

The Body of Christ

Lesson 5: Gifts and Service for the Common Good -- Romans 12:3-8

Somewhere in your community right now, a building is being held up by people you will never see. Behind the walls there are studs and beams and joists, ordinary lumber that nobody admires, doing the unglamorous work of keeping the roof off your head. Nobody walks into a house and says, "What magnificent floor joists." But take them away, and the whole thing comes down. The most important work in any structure is usually the work nobody notices.

Paul knew that the same is true in the church. He had just spent eleven chapters of Romans unfolding the mercies of God, the gospel that saves Jews and Gentiles alike by grace through faith. And now, having lifted our eyes to the heights of God's mercy, he brings us down to earth with a thud: present your bodies as a living sacrifice, do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, and then, get to work serving one another with whatever God has given you.

It is a strikingly humble vision. Paul tells every member to think soberly about himself, measuring not by ego but by "the measure of faith that God has assigned." Then he says we are one body with many members, and the members do not all have the same function. Some teach, some serve, some give, some lead, some show mercy. None of these is more glamorous than the floor joists, and all of them are necessary. The church runs on the faithful, often invisible service of ordinary members doing what God gifted them to do.

Here is the quietly revolutionary thing about this passage: it assumes you have something to offer. Not someday, not when you are more mature, not if you become a preacher or an elder. Now. God has assigned you a measure of faith and given you a gift to be used for the good of His people. This lesson is about discovering what God has put in your hands and putting it to work, with humility, for the common good of the body.

Group Discussion: Most of us can name the up-front roles in a church, the preacher, the song leader, the teacher. But what are the quieter, less visible kinds of service that keep a congregation healthy, and why do those often go unnoticed and unthanked?

Personal Reflection: When you think about serving in the church, what is your honest first reaction, eagerness, guilt, a sense that you have nothing to offer, or that you are already doing too much? What does that reaction reveal about how you see yourself and your place in the body?

Read Romans 12:3-8

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?

6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: 1 Corinthians 12:7, the manifestation of the Spirit given for the common good; 1 Peter 4:10-11, as each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards; Ephesians 4:16, the body grows as each part works properly; Galatians 5:13, through love serve one another; Matthew 25:21, well done, good and faithful servant.