal achievement, and how should that truth shape the way we view both our own gifts and the gifts of others?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul says gifts differ “according to the grace given to us” (v. 6). The word for gifts is rooted in the word for grace. Gifts are grace-gifts, given by God, not produced by us.

Draw out the freeing effect on how we view our own gifts. If a gift is grace, we cannot boast in it any more than a window can boast in the light it lets through. We can only be grateful and faithful.

Draw out the effect on how we view others' gifts. If gifts are grace, then envy and comparison are out of place. God distributes as He chooses (1 Corinthians 12:11). Another's gift is God's grace to the body, to be celebrated, not coveted.

Apply it to stewardship. Because gifts are grace given for others, we are stewards, not owners (1 Peter 4:10). The question is not whether we earned them but whether we are using them faithfully.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Gifts as grace-gifts, given by God, not personal achievements.
- Gratitude and faithfulness rather than boasting.
- Envy and comparison ruled out by the grace of gifts.
- Stewardship: faithful use of what we did not earn.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that our gifts are matters of grace, not achievement?
- How should that shape the way we view our own gifts?
- How does it free us from envying the gifts of others?

Question 6

Student Question:

Paul lists ordinary services, teaching, serving, giving, leading, showing mercy, with no hint that some are glamorous and others lowly. Have you ever discounted a way you could serve because it seemed too ordinary or unnoticed? What would change if you believed God values the hidden joists as much as the visible facade?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question follows the ordinariness of Paul's list. Teaching, serving, giving, leading, mercy, none is presented as glamorous; all are needed. Many believers discount humble service because it goes unnoticed.

Help students confront the applause-driven heart. We are tempted to value only visible, praised service and to neglect the hidden work that actually holds a church together. God values the joists as much as the facade.

Recover the dignity of unseen service. The Lord sees in secret and rewards the faithful (Matthew 6:4; 25:21). Hidden service done for Christ is never wasted or unnoticed by Him.

Aim for one ordinary, perhaps unseen, act of service to embrace gladly, freed from the need to be noticed.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The dignity of ordinary, unnoticed service.
- The applause-driven heart that values only visible work.
- God's notice and reward of hidden faithfulness.
- Embracing humble service freed from the need to be seen.

Discussion Prompts

- Have you discounted a way to serve because it seemed too ordinary?
- What would change if you believed God values the hidden work most?
- What unseen service could you embrace gladly this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul attaches a manner to each gift: give "with generosity," lead "with zeal," show mercy "with cheerfulness" (v. 8). Why does Paul care not only that we serve but how we serve, and what does this teach about the heart God desires behind our service?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul attaches a manner to several gifts: give "with generosity," lead "with zeal," show mercy "with cheerfulness" (v. 8). He cares not only that we serve but how. The heart behind the act matters to God.

Explain why manner matters. The same act can be done in a way that blesses or wounds. Mercy shown grudgingly stings; generosity given reluctantly cheapens the gift; leadership without zeal grows slack. God wants the deed and the heart together.

Connect to the nature of God's own giving. God gives generously and cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7; James 1:5). Service in His character reflects His heart, not just His commands.

Apply it to self-examination. It is possible to do all the right things in the wrong spirit. The manner of our service reveals whether we are serving people or merely performing duties.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The manner of service: generosity, zeal, cheerfulness.
- The heart behind the act mattering to God.
- Service that reflects God's own generous, cheerful character.
- Right deeds done in the wrong spirit.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul care how we serve, not only that we serve?
- How can the same act bless or wound depending on the manner?
- What does the manner of our service reveal about our hearts?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul says the one who shows mercy should do it "with cheerfulness," not grudgingly. Where do you find yourself serving out of duty, guilt, or resentment rather than gladness? What would need to change in your heart for that service to become cheerful?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question follows "the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness." It targets service done from duty, guilt, or resentment rather than gladness.

Help students locate the grudging places. We can serve while quietly resentful, keeping score, feeling used, or acting only to silence guilt. Such service drains us and rarely blesses others.

Trace cheerfulness to its source. Cheerful service flows from gratitude for grace received and from love for Christ and His people. When service feels grim, the cure is usually upstream, at the level of what we believe about God's mercy to us.

Aim for one area where duty-bound service could become cheerful, naming what needs to change in the heart for the gladness to return.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Cheerful service versus service from duty, guilt, or resentment.
- The grudging heart that keeps score or feels used.
- Cheerfulness flowing from gratitude for grace.

- Renewing the heart upstream of the act.

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you serve out of duty or resentment rather than gladness?
- What feeds the grudging spirit in that service?
- What would need to change in your heart for it to become cheerful?

Question 9

Student Question:

This passage teaches that every member has a Spirit-given role, and the body grows only as each part does its work (compare Ephesians 4:16); yet it also rules out the idea that gifts make us independent or self-important, since they are gifts of grace for the common good. Why is it so significant that God distributes gifts widely across the whole membership rather than concentrating all ministry in a few, and what does this say about any believer who leaves the work of the body to the professionals?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block, focused on the wide distribution of gifts and the consequent responsibility of every member. God gives gifts across the whole body, and the body grows only as each part works (Ephesians 4:16).

Make the central point: there is no clergy-laity divide in which a few do ministry while the rest watch. Every member is gifted and called to serve. The New Testament knows nothing of passive members supported by professional ministers doing all the work.

Explain why God distributes gifts widely. By spreading gifts across the membership, God makes the body interdependent (Lesson 3) and ensures that the health and growth of the church depend on the many, not the few. No single person, however gifted, can be the body.

Address directly the believer who leaves the work to the professionals. Such a posture contradicts the design Paul describes. It starves the body of the member's needed contribution and leaves the few overburdened. The growth of the church is hindered when members opt out.

Balance this with order, anticipating Lesson 7. Wide participation does not mean disorder or the abolition of appointed leaders. Elders, deacons, and teachers have their God-given roles; but their role is to equip the members for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11–12), not to do it all while the members watch. Every-member service and appointed leadership go together.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Gifts distributed widely across the whole membership.
- The body growing only as each part does its work (Ephesians 4:16).

- No clergy-laity divide; every member a minister.
- The error of leaving the work of the body to the professionals.
- Every-member service alongside God-appointed leadership.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God spread gifts across the whole body rather than a few?
- What does this say about leaving the work of the church to the professionals?
- How do every-member service and appointed leadership fit together?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across Romans 12:3–8. Having seen that God has assigned you a measure of faith and a gift to use for the common good, name one specific way Jesus is calling you to put your gift to work for the body, and what is the first step?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the capstone, turning the whole passage toward a concrete step. The lesson has established that God has assigned the student a measure of faith and a gift for the common good.

Press for specificity: a named gift, a real need in the body, and a first step toward using it. Vague intentions to be more involved rarely change anything; a concrete commitment does.

Attend to the manner as well as the act. Encourage the student to serve not only faithfully but gladly, with generosity, zeal, or cheerfulness, as Paul urges.

Close on the dignity of ordinary service. Whether the gift is visible or hidden, it matters to the body and to God. Invite the student to take up the floor-joist work of the church with humble joy.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Putting a specific gift to work for the body.
- Connecting a named gift to a real need.
- Serving with the right manner, not only the right act.
- The dignity and value of ordinary service.

Discussion Prompts

- What is one specific way Jesus is calling you to use your gift for the body?
- What first step will you take, and when?
- How can you serve not only faithfully but gladly?