

The Gift of One Another

ROMANS 12:3-8

A Series of Lessons

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The Gift of One Another

ROMANS 12:3-8

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Introduction:

God established the church to bless us not burden us. **Romans 12:3-8** explains the gift of one another.

Discussion:

- I. We don't have to face life _____.
- A. "_____ are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they _____, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not _____ to lift him up!" (**Ecclesiastes 4:9-10**).
- II. Everything does not rest on _____.
- A. "For as in one _____ we have many _____, and the members do not all have the same function..." (**Romans 12:4**).
- B. "...from whom the whole body, joined and held together by _____ joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love" (**Ephesians 4:16**).
- III. We need _____.
- A. "For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more _____ than he ought to think..." (**Romans 12:3**).
- B. List some other passages that explain we need others.
- IV. Others need _____.
- A. "If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do _____ to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body" (**I Corinthians 12:15**).
- B. "But as it is, God arranged the _____ in the body, each one of them, as he _____" (**I Corinthians 12:18**).

Conclusion:

Let's not ignore the gift of one another. Let's learn to rely on it.



Introduction:

We all have a place here. Is yours the place of Discerner? Let's find out.

Discussion:

I. Am I a Discerner? (Joseph & Jethro)

Score yourself on each characteristic. (0 means this characteristic is never you, 5 means about half the time it is you, 10 means it is always you)

A. Discerners are very perceptive: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

B. Discerners can see where today's choices lead: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

C. Discerners see God's plan behind all things: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

D. Discerners have strong convictions and strict standards: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

E. Discerners see sin in relation to God: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

II. The Struggles of Discerners. (Various)

A. Discerners tend to be judgmental: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

B. Discerners can be impatient with those who don't measure up quickly: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

C. Discerners struggle with poor self-image: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

D. Discerners can think they know and see more than everyone else: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

E. Discerners can get puffed up and rely too much on their own wisdom: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Total your scores here _____

III. In the space below, list some opportunities for Discerners in the work of the congregation, among their brethren, and in their personal work to connect and evangelize:

IV. Improving your discernment (help for the non-Discerners).

A. Become _____ with Discerners.

B. Spend time in the _____.

C. _____.

D. Take time to _____ God in all things.

E. Consider the _____.

Conclusion: Are you a Discerner? Don't be embarrassed that you aren't something else. Get to work discerning. We need Discerners like you!



Introduction:

We all have a place here. Is yours the place of Server? Let's find out.

Discussion:

I. Am I a Server? (Peter's mother-in-law; Luke 4:38-39)

Assess yourself on each characteristic. (0 means it is never you, 10 means it is always you)

- A. Servers easily recognize practical needs and are quick to meet them: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- B. Servers are more interested in others needs than their own: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- C. Servers are more interested in manual projects, jobs, and functions: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- D. Servers show love for others in actions more than words: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- E. Servers prefer doing the work rather than delegating it: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

II. The struggles of a Server. (Martha; Luke 10:38-42)

- A. Servers can be overly critical of others not as attuned to service: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- B. Servers may become pushy and interfering in their attempts to help: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- C. Servers may lose sight of spiritual goals in the action of physical service: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- D. Servers can get easily caught up in resentment: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- E. Servers can be easily hurt when unappreciated: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Total Here: _____

III. List some opportunities for servers in the work of the congregation, among their brethren, and in their personal work to connect and evangelize in the space below:

IV. Improving your serve (help for non-Servers).

- A. Become _____ with a Server.
- B. Walk _____ through the _____.
- C. Don't _____.
- D. _____ to get ideas.
- E. Say _____.

Conclusion:

Are you a Server? Don't be embarrassed that you aren't something else. Get to work serving. We need Servers like you!



Introduction:

We all have a place here. Is yours the place of Teacher? Let's find out.

Discussion:

I. Am I a Teacher? (Luke; **Luke 1:1-4**)

Assess yourself on each characteristic. (0 means it is never you, 10 means it is always you)

- A. Teachers want to confirm facts for themselves: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- B. Teachers generally enjoy research and study: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- C. Teachers tend to focus on facts over feelings: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- D. Teachers want to know and present the truth with certainty: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- E. Teachers tend to present what they know in an orderly fashion: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

II. The Struggles of a Teacher. (Warnings to Timothy; **I & II Timothy**)

- A. Teachers can take too much pride in their own knowledge: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- B. Teachers can become puffed up about their role as teachers: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- C. Teachers can tend toward argument and quarreling: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- D. Teachers can mistake increased knowledge for spiritual growth: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- E. Teachers are easily discouraged when others don't listen to the teaching: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Total Here: _____

III. In the space below, list some opportunities for Teachers in the work of the congregation, among their brethren, and in their personal work to connect and evangelize:

IV. Improving your teaching (help for non-Teachers).

- A. Become _____ with a Teacher.
- B. Read and study your _____ a lot.
- C. Read your Bible with a view to _____ what you _____ with others.
- D. Be on a constant lookout for life _____.
- E. _____ what you will say.

Conclusion:

Are you a Teacher? Don't be embarrassed that you aren't something else. Get to work teaching. We need Teachers like you!



Introduction:

We all have a place here. Is yours the place of Exhorter? Let's find out.

Discussion:

V. Am I an Exhorter? (Barnabas)

Assess yourself on each characteristic. (0 means it is never you, 10 means it is always you)

- A. Exhorters want to help people: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- B. Exhorters want to empower others in their lives and ministries: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- C. Exhorters often accept others as they are without condemning them: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- D. Exhorters focus more on application than mere knowledge: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- E. Exhorters are greatly loved because of their encouragement and positive outlook: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

VI. The Struggles of an Exhorter. (Peter)

- A. Exhorters can be outspokenly opinionated: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- B. Exhorters tend to interrupt with their opinions rather than listening in order to learn: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- C. Exhorters tend toward people-pleasing: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- D. Exhorters can be impulsive: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- E. Exhorters sometimes promise more than they can deliver: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Total Here: _____

VII. In the space below, list some opportunities for Exhorters in the work of the congregation, among their brethren, and in their personal work to connect and evangelize:

VIII. Improving your exhortation (help for non-Exhorters).

- A. Become _____ with an Exhorter.
- B. Spend _____ with other people.
- C. Learn to give the same _____ you want to receive when you mess up.
- D. Place a _____ on everyone's head.
- E. Think _____.

Conclusion: Are you an Exhorter? Don't be embarrassed that you aren't something else. Get to work exhorting. We need Exhorters like you!



Introduction:

We all have a place here. Is yours the place of Sharer? Let's find out.

Discussion:

I. Am I a Sharer? (Macedonians: **II Corinthians 8-9**)

Assess yourself on each characteristic. (0 means it is never you, 10 means it is always you)

- A. Sharers quickly volunteer to give or help when needs are revealed: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- B. Sharers see God as the true owner and believe He will care for them: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- C. Sharers see sharing as an opportunity, not an obligation: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- D. Sharers are willing to go without in order to share with others: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- E. Sharers go beyond giving money to give themselves: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

II. The Struggles of a Sharer. (Various examples)

- A. Sharers tend to think money is the answer to everything: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- B. Sharers can be fixated on money, producing stinginess and greed: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- C. Sharers can develop ulterior motives: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- D. Sharers tend to take pride in self and judge others based on the size of their contributions: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- E. Sharers struggle with receiving because they are sure someone else needs it more: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Total Here: _____

III. In the space below, list some opportunities for Sharers in the work of the congregation, among their brethren, and in their personal work to connect and evangelize:

IV. Improving your sharing (help for non-Sharers).

- A. Become _____ with a Sharer.
- B. Write _____ lists.
- C. _____ sharing first.
- D. _____ for something that will take time.
- E. _____ something.

Conclusion:

Are you a Sharer? Don't be embarrassed that you aren't something else. Get to work sharing. We need Sharers like you!



Introduction:

We all have a place here. Is yours the place of Leader? Let's find out.

Discussion:

I. Am I a Leader? (Nehemiah)

Assess yourself on each characteristic. (0 means it is never you, 10 means it is always you)

- A. Leaders focus on accomplishing the goals: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- B. Leaders organize people to accomplish the goals: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- C. Leaders look for solutions, not problems: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- D. Leaders are not easily quelled by criticism: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- E. Leaders see the big picture: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

II. The Struggles of a Leader. (David)

- A. Leaders can view others as tools for personal benefit: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- B. Leaders can be easily angered when people don't see things their way: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- C. Leaders can jump to quick conclusions without considering all the angles: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- D. Leaders can overlook family obligations in the haste to lead others: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- E. Leaders can sometimes forget who is really in charge: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Total Here: _____

III. In the space below, list some opportunities for Leaders in the work of the congregation, among their brethren, and in their personal work to connect and evangelize:

IV. Improving your leadership (help for non-Leaders).

- A. Become _____ with a Leader.
- B. Be _____.
- C. Lead _____ first.
- D. Think of two or three _____ for every problem you think of.
- E. Remember it's _____ of your _____ what others think of you.

Conclusion:

Are you a Leader? Don't be embarrassed that you aren't something else. Get to work leading. We need Leaders like you!



Introduction:

We all have a place here. Is your place a Giver of Mercy? Let's find out.

Discussion:

I. Am I a Giver of Mercy? (Good Samaritan: **Luke 10:29-37**)

Assess yourself on each characteristic. (0 means it is never you, 10 means it is always you)

- A. Givers of Mercy are drawn to people who are hurting: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- B. Givers of Mercy take action to remove hurt and distress: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- C. Givers of Mercy see value (the good) in others: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- D. Givers of Mercy are trusting and trustworthy: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- E. Givers of Mercy follow the heart over the head: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

II. The Struggles of a Giver of Mercy. (Various examples)

- A. Givers of Mercy often fear conflict: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- B. Givers of Mercy can be gullible: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- C. Givers of Mercy can tend toward sadness and depression: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- D. Givers of Mercy can be easily hurt by others: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- E. Givers of Mercy can allow feelings to override knowledge: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Total Here: _____

III. In the space below, list some opportunities for Givers of Mercy in the work of the congregation, among their brethren, and in their personal work to connect and evangelize:

IV. Improving your mercy (help for non-Givers of Mercy).

- A. Become _____ with a Giver of Mercy.
- B. Spend time in your _____.
- C. Look for the _____ in others.
- D. Don't _____ the hurting.
- E. Put yourself in others' _____.

Conclusion:

Are you a Giver of Mercy? Don't be embarrassed that you aren't something else. Be merciful. We need Givers of Mercy like you!

Romans 12 Gifts Survey

Gift	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
Discernment											
Service											
Teaching											
Exhortation											
Sharing											
Leadership											
Mercy											

Name: _____



Introduction:

What do you think when I say the word “church”? Many think of a service they attend on Sundays. “We’re going to church today.” Some, who understand the word a little better, think of the people who are gathering on those Sundays. Sadly, many think of “church” as a burden. The church is people we have to please. “Church” means responsibilities, assignments, and work. However, I’d like to share the perspective of **Romans 12:3-8**. God did not establish the local church to be a burden; He established it to be a blessing, a gift. Instead of handing each of us a Bible and sending us out into the wilderness of life on our own, He gave us the gift of one another. Sadly, I think relatively few Christians ever make the most of this gift. Too many of us spend our time trying to run and hide from this gift of God. We build walls, afraid of making real connections with these people God has given to us as a gift. Examine **Romans 12:3-8** with me and let me share four encouraging lessons I gain from this text to help us see how what we’ve got here is a gift from God Himself.

Discussion:

- I. We don’t have to face life alone.
 - A. Let’s face it. Life is tough. While we have plenty of good times, we have our fair share of hard times. We face family stress, work troubles, financial fears. We are bombarded daily with temptations and trials. Satan is working overtime to get our hearts and souls. He doesn’t want us making it through this life. According to **I Peter 5:8**, Satan is like a roaring lion, seeking to devour us. There is no doubt that we can’t make it on our own.
 - B. Do you ever feel like you are all alone? Do you ever feel like you just can’t make it, but you have no one to turn to? No one would understand. No one would be patient with you. No one could help. It’s just you against the world. In that place, you can even begin to think that the only possible way to overcome is if God would just let you leave this life right now. Elijah felt that even after one of his greatest victories. In **I Kings 18**, Elijah had undergone the contest on Mt. Carmel. Baal had not lit the fires of his prophets’ altar. Jehovah, however, had responded immediately to Elijah. The people saw who was the true God and they slew the false prophets, executing them for their idolatry and rebellion against the one true God. However, that didn’t change anything with Jezebel. Instead of repenting, in **I Kings 19:2**, Jezebel threatened to kill Elijah for this victory. In **I Kings 19:4**, he asked that God let him die. Why? **I Kings 19:10, 14** explain it. Elijah believed he was all alone. He had fought valiantly. He had upheld God’s will. He had taught God’s Word. He had stood against the enemies. But nothing was changing and he was all alone. Notice God’s response in **I Kings 19:18**. Elijah was not alone. God said there were 7,000 other faithful servants in Israel. No doubt, that is a small number compared to all of Israel. But Elijah wasn’t alone. God wanted Elijah to know there were others.
 - C. **Romans 12:3-8** demonstrates the same point. We gather here repeatedly not simply in order to check “assembly” off of our “Christian obedience card.” We gather here to remind us we are not alone. Look around you. No doubt everyone here is at a different level of spirituality. Some have had victories we haven’t had. Some are farther along than we are. But what we all have in common is that we are sinners in need of a Savior (cf. **Romans 3:23**). Every person in this room faces struggles. Every person faces temptation. Every person here has fallen to temptation. We all want to overcome sin. We all want to make it through our tribulations, trials, and struggles. God has given us each other; He has put us in a body so we can help each other. You are not alone. Don’t let Satan make you think you can’t rely on us. We are not only members of this body, we are members of one another. You are not alone. Don’t make the mistake of coming into this building week after week, but facing life alone. As **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12** says, two are better than one and three are better than two. Do more than “go to church” with these people. Find folks in here who can face life with you.
- II. Everything does not rest on your shoulders.
 - A. One of the problems with feeling alone is thinking everything rests on your shoulders. That is a lot of pressure. I don’t know how many Christians I’ve met who struggle under the burden of thinking it is their sole job to

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make sure everything is done properly. They feel the pressure to be involved in every aspect of the work. They overwhelm themselves with responsibilities and commitments. Eventually, they burn out under all that pressure.

- B. **Romans 12:3-8** explains that God put us together as a body. That means no one of us has all the responsibility. No one of us has to bear the entire burden. We have each other. Paul elaborates on this in **I Corinthians 12:12-26**. No doubt, you have responsibility within this body, but you don't have all the responsibilities. Could you imagine the eye trying to do the hearing? Could you imagine the feet trying to do the grasping? What pressure each part of the body would feel if it all rested on them. But God didn't put us in the body so the whole burden could rest on us. God put us in the body to do our part and rely on others to do theirs.
- C. Consider the example in **Acts 6:1-6**. If anyone had pressure of making sure things went right, it was the apostles. But even they recognized the blessing of being part of a body. When the Hellenistic widows were not being cared for properly, they didn't have to do it all. They selected seven other men to lead that work.
- D. Again, we all have responsibilities within the body. According to **Ephesians 4:15-16**, the body is held together and built up by that which every joint supplies. But what a blessing to know that the whole burden is not resting on our shoulders. God gave us one another so we could work together and rely on each other, so that none of us would have to be a lone ranger and bear all the pressure.

III. We need others.

- A. While not facing life alone and not having to bear all the burden sound like blessings, in our independent American culture, some of us can't seem to accept the blessing of being part of a body. We have been raised with the ideal of pulling ourselves up by the bootstraps, standing tall, and going it on our own. The idea of relying on others is anathema to us. One of the most common refrains among American Christians is that our spirituality is between us and God, no one else should be involved. Oh sure, if someone has a real problem, they need help. But not me. I don't have those kinds of problems. We even try to make a doctrinal matter out of this spiritual independence. It has been my experience that just about every time I bring up the need for accountability partners someone starts talking to me about the "Prayer Partners" of the Boston Church. We definitely do not need the life control and denominational hierarchy of partners that the Boston Church taught. But we do need each other. Our spirituality is not simply between us and God. God has put us together because we need others.
- B. Paul specifically deals with this issue in **Romans 12:3**. He says we must not think too much of ourselves. Paul's point is that we need to humble ourselves and realize that not only are we not burdened with doing everything on our own, we can't. We need others. Just consider the number of passages that express this need.
 - 1. We've already read **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12**. Two are better than one. Three are better than two. We need others.
 - 2. **Hebrews 10:24** says we need to provoke one another to love and good deeds. We need that provocation, that support, that help. We need others.
 - 3. **James 5:16** tells us we need to confess to each other and pray for each other. We need others.
 - 4. **I Corinthians 12:21** explains that we simply cannot say to others that we don't need them, no matter what we can do or what they can do. We need others.
 - 5. We read **Ephesians 4:15-16** that explains growth takes what everyone can provide. We need others.
- C. You may be doing great spiritually right now. You may think you don't need others. But like **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12** says, sooner or later you will be attacked. Sooner or later you will fall. You need to use this time of strength to develop relationships with others who will be able to support you when you are struggling. You need others.

IV. Others need you.

- A. Amazingly, just as there are some who think they don't need others, there are some on the other end of the spectrum. They think no one needs them. **Romans 12:4-5** explains that each member of the body has their own separate function. That means you have a function that the others need you to do.
- B. In **I Corinthians 12:14-17**, Paul explained that you are needed no matter what function you perform. Perhaps you are a foot. Do not say that you are not needed because you are not a hand. Perhaps you are an ear. Do not say that because you are not an eye, you are not needed. Others need you.
- C. I love what Paul explains in **I Corinthians 12:18**. God has put each member of the body right where He wants it in order to accomplish what He wants it to. Just like the eyes and ears are in our bodies exactly where God wants them in order to see and hear, you are in this body exactly where God wants you to be in order to accomplish God's work here. Think about that. You are here because God has a function for you here. Others need you.

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- D. Perhaps the greatest blessing in this gift of one another is having a place to belong. But not only belong, having a group with which to be involved. In this gift of one another, God has provided a purpose, a greater mission. He has provided you with meaning to your life. Look around at these people. I know that many of us look around and see people we think are so much stronger than us. They don't need the help we need. But they do. Just like we have to learn that we are attacked and we fall and need others, we need to see that will happen to the folks around us. Just as we need their support, they need ours. We are needed.

Conclusion:

The church is not a burden. It is not simply responsibility. The church is God's gift to us. We need the church as much as we need Jesus, the Spirit, the Bible. Look around at the people here. You are not alone. This is God's gift to you—the gift of one another. Don't leave it unopened. Enjoy it. Be supported by it. Be part of it.



Introduction:¹

We've learned that none of us has to carry the weight of the entire congregation. However, we each have our place. That leaves each of us with a big question. What's my place? **Romans 12:6-8** gives us some insight. Paul said God has given gifts to each of us. He has placed us in this body to use these gifts in order to glorify Him and serve one another (**I Peter 4:10**). Further, He expects us to use these gifts in order to build up the body (**Ephesians 4:15-16**).

I believe **Romans 12:6-8** tells us two things about these gifts. First, we all have different levels of giftedness in each of the areas listed. Since we have a level of giftedness in each one of these areas, we have a responsibility in each one. None of us can say, "I have no gift at being merciful, so I have no responsibility to be compassionate and merciful." If you were sitting in your pew and noticed the brother or sister next to you crying, you couldn't say, "Whoa! Hey, my greatest strength is teaching, not mercy. You're going to have to go find someone with a better gift of mercy than me and cry on their shoulder." No, you would need to use what ability you have and offer mercy. Second, the text does teach that each of us will have higher God-given giftedness in at least one of these areas. We all have an area we are strongest in and stronger than most others in. In that area, we have the most responsibility and opportunity in the kingdom and the local church.

So, that leads us back to our question. What's my place? How will I know? How do I fit in this puzzle? We're going to take the next seven lessons to examine these areas of strength and giftedness, help you see how you fit, to see how you can most be of help to motivate and encourage us to do the Lord's will. In this lesson, we'll study the first on Paul's

Prophecy, on the surface, is the only miraculous gift in this list. This leads to some interesting questions. Why include it in this list? Was Paul using this word in a special way, allowing it to fit in this list more appropriately? Was this a gift that was only miraculous and would end when the Holy Spirit no longer used miraculous gifts? Should we just ignore this first gift on the list? Or is it possible that there are natural and non-miraculous aspects of this gift that we can discern even today when the miraculous aspects are no longer in use?

According to M.R. Vincent, "In the New Testament, as in the Old, the prominent idea is not *prediction*, but the inspired delivery of warning, exhortation, instruction, judging, and making manifest the secrets of the heart."² Certainly, as Vincent goes on to say, in biblical times the distinguishing feature of this gift was divine inspiration. *Let me make it very clear that I believe the Bible clearly teaches God no longer makes use of miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit.* However, having examined some aspects of this gift, I think we see some natural and non-miraculous aspects that we still see in people today, making them gifted in ways we need in the kingdom and this congregation. So, please bear with me as we examine some aspects we can see in Scripture. To help distinguish what we are talking about in this lesson from the purely miraculous spiritual gift of prophecy, I've decided to refer to this gift in a more mundane way and call it the gift of discernment. Are you a Discerner? Take note of the characteristics and struggles that we'll see in Scripture and then figure out how you can work within this congregation.

Discussion:

I. Am I a Discerner?

- A. No doubt we all have responsibility to be discerning. **Hebrews 5:14** says the mature have their powers of discernment trained to know the difference between good and evil. We need to be discerning. However, if I understand **Romans 12:3-8** properly, we see some seem to have a natural gift at being able to discern God's will and understand wisdom. What does that look like?
- B. You may be wondering, "Is that my place? Am I a Discerner?" Allow me to share five characteristics that go along with being a Discerner. We will examine these from two different examples—Joseph and Jethro (Moses' father-in-law).
 1. *Discerners are perceptive* (**Genesis 41:39; Exodus 18:13-23**): They are wise and understanding. They can cut to the heart of matters. Pharaoh could see that Joseph was wise and perceptive. He would make a great

¹ This lesson and the series to follow was inspired by Discover Your God-given Gifts by Don and Katie Fortune, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1987.

² M.R. Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament, MacDonald Publishing Company, McLean, VA, v II, p 742.

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ruler because of that wisdom and so was placed as second-in-command in Egypt. Despite Moses' leadership qualities, he was not quick to see what Jethro saw. Jethro knew Moses' plan for judging the people was bad. Discerners are very perceptive. They quickly perceive God's will in situations. Have you known people who seem to be able to make the complex issues in the Bible seem very simple? These are Discerners. Folks who can cut through to the heart of the matter. But they are not only perceptive with God's Word and will. They are perceptive in life and areas of wisdom. They are also perceptive with people. It's hard to pull the wool over the eyes of a Discerner. They seem to almost intuitively pick up on someone's sincerity or the lack thereof. Those gifted with mercy might tend toward gullibility; Discerners rarely do.

2. *Discerners can see where today's choices lead (Exodus 18:18)*: Jethro is not prophesying in the sense of speaking from God in this passage. But he demonstrates his discernment ability by being able to foresee where Moses' choices would lead. He saw the burn out and struggle that was inevitable for Moses and the people. Some of us look at this and say it was obvious. Yet, Moses didn't see it. Further, many folks make the exact same mistake today and don't see it. Discerners recognize that today's choices are not made in a vacuum and are able to look ahead into the future to see how today's choices will affect the future.
 3. *Discerners see God's plan behind all things (Genesis 50:20; Exodus 18:19, 23)*: Joseph was able to see God's plan behind all of his hardships. He was able to see how his own suffering was actually beneficial both for him and for his family because he could see God's involvement. Jethro saw his advice as being beneficial to Moses because he knew God would bless this wise course of action. Both Joseph and Jethro saw God's involvement in what was going on. Discerners look beneath the surface of our actions and reactions to see God's participation in all that we do. Discerners are quick to acknowledge God's involvement and quick to recognize that without God nothing we do will work.
 4. *Discerners have strong convictions and strict standards (Exodus 18:13-17; Genesis 39:8-9)*: Notice how Jethro approaches Moses. He doesn't equivocate. He doesn't give a suggestion that Moses might want to consider, just maybe. Rather, he has strong convictions. What Moses was doing was bad. He boldly proclaimed those convictions. Hand in hand with the strong convictions, we see Joseph demonstrate strict personal standards. He doesn't justify because God let him go into slavery. He doesn't equivocate because no one will know. He doesn't excuse himself because she is his owner's wife. He stands by his convictions with strong standards. Discerners are convicted and strict. They don't see a lot of gray. Things are often very black and white in their minds and they hold themselves (and others) to high standards.
 5. *Discerners see sin in relation to God (Genesis 39:9)*: Though Joseph talked about his place in connection to Potiphar, in the end his big concern was about his relationship with God. How could he commit this wickedness against God? Some people see sin simply in terms of right and wrong. Some avoid sin because of what it means about their relationships with other people. Some avoid sin because they fear punishment. Discerners avoid sin because of how it affects their relationship with God. They don't want anything coming between them and God. They want to obey Him and serve Him and be like Him. The other benefits are all icing on the cake to the Discerner; the most important issue is their relationship with God.
- C. Does these characteristics fit you? You might just be a Discerner. That's great. We need Discerners like you.

II. The struggles of a Discerner.

- A. As with all the gifts, there are struggles that seem to go hand in hand with being a Discerner. If these are your natural struggles, don't beat yourself up too much about it. Certainly, they may demonstrate where you need to grow and they show that you have room to improve. But what they show is you may just be a Discerner.
- B. As with the gifts of sharing and mercy, we are going to look at various passages to help us see some of the natural struggles that go along with this giftedness.
 1. *Discerners tend to be judgmental (Jonah 4:1-4; Luke 9:51-56)*: Jonah didn't want the enemies of God and his people to be spared. He wanted them judged. James and John were quick to judge the Samaritan village. They wanted immediate condemnation and punishment. They wanted fire brought down on these people who would not accept the Savior. Because Discerners are so perceptive and because they see these issues of sin as matters of people's relationship with God, they see almost any infraction as devastating. While Exhorters are able to see folks on a spectrum of spiritual growth and Givers of Mercy are able to look for the good in people, Discerners have a tendency to view people as either in or out. They are quick to cut the cord and bring judgment and condemnation. While sin needs to be rebuked and error needs to be warned against, Discerners need to learn the fine line between warning in love and trying to put people in their places.

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2. *Discerners can be impatient with those who don't measure up quickly (Acts 15:38-41)*: While Barnabas was able to see John Mark on a spectrum of growth and therefore see his potential, Paul was ready to cut him loose. Going along with the Discerner's tendency to be judgmental, Discerners tend to be impatient with people. They are willing to give folks a chance, but they better make it count the first time, definitely at least by the second time. To the Discerner everything is so important that we just don't have time to deal with folks who won't get it together today. Discerners need to take some time to examine themselves and be honest about how much patience God has had to have with them.
 3. *Discerners struggle with poor self-image (Isaiah 6:5)*: Despite having been used by God as a prophet through the first five chapters, Isaiah still saw himself as unclean and unusable. God had to provide him a great vision to help him overcome this. God had cleansed him and made him useful, but Isaiah still had struggles with this. No doubt, there is a healthy sense in recognizing our unholiness before God. I don't want to speak against that. However, Discerners can carry that to a personal extreme. I once heard a person describe himself as an ego-maniac with an inferiority complex. I think that can describe a Discerner living in his weaknesses very well. The ego-maniac is the part that looks at everyone else and lets the Discerner think they are worthy of judgment for their sins while he/she is just a growing Christian who should be saved. But if the Discerner is honest, he/she can't help but see all the sins in his/her own life. You'll never here a Discerner say, "Hey, I'm only human." They'll rarely say, "God's still working on me." They'll not often say, "I'll do better next time." Rather, they struggle with feeling unclean. What if everyone else finds out how unclean they are? This sometimes sets them up on a cycle of these first three struggles. They bring judgment down on everyone else in an attempt to make themselves appear more holy than they really are. I think everyone can have some struggle with this cycle. But Discerners can get really bogged down here. Because they are so perceptive about God's will and people, they are just unable to turn a blind eye to their own shortcomings. They even have a hard time being able to live in God's grace because they so desperately want to be in perfect alignment to what they perceive as God's will.
 4. *Discerners can think they know and see more than everyone else (Numbers 22:22-35)*: Balaam was a prophet. He clearly was able to perceive and discern all kinds of things. Yet, on this trek he was missing something. He believed he knew all that was going on, but in this scenario his own donkey knew more than he did. I can almost imagine it now, Balaam thinking, "Hey, I'm a prophet, you're just a donkey." Discerners can get a little full of themselves. They are the ones who are quick to see where we fall short. They are the guardians. They are the watchmen. No one else can be as right as they are and know as much as they do.
 5. *Discerners can get puffed up and rely too much on their own wisdom (Romans 12:3, 6)*: When Paul encouraged the prophets to prophecy, or for our purposes the discerners to discern, he told them to do so in proportion to their faith. This is actually a reference back to vs. 3, in which Paul said God has given gifts according to the measure of the faith He has assigned or distributed to each. When Paul claimed the prophets should prophecy in proportion to their faith, he is reminding them to rely on God and what He has given them, not branch out and go beyond the faith God has assigned. Obviously, this isn't saying, "Don't have more faith than God is allowing you to." Rather, the point is rely on God. Don't go beyond God. Discerners apparently have the natural struggle of thinking too much of themselves and their ability to perceive and foresee. If they are not careful, they can move from true godly wisdom and assume that anything they think must be right and every concern they have must be a major warning. They move from "thus says the Lord" to "I said it and I'm always right." Especially since God is no longer using the miraculous gift of prophecy, Discerners need to be very careful to stick with book, chapter, and verse and not simply rely on what they have reasoned out and drawn conclusions for themselves. It is too easy to step away from true biblical thinking to just following human reasoning.
- C. Again, if these are your struggles, don't spend too much time beating yourself up about them. Certainly, they show areas where you need to work and grow. But what you really need to see is that you may just be a Discerner. That means you are useful to the kingdom and this congregation. We need Discerners like you.
- ### III. Opportunities for a Discerner.
- A. There are many places in God's kingdom and this congregation that you can use your gift of discernment. If what we've said so far sounds a lot like you, then you need to ask, "What am I doing with my gift of discernment? What function am I filling?" Consider some opportunities that you have.
 - B. Some opportunities to use discernment within the congregation.

1. Prayer/Intercession
 2. Preaching
 3. Teaching
 4. Bulletin articles
 5. Website articles
 6. New converts work
 7. Foreign missions
 8. Shepherd
- C. Some opportunities to use discernment with other Christians.
1. Prayer/Intercession
 2. Bible studies
 3. Teen studies
 4. Parenting studies
 5. Marriage studies
 6. Counseling and advising
 7. Mentoring
 8. Accountability partners
- D. Some opportunities to connect and evangelize.
1. Prayer/Intercession
 2. Counseling and advising
 3. Bible studies
 4. Neighborhood studies
 5. Newspaper articles
 6. Blogging

IV. Improving your discernment (help for the non-Discerner).

- A. As we saw earlier, everyone has responsibility when it comes to discernment (**Hebrews 5:14**). But some of us aren't as naturally gifted in that area.
- B. Let's wrap up with some help for the non-Discerner. Here are five ways to help you grow in your discernment.
1. *Become friends with a Discerner*: Obviously, if you want to become more discerning, spending time with someone who is naturally gifted in this area will help. Watch what they do. Listen as they interact with others. Pay attention to their interaction with you.
 2. *Spend time in the Word*: **Hebrews 5:14** flat out says that spending time in God's Word will help you train your senses to discern better. When you spend time in God's will, you will be better able to discern God's will as you face your life.
 3. *Pray*: Clearly you can pray for wisdom and discernment. But that is not really what I'm pointing out here. Rather, if Discerners see God behind all things and they see sin as a primary issue in their relationship with God, it makes sense to spend time working on that relationship. Prayer, along with Bible study, is the number one way to work on that relationship.
 4. *Take time to acknowledge God in all things*: Discerners see God behind all that is going on. If you want to grow in your discernment, spend time acknowledging God. Stop and ask how God is involved. If you can't figure it out, at the very least give Him the glory knowing that He is involved.
 5. *Consider the consequences*: Discerners are able to see where choices will lead. Some of us don't even consider that. Rather, we impulsively jump in with both feet. If we want to improve our discernment, we need to hit the pause button and consider where this choice might take us. If you're having trouble with this, find your new Discerner friends and ask them.

Conclusion:

We all have a place in the kingdom and this congregation. Is yours as a Discerner? What will you do about it? Don't be embarrassed if you can't do what someone else does. Make sure you are pursuing the gift God has given you. We need the encouragement, edifying, and building up you can provide through your discernment. Like **Ephesians 4:15-16** says this congregation is held together by what every joint supplies. We need Discerners like you.



Introduction:

There are a lot of things that need to be done to make a congregation work, to develop disciples, to bring glory to God among His people. When you simply start listing out all of them, it makes me exceedingly glad none of us has to do it all. However, God has put us all together as a body so all of it can be done. We've already learned some aspects of the gifts God has given us as seen in **Romans 12:6-8**. In an earlier lesson, we examined the Gift of Discernment, my more mundane name for the characteristics of the gift of prophecy after the miraculous portion of that gift is removed. Hopefully, that set us on a course of understanding why we are all needed.

However, that gift is pretty intense. Few of us see ourselves there and might be tempted to believe there is no place for us in Christ's church. That brings us back to the question we are going to be asking again and again this week. What's my place? How will I know? How do I fit in this puzzle? We're going to take the next seven lessons to examine these areas of strength and giftedness, help you see how you fit, to see how you can most be of help to motivate and encourage us to do the Lord's will. In this lesson, we'll study the Gift of Service.

Discussion:

I. Am I a server?

- A. As stated earlier, we all have responsibility to serve each other. As **Matthew 20:28** says, Jesus, our example, came to serve and not be served. So, in **Matthew 20:26**, it claims servant is the highest rank in the kingdom. In a sense, no matter which of the gifts in **Romans 12:6-8** we employ, we are to use them to serve others (**I Peter 4:10**). However, there are some that seem to have a natural knack for serving others. It seems to be the way they are wired. They are good at it and they find fulfillment in it. Is that you?
- B. You may be wondering, "Is that my place? Am I a server?" Allow me to share five characteristics of the gift of service by looking at a great server found in **Luke 4:38-39**, Peter's mother-in-law. To borrow a phrase from a popular movie of the late 80s, she had "been mostly dead all day." But as soon as she was healed, the text claims she got up and served Jesus and His disciples. Here is a natural servant. Serving was what came to her easily and even when she had every reason to lay off for a while, she immediately got up and started serving.
 1. *Servers easily recognize practical needs and are quick to meet them:* Peter's mother-in-law had been sick. She had been laid up in the bed with a high fever. For however long that had been going on, she had not been involved in the household tasks and chores of hospitality and service. Yet, as soon as she was healed, she recognized that some serving needed doing. She was attuned to these needs and immediately started working on it. Servers are quick to see these kinds of needs, while the rest of us are not as quick to see these needs. For instance, when it snows, I have to admit what I think about is getting my kids out and having a snowball fight, building a snowman, riding the sled with them. But a server immediately thinks about the widows and the elderly who may need their sidewalks and driveways shoveled.
 2. *Servers are more interested in the needs of others than in their own needs:* Peter's mother-in-law had been sick. She had needs. Yet, once she was healed she immediately began to think of others. She saw the needs the others had and began to serve them. Servers are quick to set aside their own needs. Servers are the last ones to sit down at the table during a meal, the last ones to get to the tv room for a family movie, the last ones to make it to the car when going anywhere because they feel the need to do something and meet needs rather than relax or get to their own needs.
 3. *Servers enjoy manual projects, jobs, and functions:* I'm sure that Peter's mother-in-law told others about her healing. But that wasn't the first thing she did. Unlike the myriad of others healed by Jesus who immediately went out and proclaimed their healing, she immediately started working on the manual task of serving Jesus and His disciples. That was what was most natural. Servers aren't into the gifts that are more verbal. They want to do something, usually with their hands. I'm thinking of a good friend of mine in Franklin, TN, named Kenny Wells, who is absolutely a server. While he is happy to teach on occasion and does a fine job when he does, his most natural element is helping others with manual projects and jobs. It

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is no wonder that his occupation is handy-man and small construction. When hurricanes hit the Gulf of Alabama, Louisiana, or South East Texas, he was immediately setting up crews to go down and work on clean-up and repair, renting a truck to carry supplies and donations to those in need. When a tornado destroyed the house of one of the members in his congregation and a flood destroyed another's, he was the first one there to organize and help with the clean-up. That is his natural element.

4. *Servers show love for others in actions more than in words:* I have no doubt that Luke tells us Peter's mother-in-law immediately started serving to demonstrate how thorough her healing was. There was no lingering tiredness or aching that kept her down. However, I can't help but recognize that this was also her way of saying thank you. She didn't fall at Jesus' feet, repeating her gratitude verbally. Instead, she served. Servers show their love and gratitude through actions more than through words. They find helpful things they can do to show their appreciation. I don't know if Marita's greatest gift is serving, but I know she is higher on the scale of giftedness in service than I am. When I want to show love or offer gratitude, I'm more likely to say something, write something, send a note. Marita is more likely to take an action like cleaning my car, cutting the grass, or helping with some task. That's what servers do.
 5. *Servers prefer doing the work rather than delegating it:* Remember that Jesus is in Peter's house. That means Peter's wife lives there, the daughter of Peter's mother-in-law. Did Peter's mother-in-law get up and start directing her daughter to take care of these men in their home? She would have every right. Everyone would understand if she did. But that is not what she did. She did the serving. She didn't delegate it. She did it herself. Servers prefer to do work themselves and have a hard time delegating work even when it is the best thing to do in the moment. They are not always thinking, "To get something done right I have to do it myself." Rather, they often simply see a job needs doing and feel the tug of responsibility to do it and do it now.
- C. If these characteristics fit you, you have a place in the kingdom and this congregation. We need servers like you.

II. The struggles of the server.

- A. As you can imagine, while there are strengths that go along with this natural giftedness, there are also some natural weaknesses. There are some struggles that servers have to face and overcome.
- B. Martha, of Mary and Martha fame, was a natural server. In **John 12:1-3**, after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He returned to their home. While Lazarus was reclining at the table, and Mary was demonstrating her gift of giving by anointing Jesus' feet with a pound of expensive ointment, Martha was serving. However, in **Luke 10:38-42**, we see a moment when her servant's heart got the better of her and she spiraled for a time in her weaknesses rather than her strengths. Notice five struggles demonstrated by Martha that every servant has to contend with.
 1. *Servers can be overly critical of others who are not as attuned to service:* As we saw in **John 12:1-3**, Mary seems to be naturally gifted as a giver (another of the gifts mentioned in **Romans 12:6-8**). She was not a natural servant as Martha was. When Jesus was in her home, all Martha could see was the serving that needed to be done. When Mary didn't see the serving in the same light as Martha did, Martha became highly critical. She even asked Jesus in front of everyone to rebuke her sister and command her to see the need to serve. Servers can't understand why everyone else doesn't see these serving needs in exactly the same light as the servers do. They accuse others of being lazy, procrastinators, undisciplined, irresponsible. While the rest of us sometimes are all of these things, the real issue is we just aren't wired to see it as easily as the server does. Servers need to understand that and cut us a little slack. If right now you're thinking, "Whatever, Edwin! You're just trying to get out of some work," you may just be demonstrating that you are a server.
 2. *Servers may become pushy and interfering in their eagerness to help:* I've always been amazed at how Martha spoke to Jesus in this instance. In front of everyone, she tells Jesus how to do His job. If He really cared about Martha and the serving, like Martha did, then He would rebuke Mary and command her to serve as well. I have no doubt Martha was only trying to help. She wasn't trying to rebel against Jesus or shame Him or put Him in His place. She just couldn't understand why no one was seeing this issue the way she did and began to be pushy and interfering. At the heart of the work of most servers is the desire to help. They want to meet the needs of others. However, because the others don't always place the same importance on the same things as the server does, the server can become pushy and interfering. Some of us might even see it as controlling and manipulative. They want us to see how wonderful their way is and they just keep

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inserting themselves in situations that aren't their business or constantly repeating advice that we don't want to hear almost like Chinese water torture on the brain.

3. *Servers may lose sight of spiritual goals in the action of physical service:* Martha's problem in this text is not that she was a server. There is a time to serve. As we've already noted, each of us has responsibility in service. There may well have been a time when Mary, who doesn't seem to be a natural server, had to be truly rebuked for not being more involved in serving. However, in this case, it wasn't the right time to serve. It was time to listen to the Master Teacher. Martha's God-given gift had her so attuned to the physical needs and manual projects that she was distracted away from the spiritual goal of growing at the feet of Jesus. Servers can be so involved in meeting the needs of people, doing, and working that they forget to take the time to grow spiritually. They neglect praying, Bible study, encouragement, teaching, and being exhorted by others. When it's time for the family study, they are so busy cleaning house that they see the study and prayer time as an interruption. They spend the whole time thinking it is taking up too much of their time. They need to get back to serving.
 4. *Servers can get easily caught up in resentment:* Martha was angry. She was mad at Mary. Didn't Mary see how much serving had to be done? Didn't Mary know how much help Martha needed? Why wasn't she doing something about it? Further, why wasn't Jesus doing something about it? Why wouldn't He rebuke Mary for her laziness? Because Martha was distracted by what seemed most important to her and no one else felt the same way, she got caught up in resentment. She allowed that to govern her actions and reactions, so she blew up, not simply at Mary, but also at Jesus. Servers can easily get caught up in resentment. It may come out in an altercation like this one, or it may seethe under the surface coming out with passive-aggressive sniping.
 5. *Servers can be easily hurt when unappreciated:* When I consider this story of Mary and Martha in the light of my own experiences and the experiences of others who have shared with me, I see something behind the resentment. Martha is hurt. No one is noticing what she is doing. No one is expressing appreciation for all she is going through. Mary is just sitting there and Jesus is letting her. They don't get what Martha is accomplishing and doing it all for them. Often times, when servers get caught up in resentment, they don't actually resent doing the work. They love the work. They love being helpful. They don't really want someone else to do the work. They sometimes don't even want help. They don't want to be in the spotlight. They don't have to be up on the stage leading the show. But they do want to be noticed and appreciated. When that doesn't happen, they are hurt and wounded, which can lead to other issues like the resentment we've already mentioned.
- C. If these struggles sound all too familiar to you, your place in the kingdom and in this congregation may just be as a server. Don't be too upset with yourself about these weaknesses. Sure, they demonstrate that you have room to grow and areas to work on. But they also demonstrate that you have a place here. We need servers.

III. Opportunities in the local church for the server to motivate and encourage.

- A. While some servers may also have giftedness in teaching and leading, many don't feel comfortable in these spotlight roles. Sadly, they have often been made to feel like second-class Christians because they don't jump at the chance to teach a class, offer the invitation, or give a talk before the Lord's Supper. Too often we have placed so much emphasis on these public roles that we have the idea that Christian maturity is determined by standing up on the stage in the auditorium. It isn't. If you are a server, there are plenty of ways you can be of use in the kingdom and in this local congregation.
- B. Some opportunities to serve the congregation as a whole
 1. Deacons
 2. Facilities cleaning
 3. Grounds maintenance
 4. Secretarial and clerical help
 5. Writing and mailing letters
 6. Phone-calling
 7. Preparing communion
 8. Ushering
 9. Copying cds
- C. Some opportunities to serve others.
 1. Cleaning homes

2. Yardwork
3. Baby-sitting
4. Preparing meals
5. Hospitality
6. Helping people move
7. Repair work (cars, woodwork, plumbing)
8. Sewing
9. Rides to church
10. Praying with others

D. Some opportunities to connect and evangelize

1. Volunteering
2. Homeless shelters
3. Nursing home and hospital visitation
4. Serving neighbors
5. Praying with
6. Prison visitation
7. Serving in schools

IV. Improving your serve (help for the non-server).

- A. As we've recognized, not all of us have our greatest gift in serving. Yet, we all have responsibility to serve. Don't beat yourself up for not being as great a server as Peter's mother-in-law, but don't think you can avoid serving because it isn't your greatest gift.
- B. So, let's wrap up with a little help for the rest of us. How can we improve our serve and through that serving motivate and encourage those around us?
 1. *Become friends with a server*: Watch what they do. Observe how they react. Go along with them as they serve. Ask them to help you be a better server.
 2. *Walk slowly through the crowd*: Spend time opening your eyes and heart to those around you. Observe others with a view to be of service. Listen to what they are saying for opportunities to serve. Focus on the people.
 3. *Don't procrastinate*: Non-server typically intend to be helpful, but we'll get to it in a moment. Don't wait, otherwise the natural server will jump up immediately and get the job done. If you see a need, start working on it right away.
 4. *Read to get ideas*: Obviously, start by reading the Bible. See what servers in the Bible did. But read other things too. Magazines that are geared toward men or women often have good ideas in them about how to be of help to each other. Inspirational and devotional books like Chicken Soup for the Soul tell stories of servers that can be of help.
 5. *Say thank you*: Learn to appreciate the work of servers. As we learn to value their work, we'll more naturally be involved in it ourselves. Not to mention, we'll improve our relations with the servers in our lives.
- C. On a scale of 1 to 10, if your giftedness in serving is only a 3, you'll probably never get to be an 8 or 9. That's okay. As **Romans 12:3-8**, we all have our different functions. But, if you work on these helpful hints, you will grow in your ability to serve. You will grow in your ability to encourage and motivate your brethren through service.

Conclusion:

We all have a place in the kingdom and this congregation. Is yours as a server? What will you do about it? Where will you serve? Don't be embarrassed if you can't do what someone else does. Don't be ashamed to hang behind the scenes. But make sure you are pursuing the gift God has given you. We need the encouragement, edifying, and building up you can offer through your serving. Like **Ephesians 4:15-16**, you may not preach as many of the sermons or teach as many of the classes, but you are a joint in this congregation. We need the gift God has given you.



Introduction:

In **Romans 12:3**, Paul said, “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think...” Some Christians simply think too highly of themselves. They either think that everything rests on them and their ability to do everything or perhaps they think what they are good at is what is best to be good at. Sure, there are some things they can’t do, but those things aren’t important anyway. I’ve met people like this. Sadly, I’ve been people like this. But there is another similar problem. Some people think too lowly of themselves. They think that whatever they can do is not important. If only they could be like someone else. Or they constantly try to do what others are good at so they can look good themselves. This leads to frustration and burn out.

In **Romans 12:3-8**, Paul demonstrates a different approach, a humble approach. Paul explained that God has blessed each of us with differing gifts. As such, we need to learn to appreciate the differences and the roles they open up for each of us within the body of Christ. Perhaps you are a lousy teacher, but you are great at recognizing needs and providing for them. You are just as much a part of the body as the teacher. Perhaps you not very good at providing comfort and encouragement, you never think to write notes, and are always looking back and remembering you needed to visit someone but forgot, but you are great at organizing and teaching Bible class lessons. You are just as much a part of the body as the encourager.

This leaves us with the big question. What’s my place in the local congregation? How do I fit in this puzzle? That is what this series of lessons is about: helping you find your fit. Instead of repeatedly suffering burn-out because you keep trying to fit yourself as a square peg into a round hole, find out where God has gifted you, then set yourself loose in that area of ministry within the congregation. You won’t suffer burn-out: you’ll be revitalized.

In an earlier lesson, we talked about the gift of service. In today’s lesson, we’ll examine the gift of teaching. Please understand the point of these lessons is not to rate and rank the gifts and functions themselves. None of these is better; they are simply different. The point of these lessons is to help you assess where your giftedness lies and therefore determine how you can best function, minister, and motivates other within this congregation and the body of Christ at large. If you discover you are a teacher, the big question will be, what are you doing with that?

Discussion:

I. Am I a teacher?

- A. No doubt, there is a sense in which all of us are to teach. In fact, the Hebrew writer rebuked many of the Hebrew Christians in **Hebrews 5:11-14** because they had not progressed on to teaching. However, there are clearly some who are more gifted to fill that role than others. After all, **I Timothy 3:2** demonstrates that we will all be at different levels of ability in teaching when it gives our shepherds the qualification of “able to teach.” While we all want to grow in our ability to teach and we all want to learn how to capitalize on any opportunities to teach that we have, some among us have a special, almost natural-seeming knack at teaching. With that ability comes responsibility. If you have this gift, you need to be functioning in it within this body of believers. That is why God put you here.
- B. You may be wondering, “Is that my place? Am I a teacher?” Allow me to share five characteristics of the gift of teaching by looking at an oft overlooked teacher in the New Testament. Luke was a great teacher. So great, in fact, he was used by God as one of the four recorders of the gospel of Jesus and the only one to teach about the early history of the church. I want to examine Luke’s introduction to his gospel in **Luke 1:1-4** and share with you five characteristics of teachers.
 1. *Teachers want to confirm facts for themselves:* Though many had “undertaken to compile a narrative” of what Jesus had done, Luke didn’t simply hand Theophilus someone else’s research. He followed all things closely himself. He examined what the eyewitnesses and ministers had delivered. He did the work himself. Teachers often want to confirm the facts for themselves. They are not satisfied hearing someone’s sermon or reading someone’s article. They want to get into the Word themselves to see if what is said is really so.

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2. *Teachers generally enjoy research and study*: Luke must have done all kinds of research in preparing his gospel account. He talked to eyewitnesses. He talked with Paul. He checked his facts. He had to find out when certain things happened and examine the history to give accurate descriptions of when they happened. As a Gentile, he did not grow up reading the Law. He would have had to research what the Law said to make statements as he did in **Luke 2:22-24**. That took way more than running down to the local library or religious bookstore and picking up a copy of the Bible. Teachers are interested in knowledge and in passing on that knowledge. Therefore, they generally enjoy spending time researching whatever subjects they are passionate about. Reading the Bible, making connections, figuring things out are fun for the teacher.
 3. *Teachers tend to focus on facts over feelings*: Luke wasn't interested in pumping up Theophilus's certainty with personal experiences and feelings. He wanted to give him the facts. Here is what the eyewitnesses said happened. You can believe that Jesus is the Son of God because of these objective facts, not simply because of how we feel about Him. It is no surprise that as Luke moves from his introduction to his narrative that the first thing he does is share a fact about the timeline: "In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah..." (**Luke 1:5**). Notice another great example of this in **Luke 2:1-2**. Teachers often want to remove the feelings and try to be completely objective (though no one ever truly is). They are not nearly so concerned about what you feel, or sometimes even think, about a text as they are just what the text says.
 4. *Teachers want to know and present the truth with certainty*: Why did Luke write this account? So Theophilus would have certainty about the truth. Luke wanted to help remove doubts. While this is written to Theophilus, this work, no doubt, helped Luke in his own certainty as well. He wasn't satisfied with mere maybes and speculation. He wanted certainty. The teacher sees the truth as the means to all other aspects of Christianity. So, they want to know and present the truth with certainty.
 5. *Teachers tend to present what they know in an orderly and organized fashion*: Why wasn't Luke simply satisfied with what all the others had done to talk about what Jesus had done? He wanted to put it in orderly fashion. Someone told a story here; another a story there. Luke wanted it to fit into an organized whole (not necessarily a chronological one, but an organized one). Teachers like to present things in an organized way. They like outlines, major points, natural flow. They want point A to lead to point B and then to point C. They like their supporting arguments to fit all in a row. They struggle with scattered, circular, or shotgun thinking and teaching. They want the teaching to be like a row of dominoes, knock the first one over and then watch the rest fall into place.
- C. If these characteristics fit you, you have a place in the kingdom and this congregation. We need teachers like you.

II. The struggles of the teacher.

- A. As you can imagine, while there are strengths that go along with this natural giftedness, there are also some natural weaknesses. There are some struggles teachers often have to face and overcome. If you have these weaknesses and struggles, you are not a bad person. This is simply an assessment of your natural bent. If you score high on these, don't beat yourself up. Rather, recognize it simply means your role within this congregation may be as a teacher. Don't get upset, rather get energized to start working in your role and capitalizing on your strengths.
- B. This part of the lesson was hard to put together simply because when we think of weaknesses and teachers, we tend to simply think "false teacher." Additionally, in the Bible, we tend to simply see the teaching and not much of the personality behind the one teaching. However, I think we can see some danger zones for teachers based on the warnings Paul gave to Timothy in his letters. I'm not saying Timothy necessarily suffered from all these weaknesses and struggles, but as Paul warned Timothy about other teachers, talked about his own teaching, and offered advice and admonition to Timothy about his teaching, we can uncover five danger zones for teachers, five struggles and potential weaknesses for teachers.
 1. *Teachers can take too much pride in their own knowledge (I Timothy 6:20)*: Teachers can be enamored with knowledge. Paul, therefore, warned Timothy not to get caught up in what was falsely called knowledge. Like the Gnostics, teachers can sometimes think too much of their own knowledge. They can think their knowledge sets them on a pedestal above everyone else. It makes them one of the enlightened few and then look down on others who don't quite get it like they do.
 2. *Teachers can become puffed up about their role as teachers (I Timothy 1:6-7)*: Paul warned Timothy against men who seemed to think that somehow being a teacher was a super-special role. Even though they

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didn't understand their confident assertions, they wanted to be looked on as teachers. Perhaps out of all the roles and functions, the teachers most need to heed Paul's warning in **Romans 12:3** not to think too much of themselves. Let's face it, being the voice in the congregation can become a pretty heady experience. It often puts the teachers in front of other people, heading up classes, conducting studies, being out front. When teachers aren't careful they can tend to think too much of their own role in the congregation.

3. *Teachers can tend toward argument and quarreling (I Timothy 6:3-5; II Timothy 2:23-24)*: Paul went out of his way to explain that teachers should not be quarrelsome. Sadly, because of the pride that teachers are sometimes subject to, they are not quick to listen to others with different perspectives. Rather, they get quickly defensive about their own positions and opinions. That leads them to get quarrelsome and argumentative. Certainly, everyone should be able to defend the truth of the Gospel. But often times teachers can move beyond simply defending the Gospel, taking the disagreements personally and then get into defending themselves. That is when it has become argumentative and quarrelsome.
 4. *Teachers can mistake increased knowledge for spiritual growth (I Timothy 4:11-12)*: Though Timothy was apparently a good enough teacher to be granted all kinds of responsibility in teaching and preaching, Paul still felt the need to warn him to actually live the teaching. Why? Because teachers sometimes mistake increased knowledge for spiritual growth. I remember when I finished my year and a half working with Harold Comer and David Thomley in a training program as a preacher. David took me out for coffee and he asked me two questions. The first was whether or not I thought I was a better preacher and teacher than when I started. The answer was absolutely and unequivocally yes. The second question was whether or not I thought I was a better Christian than when I started. When he first asked the question, I didn't understand. Since the first answer was yes, how could this answer be any different? But then it sank in. Knowing more and being better able to teach it are not the same as growing in it. In extreme cases, I've known teachers to think that their ability to teach well actually offset the sexual immorality of multiple affairs. But even when not that extreme, teachers can tend to be satisfied with simply knowing more and not always grow spiritually.
 5. *Teachers are easily discouraged when others don't listen and heed the teaching (I Timothy 4:14; II Timothy 4:1-5)*. While other Christians tend to get more discouraged based on the way people treat them, teachers tend to get discouraged based on how people listen to them. The mere tenor of Paul's letters to Timothy demonstrate the ease with which teachers can be discouraged away from their work. But Paul offered some specific statements that showed Timothy's discouragement. He had to remind him on multiple occasions that there would be people who simply wouldn't listen (**I Timothy 4:1-6; II Timothy 3:1-10**). But we can't allow that to discourage us into not teaching. They can also get really discouraged when they don't live up to their own teaching, wondering if they should even be the teacher.
- C. If these struggles sound all too familiar to you, your place in the kingdom and in this congregation may just be as a teacher. Don't be too upset with yourself about these weaknesses. Sure, they demonstrate you have room to grow and areas to work on. But they also demonstrate that you have a place here. We need teachers.

III. Opportunities in the local church for the teacher to motivate and encourage.

- A. There are numerous ways that you can exercise your function as a teacher in the work of this congregation. We have a place for you and we need you to ask, "What am I doing with my teaching ability?"
- B. Some opportunities to teach for the congregation as a whole.
 1. Teaching adult classes
 2. Teaching children's classes
 3. Lord's Supper talk
 4. Preaching sermons
 5. Wednesday night invitations
 6. Writing articles for the bulletin
 7. Writing articles for the website
 8. Leading workshops or special seminars
 9. Organizing curriculum
 10. Teaching VBS
- C. Some opportunities to teach in your relationship with other Christians.
 1. Home Bible study groups
 2. Teenage Bible studies

3. Backyard Bible school for kids
4. Blogging
5. Writing newsletters
6. One-on-one studies with others
7. New Converts studies
8. Retreats and offsite studies
9. Writing letters
10. Over the internet studies

D. Some opportunities to connect and evangelize.

1. Evangelistic teaching and Bible studies
2. Teaching in hospitals and nursing homes
3. Teaching in prisons
4. Using community opportunities to teach
5. Bible studies with co-workers
6. Neighborhood Bible studies
7. Correspondence Courses
8. Online articles
9. Internet radio programs
10. Newspaper articles

IV. Improving your teaching (help for the non-teacher).

- A. As we've recognized, not all of us have our greatest gift in teaching. But we all have some responsibility to grow in teaching ability (cf. **Hebrews 5:11-14**). Don't beat yourself up for not being as great a teacher as Luke, but don't think you can entirely avoid all teaching just because it isn't your greatest gift.
- B. So, let's wrap up with a little help for the rest of us. How can we improve our teaching and through that teaching motivate and encourage those around us?
 1. *Spend time and study with the teachers around you:* Watch what teachers do, how they teach, what they say, why they say it. Let them teach you and help you gain a greater grasp through what they teach you and how they do it. This would include attending classes designed to help folks learn how to teach better.
 2. *Read and study your Bible on a regular basis:* The Bible is the basis for what we teach. We can only improve our teaching as we improve our grasp on what God wants us to teach.
 3. *Read your Bible with a view to share what you learn with others:* Even if it is only one thing in what you are reading. Always have that as a goal in your reading. What one thing will you share with someone today about what you read and studied?
 4. *Be on a constant lookout for life illustrations:* Many lessons come simply from everyday life. Review your day, what you experienced, what you heard, what you saw, and think of biblical principles that were exemplified. Mentally catalogue the illustrations for use in teaching.
 5. *Outline what you will say:* When you are going to be doing some teaching, don't fly by the seat of your pants. Prepare and give thought to what you will say, how you will say it, and why you will say it that way. Determine what the major point(s) you want to get across are and then focus your effort on getting those across well.

Conclusion:

We all have a place in the kingdom and this congregation? Is yours as a teacher? What will you do about it? When and where will you teach? Don't be embarrassed if you can't do what someone else does. Don't be ashamed because you don't have someone else's gift. Make sure you are pursuing the gift God has given you. We need the encouragement, edifying, and building up you can offer through your teaching. As **Ephesians 4:15-16** explains, you are a joint in this congregation and we need the teaching with which you are equipped. If you are a teacher, the question for you is what will you do with God's gift? Are you teaching? How? When?



Introduction:

The baseball scout called up the team manager with an eager report. “Boss, I’ve found the guy you need to sign. He’s a hitter like I’ve never seen before. He was able to hit off of 20 straight pitchers. He hit 5 home runs. Only one guy struck him out. I’m telling you, we need to look into this guy before someone else snatches him up.” The manager replied, “Don’t talk to the batter. Talk to the guy who struck him out. We don’t need any more hitting on our team. What we need right now are guys who can pitch.”

That manager had a healthy perspective of teamwork. He understood that every person at every position provides different strengths and gifts. A great batter doesn’t have to be a great pitcher and vice versa. While it is nice when a pitcher can also hit well, most of the time that doesn’t matter too much. Few pitchers lie awake at night worried about their RBIs or base hit record. Just so, in the church, we don’t need to lie awake at night fretting over what we don’t know how to do or what we aren’t any good at. What we need to focus on is the ability and natural bent that God has given us by His grace. As we’ve already learned from **Romans 12:3-8**, we all have differing abilities which allow us all to function in different ways. We don’t need to be jealous of others and their abilities, neither do we need to devalue our own abilities. Instead, we need to see our place in the congregation, step up, and fill it.

So what is your place? Perhaps you have already learned that you are a Server. Or maybe you have discovered that you are a Teacher. Maybe you’re still waiting to figure out your gift. If so, you might be an Exhorter. Today’s lesson will examine the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for those with the gift of exhortation.

Discussion:

I. Am I an Exhorter?

- A. As we have seen with the other gifts, we all have responsibility in exhortation. **II Corinthians 13:11** says we must “comfort one another.” The word translated “comfort” is the same word found in **Romans 12:8** when it talks about “the one who exhorts.” While we all need to work on this ability in our lives, there are some among us who naturally excel in this area. This is their strength. With this ability comes responsibility. If you have this gift, you need to be functioning in it within this body of believers. That is why God put you here.
- B. You may be wondering, “Is that my place? Am I an Exhorter?” Allow me to share five characteristic strengths of the gift of exhortation. We will be looking at the life of Barnabas to help with this. After all, anyone who is called “the son of exhortation” ought to be able to demonstrate some key strengths in this gift.
 1. *Exhorters want to help people (Acts 4:36-37)*: Barnabas was concerned about people. So, when folks were in need, Barnabas was among the first to provide for that need (demonstrating that he also had strength as a Giver). His exhortation and encouragement grew out of that concern for others. We will note that there are a lot of similarities between Teachers and Exhorters. They will work in many of the same roles. The difference is that Teachers are more focused on passing on the knowledge, facts, and information correctly, while Exhorters are more focused helping, strengthening, and empowering the people who hear them.
 2. *Exhorters want to empower others in their lives and ministries (Acts 9:27; 11:25-26)*: We often look back at Saul, who became the apostle Paul, as one of the greatest Christians in the New Testament. However, if it hadn’t been for Barnabas, there would have been no Paul. God placed Barnabas in Paul’s life for the very purpose of empowering Saul to move from a feared persecutor to a respected brother and Teacher. Exhorters want to see people living victoriously. They want to see others succeed. They aren’t as concerned about the competition as they are the teamwork. So they exhort, comfort, encourage, counsel, advise. They want to see others growing and excelling in confidence.
 3. *Exhorters often accept others as they are without condemning them (Acts 15:36-39)*: John Mark had abandoned Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. Paul gifted as a Teacher and with Insight (prophet) was quick to condemn. John Mark had messed up and that was that. Barnabas, on the other hand, gifted as an Exhorter did not see this in such black and white terms. Sure, John Mark had messed up, but that didn’t make him a bad person. Like everyone else, he was growing. Those with the gift of Teaching

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think in terms of “yes” and “no,” “in” and “out,” “right” and “wrong.” Exhorters tend to see the spectrum and aren’t as quick to condemn others but rather try to come alongside them and empower them to grow and succeed.

4. *Exhorters focus more on application than mere knowledge (Acts 11:23-26)*: Barnabas went to get Saul to help teach in Antioch. After Saul arrived, the text says they taught a lot of people. But while it was just Barnabas, he focused on encouraging them “to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.” Barnabas didn’t come to Antioch to merely pass on information. Rather, he wanted to produce results. He didn’t communicate to these Christians in terms of what they might know. Rather, he focused on what they needed to do. Both Exhorters and Teachers will teach and preach. However, the Teachers focus more on conveying the truth expecting the hearers to make their own application. Teachers tend to think if the truth will make you free, then if I pass on the truth, you will get free. The Exhorters focus more on getting a response from the hearers. Yes, they think, the truth will make you free but only if you apply it properly. The Exhorter wants to encourage people to make proper application and grow thereby.
 5. *Exhorters are greatly loved because of their encouragement and positive outlook (Acts 4:36)*: What a nickname. Barnabas’s real name was actually Joseph, but because he was such an encouragement to people, they nicknamed him “son of encouragement.” The word translated “encouragement” is the same as “exhortation” in **Romans 12:8**. Just about everyone loves to be encouraged. So, just about everyone loves an encourager. Folks love Exhorters. They are easily the most popular Teachers and preachers because they tend to make people feel good, even when they have to make them feel bad about something. Because Exhorters tend to be open about their own shortcomings, even when they have to talk to others about their shortcomings it tends to come off well. Exhorters are well-beloved members of the congregation.
- C. If these characteristics fit you, you have a place in the kingdom and this congregation. We need Exhorters like you.

II. The Struggles of an Exhorter.

- A. As with all of the gifts, the Exhorter also has some natural weaknesses and struggles. If you have these weaknesses and struggles, don’t spend time beating yourself up. Certainly, these demonstrate you have room to grow and areas to work on in your life. However, they don’t mean you are bad or un-useful. They simply indicate that you may well be an Exhorter. You have a role and we need you to fill it.
- B. The apostle Peter was another biblical Exhorter. He certainly demonstrated a lot of strengths as well. However, in Peter’s life we can also see some of the struggles Exhorters often face. Here are five we can see in Peter’s life.
 1. *Exhorters can be outspokenly opinionated (Matthew 16:22)*: Can you imagine pulling Jesus aside and rebuking Him? Yet that is exactly what Peter did. Exhorters draw quick conclusions, make snap decisions, and then tell everyone what they are. However, this is almost always out of a desire to be helpful. Exhorters are convinced they have the answers to help people be all that they can be, to help them succeed, and they often jump in where they haven’t been asked. To modify the old saying, Exhorters often jump in where angels fear to tread. But they just want to be helpful. Exhorters will do well to learn not to answer questions that haven’t been asked or offer advice that hasn’t been solicited. But this is hard for Exhorters to do. They have a verbal gift and sometimes they struggle to shut it off.
 2. *Exhorters tend to interrupt with their opinions rather than listening in order to learn (John 13:5-10)*: When Jesus washed the feet of the disciples, He was trying to pass on one of the greatest lessons the disciples needed to learn. But Peter wouldn’t wait around to listen to Jesus’ lesson. No. Peter was sure he knew what the lesson was. He wasn’t going to wait to get done and then let Jesus ask why these disciples allowed Him to perform this menial task. Rather, Peter interrupted Jesus’ teaching with his own opinions. Even as Jesus tried to patiently teach Peter, he kept interrupting even while adapting to new opinions. Again, Exhorters are blessed with a verbal gift. They speak and they speak well. They are quick to draw their conclusions and sometimes that gets them in trouble. While they often draw correct conclusions, sometimes they are way off base. The Exhorter needs to heed the advice of **Proverbs 18:13**, “If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.”
 3. *Exhorters tend toward people-pleasing (Galatians 2:11-14)*: When men were sent by James, the Lord’s brother, to Antioch, Peter ceased to eat with Gentiles. He was concerned about how these Jews would view him. Exhorters, being so focused on other people, want to be liked. As I said above, Exhorters are generally well-beloved. Therefore, it causes them trouble to think that someone might not like them or approve of

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them. Not to mention, if people don't like them, how can they be of help to those people? So, Exhorters are in danger of compromising on principles in order to keep their relationships safe. By the way, notice that Barnabas, the other Exhorter we have highlighted in this lesson, also fell prey to this temptation.

4. *Exhorters can be impulsive (Matthew 14:28-33)*: Have you ever thought about what the other apostles thought when Peter cried out, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water"? I can see some heads shaking and Andrew muttering, "There he goes again." Peter hadn't thought this through completely or the winds and waves wouldn't have presented a problem to him. As we already stated, Exhorters can jump to quick conclusions and make quick decisions. Because they have a verbal gift, what jumps into their brain often leaps out of their mouth without sufficient thought. No doubt, this turned into a great experience for Peter and provided great lessons for both him and us. Being impulsive is not all bad. After all, it was Peter who on impulse was the first of the disciples to declare Jesus as the Christ. He was willing to go first, stand out front. But without care that impulsiveness can lead to trouble.
 5. *Exhorters sometimes promise more than they can deliver (Matthew 26:30-35)*: Peter was sure he would never abandon Jesus. He couldn't imagine of anything happening to turn him away. He was ready to die for Jesus. I believe Peter absolutely meant that. After all, he was the one who attacked the servant of the high priest in the garden. But Peter was wrong. He would fall away just like Jesus said. When you mix the Exhorter's impulsive nature with the desire to please people, you come up with a deadly combination that produces over commitment. As my dad used to say, they will often let their mouths write checks that their behinds simply can't cash. They mean to do what they say. They can't imagine not doing what they say. But they often find themselves in over their heads.
- C. If these struggles sound all too familiar to you, your place in the kingdom and this congregation may just be as an Exhorter. Don't beat yourself up too much. As we said earlier, they show areas where you need to grow. But they also demonstrate that you have a place here. We need Exhorters.

III. Opportunities in the local church for the Exhorter to motivate and encourage.

- A. There are numerous ways that you can exercise your function as an Exhorter in the work of this congregation. We have a place for you and we need you to ask, "What am I doing with my exhorting ability?" You will see that there is a good deal of overlap between your opportunities and the Teachers from our last lesson. While you both thrive in the same arenas, you will do so for different reasons and accomplish different ends.
- B. Some opportunities to exhort for the congregation as a whole.
 1. Adult classes
 2. Children's classes
 3. Preaching sermons
 4. Articles for the bulletin
 5. Articles for the website
 6. Leading prayer
 7. Recruiting Christians to fill roles
 8. Training Christians to fill roles
- C. Some opportunities to exhort in your relationship with other Christians.
 1. Home Bible studies
 2. Visitation (home, hospital, nursing homes)
 3. Letters, cards, e-mails
 4. Phone calling
 5. Marriage counseling
 6. Life-coaching
 7. Teen counseling
 8. Pray with others
- D. Some opportunities to connect and evangelize.
 1. Encouraging friends, neighbors, family in other pursuits
 2. Example of happy and positive living
 3. Neighborhood Bible studies
 4. Studies with co-workers
 5. Making positive connections in the community
 6. Inviting others to assemblies

7. Phone calling
8. Visiting guests

IV. Improving your exhortation (help for the non-Exhorter).

- A. As we recognized earlier, not all of us have our greatest gift in exhorting. But we all have some responsibility to grow in exhortation (cf. **II Corinthians 13:11**). Don't beat yourself up for not being as great an Exhorter as Barnabas, but don't think you can entirely avoid all exhorting just because it isn't your greatest gift.
- B. So, let's wrap up with a little help for the rest of us. How can we improve our exhorting and through that exhortation motivate and encourage those around us?
 1. *Become friends with an Exhorter*: Spend time listening to an Exhorter. How does he or she speak to other people? How do they speak to you? How do they support and encourage others? Mirror that behavior in your own life.
 2. *Spend time with other people*: Since Exhorters are all about supporting other people, you can't do any good at exhorting holed up in your own little private cubicle. You have to get out among people. Listen to their hopes and dreams, encourage them. Support them.
 3. *Learn to give the same benefit of the doubt you want to receive when you mess up*: Exhorters tend to see people on a spectrum of growth. So, when someone messes up, they don't see them as bad or wrong; they see them as growing. Isn't that how you want to be seen when you mess up? I know I do. If you want to grow in exhortation, start giving folks the benefit of the doubt. I'm not saying ignore their mess ups and sins. I'm simply saying don't assume the worst. Assume they are a growing Christian who struggles just like you do.
 4. *Place a "10" on everyone's head*: This bit of advice comes from John Maxwell. Exhorters are so encouraging because they value people. They tend to see the potential as Barnabas saw the potential in John Mark. No matter where anyone is on the spectrum of growth and involvement in the church see them for the 10 they can become and start treating them like that.
 5. *Think application*: Don't be satisfied with simply passing on some principle or spouting some clichéd proverb. Rather, think application. How does what you are saying to someone really apply in real life? How can it actually help them in a real way? Think in steps and processes that will improve and empower someone's life and then share that with a healthy dose of you-can-do-it.

Conclusion:

We all have a place in the kingdom and this congregation. Is yours as an Exhorter? What will you do about it? When and where will you exhort? Don't be embarrassed if you can't do what someone else does. Don't be ashamed because you don't have someone else's gift. Make sure you are pursuing the gift God has given you. We need the encouragement, edifying, and building up you can offer through your exhortation. As **Ephesians 4:15-16** explains, you are a joint in this congregation and we need the exhortation with which you are equipped. If you are an Exhorter, the question for you is what will you do with God's gift? Are you exhorting? How? When? Where? Who?



Introduction:

What is your role in the congregation? What is your function? What do you do? Perhaps the better question is what should you do? **Romans 12:4** says this body has many members, and not every member serves the same function. Just as the eye does the seeing and not the hearing, the ear does the hearing and not the seeing. In like manner, according to **Romans 12:6**, God has bestowed His grace on us by gifting each of us to fill different functions and roles. Some might be Servers, some Teachers, and others Exhorters.

In today's lessons, we want to examine those among us who are Sharers. **Romans 12:8** says the one who contributes should do so with generosity (ESV). Are you a Sharer? If so, what are you doing with that gift? Let's find out together.

Discussion:

I. Am I a Sharer?

- A. The word translated "contributes" in the ESV or "gives" in NASB and NKJV is "metadidomi" and is also used in **Luke 3:11** and **Ephesians 4:28**. I have decided to use the title "Sharer" because I think sharing connotes the correct idea better. There are plenty of people who give when they have more than enough. A Sharer is someone who gives from what they themselves are using. It conveys the idea of taking what I am using and letting you use it.
- B. As with all the other roles, we understand that we all have responsibility in this area. **Romans 12:13** speaks of all of us contributing to the needs of the saints. **Hebrews 13:16** encourages us all to do good and share what we have. While many have learned this behavior, for some, it is natural. We are not simply talking about the contribution on the first day of the week, though this is definitely part of it. The characteristic of the Sharer is not determined by how much you have learned to put in the plate on Sunday, but on the natural bent of sharing with others.
- C. You may be wondering, "Is that my place? Am I a Sharer?" Allow me to demonstrate five characteristic strengths of the gift of sharing. We will be looking at the Macedonians who shared and sacrificed for the Judean Christians. We get to read Paul's teaching inspired by their actions in **II Corinthians 8-9**.
 1. *Sharers quickly volunteer to give or help when needs are revealed (II Corinthians 8:1-5)*: As soon as Macedonia heard about the need in Judea, they were filled with joy at the prospect of helping out and sharing. Like Servers, they are quick to step up to the plate. The difference is that usually Servers are quick to perceive opportunities, while Sharers are quick when informed of opportunities. Sharers are often the first to approach whoever made an announcement, first to respond to the e-mail, or first to get hold of the contact person when a need is explained. The rest of us tend to think someone else will take care of it.
 2. *Sharers see God as the true owner of all things and believe He will care for them (II Corinthians 9:8-11)*: The Macedonians recognized that any bread they might share with someone actually came from God to begin with. They weren't actually sharing their bread, but the bread God was sharing with them. Further, they believed that if they shared, God would provide enough for all. Sharers seem to innately grasp who actually owns everything they have to share. They don't see their house as their own property, but rather as the blessing from God to be used as a tool to help others. Since God has blessed them with this gift, they believe God will continue to bless them as long as they use the blessings He has provided to help and share.
 3. *Sharers see sharing as an opportunity, not an obligation (II Corinthians 8:4)*: The Macedonians begged for the favor of taking part in the relief of the Judean saints. They did not see the needs of the Judeans as an obligation. They saw it as an opportunity to be of use in the lives of others. They wanted that opportunity. They were excited about it. Sharers feel like they are really being of use when they can give to some cause. They don't feel guilty or manipulated. They want to be involved and they look for this kind of opportunity.
 4. *Sharers are willing to go without in order to share with others (II Corinthians 8:2-3)*: The Macedonians gave even out of their poverty. They gave even beyond their means. That means they sacrificed. They saw themselves as so blessed that they were willing to voluntarily forego some of their own blessings to be a

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blessing in the life of someone else. Sharers are willing to sacrifice. They don't feel put out when they do, nor do they get resentful when they have freely chosen to sacrifice. In fact, for them it often doesn't even feel like sacrifice, which can present a problem as they feel guilty because they think they've never done enough.

5. *Sharers go beyond giving money to giving themselves (II Corinthians 8:5)*: The Macedonians didn't just give money. They gave themselves to God and to the apostles. That naturally led them to give of themselves to the Judeans. This is also seen in **I Thessalonians 2:8-9**. While sharing may be weighted toward thinking of financial and material sharing, there is also the element of sharing time, resources, love, care, concern.
- D. If these characteristics fit you, you have a place in the kingdom and this congregation. We need Sharers like you.

II. The Struggles of the Sharer.

- A. As with all the gifts, the Sharer also has some natural struggles and weaknesses. If you have these weaknesses and struggles, don't spend time beating yourself up. Certainly, these demonstrate you have room to grow and areas to work on in your life. However, they don't mean you are bad or un-useful. They simply indicate that you may well be a Sharer. You have a role and we need you to fill it.
- B. This section of the lesson has been the hardest to write in the whole series so far, simply because I have yet to find a comprehensive example of a Sharer in the Bible demonstrating the struggles. So, unlike the other lessons, I'm going to be using several different examples to demonstrate these weaknesses.
 1. *Sharers tend to think money is the answer to everything (Ecclesiastes 10:19)*: Sharers can have a tendency to think in terms of writing a check for everything. Someone says, "The building needs to be cleaned." The Sharer's first thought is, "Who do you need me to write the check out to?" Someone might say, "I'm really depressed." While the Merciful might give a hug and listen to the depressed express why, the Sharer is likely to think, "Do you need me to help pay for a counselor?" This in turn can lead to the Sharer thinking that sharing financially relieves them of any other obligation to work. Sometimes the Sharer needs to back up and realize the answer is not with money.
 2. *Sharers can be fixated on money, producing stinginess and greed (Luke 19:1-10)*: Zacchaeus was clearly a Sharer. When Jesus came into his house and set him free from his sins, Zacchaeus went above and beyond in making amends, giving fourfold to those he had cheated and giving half of what he had to the poor. He didn't all of a sudden become a Sharer. Rather, that was innate within him but hindered and blocked by his own sinfulness. In this story, we see a struggle that Sharers who are hindered and blocked by sinfulness and immaturity can really struggle with. Because they think in terms of material and financial goods, they can become fixated on money and material goods. They think money is the answer to all problems, so they become horders, stingy, greedy, and materialistic. Their time is spent thinking about getting more money.
 3. *Sharers can develop ulterior motives (Romans 12:8)*: In **Romans 12:8**, Paul says those who contribute must do so in generosity (ESV). Some translations say "liberality." However, the term translated here is "haplotes." The word primarily means sincerity or single-mindedness. The concept of generosity and liberality is a secondary meaning because if you are giving with sincerity, you are giving with only the other person in mind and completely without self-seeking. Thus, you will be generous, rather than manipulative. I believe Paul's exhortation here demonstrates a struggle some Sharers can fall into. They can allow their sharing to develop ulterior motives. Rather than simply sharing for the full benefit of the one with whom they are sharing, they share with some personal motive themselves. One example is by having control issues based on their sharing. Either controlling the funds they share or even thinking that gives them more say in something than others because of how much they have given. This is seen in extreme cases when big givers threaten the elders with leaving the congregation and taking their big contributions with them wherever they go unless the shepherds go along with the Sharer on some decision. When truly sharing, there are no ulterior motives or personal benefits that come from it. It is a gift that becomes the recipient's and is then under the recipient's control. (By the way, this illustration does not include the case of helping out a poor steward on the basis that the poor steward start learning how to be a better steward.)
 4. *Sharers tend to take pride in self and judge others based on the size of their contributions (Matthew 6:2-4; Mark 12:41-44)*: It seems that each gift is susceptible to thinking what it is best at is the litmus test for true spirituality. Servers resent when others don't get involved in serving. Teachers take pride in their knowledge. Exhorters get outspoken and upset when folks disagree with them. Sharers can think they are more devoted to God because of how much they give and share. The Pharisees who shared would draw

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great attention to their giving to let others know how spiritual they are. Even when Sharers don't allow the left hand to know what the right is doing, they still have their own private assessment of their spirituality compared to others. Then they begin to look down on others who are sharing lesser amounts.

5. *Sharers struggle with receiving because they are sure someone else needs it more (II Corinthians 8:13-15)*: Paul explained that he wasn't trying to oppress the Corinthians by asking them to share. Rather, it was a matter of fairness. God was blessing them now so they could be a blessing to others. One day, they may be in need and God would bless others who would in turn bless the Corinthians. While Sharers love to be the ones who bless others, they struggle with being on the receiving end. However, please note why. Lots of people have pride issues when it comes to receiving help even when they really need it. I'm sure some Sharers struggle with that pride issue as well. But the real struggle for the Sharer is thinking that others need the gift more. Additionally, since their natural bent is to share with others, when they have to receive, there is the feeling that they aren't doing their part in the bargain. So, the Sharers do not struggle from an overdeveloped sense of asserting their independence. They struggle to receive because they feel discouraged and useless when someone has to share with them. Of course, Sharers need to learn, as all do, that God set it up this way. We are not encouraging laziness and sloth so others can share with you, but when you have done your work and are still in need, letting others share with you gives them the opportunity to express the gifts God has given them.
- C. If these struggles sound all too familiar to you, your place in the kingdom and this congregation may just be as a Sharer. Don't beat yourself up too much. As we said earlier, they show areas where you need to grow. But they also demonstrate that you have a place here. We need Sharers.

III. Opportunities for the Sharer.

- A. There are numerous ways that you can exercise your function as a Sharer in the work of this congregation. We have a place for you and we need you to ask, "What am I doing with my sharing ability?"
- B. Some opportunities to share with the congregation as a whole.
 1. Contributions
 2. Foreign aid
 3. Donate supplies
 4. Budgeting and treasury work
 5. Giving time
 6. Prayer
- C. Some opportunities to share in your relationship with other Christians.
 1. Financial help
 2. Financial counseling
 3. Hospitality
 4. Needed meals
 5. Rides to the assemblies
 6. Support other preachers personally
 7. Time with those who have special needs
 8. Help with moving
 9. Clothes
 10. Toys for kids
- D. Some opportunities to connect and evangelize.
 1. Giving away Bibles
 2. Lunch bags with congregational information
 3. Volunteer in community
 4. Volunteer in schools
 5. Homeless shelters
 6. Battered women shelters
 7. Unwed mother clinics
 8. Help in halfway houses
 9. Volunteer at a hospital
 10. Neighborhood hospitality

IV. Improving our Sharing (help for the non-sharers).

- A. As we recognized earlier, not all of us have our greatest gift in sharing. But we all have responsibility to share and give (**Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:16**). Don't beat yourself up for not being a stellar Sharer as the Macedonians, but don't think you can entirely avoid sharing just because it isn't your greatest gift.
- B. So, let's wrap up with a little help for the rest of us. How can we improve our sharing and through that sharing motivate and encourage those around us?
 1. *Become friends with a Sharer*: As we note with each of the gifts, one of the best ways to grow in a gift is to spend time with someone who already excels at it. Watch the Sharer in action. Listen to how they speak. Discuss their faith with them. Let them discuss your blessings with you.
 2. *Write gratitude lists*: Make it a regular habit to count your blessings. Put them down on paper and notice exactly how well God really is taking care of you. This will help build your faith that God will care for you when you surrender to Him by sharing with others the blessings He has given you.
 3. *Budget sharing first*: Sharing rarely happens on accident. There is rarely just extra money lying around to share. So, if you are going to improve your sharing, make that the first line on your monthly budget. That would include your contribution to the work of the church and whatever other specific sharing and giving you might do. Of course, we might back up and just say you need to budget period. Many folks don't share because, not knowing what they have, they never know if they can. Make a budget and put sharing first.
 4. *Volunteer for something that will take time*: Sharing means more than writing a check. Find some cause you can volunteer in. Allot a certain amount of time each week or month to be involved in some kind of volunteer capacity, whether it is for something in the community, something with the church, something with an individual. Find a place to simply give of yourself, your time, your energy, your effort.
 5. *Sacrifice something*: Lots of us are great at giving our old stuff away. The kids no longer wear some clothes? A trip to Goodwill is easy. This kind of giving is great and appreciated. I know we have been the benefactors of this kind of giving many times and really appreciated it. But if we want to take our sharing to the next level, we need to sacrifice something. If we only give from our surplus, we are no better than the Jews that put in large sums. If we want to share like the widow with her two mites, we have to sacrifice something. That doesn't mean to give until you become the one in need of sharing by virtue of your giving. It is true that some have given so much as to hurt their own families. Don't do that. But give up something. Instead of buying that new set of clothes, why not rely on the ones you already have and instead put some extra in the church contribution, send some money to a foreign evangelist, donate to a local homeless or battered women's shelter, or buy someone in need a set of new clothes or a gift card for a clothing store.

Conclusion:

We all have a place in the kingdom and this congregation. Is yours as a Sharer? What will you do about it? When and where will you share? Don't be embarrassed if you can't do what someone else does. Don't be ashamed because you don't have someone else's gift. Make sure you are pursuing the gift God has given you. We need the sharing and giving you can offer as a Sharer. As **Ephesians 4:15-16** says, you are a joint in this congregation and we need the sharing with which you are equipped. If you are a Sharer, the question for you is what will you do with God's gift? Are you sharing? How? When? Where? With whom?



Introduction:

In a body, there are eyes, ears, hands, and feet. Each part is gifted with its unique ability and therefore fulfills its function well. Just so, according to **Romans 12:3-8**, in a congregation there are different parts that have different gifts and therefore can fulfill different functions. The great thing, according to **I Corinthians 12:18**, is that God has placed each part of the body right where He wants it to be to accomplish exactly what He wants it to accomplish. Think about what that means for you. You are here because God knows how He has uniquely gifted you. He knows what blend of grace He has bestowed in Your life. Therefore, He knows exactly what functions He wants you to fulfill and has placed you right here to be able to accomplish them. That means we need someone just like you.

What is your function in the congregation? Have you discovered that you are a Server? A Teacher? A Sharer? Maybe, you are a Leader. Please, don't hear the word "Leader" and think this is about the eldership. **Acts 15:22** calls Judas and Silas "leading men among the brothers." They were not elders, but they were seen as leaders. You may be gifted to lead and yet not be a shepherd in the congregation. Likewise, I believe someone may be qualified to pastor the flock and do a great work in that even if their greatest natural gift is something other than leadership. Today's lesson is not examining the eldership. Rather it will examine the strengths, struggles, and opportunities for those with the gift of leadership.

Discussion:

I. Am I a Leader?

- A. When we recognize that at its core leadership is influence and good leadership is positive influence, we understand that all of us have responsibility in leadership. As **I Timothy 4:12** demonstrates, we need to be an example to others. That is leadership at its heart. However, there are clearly some who have a natural talent for leading. They excel under the pressure of gathering people together to overcome obstacles and accomplish goals. With this ability comes responsibility. If you have this gift, you need to function in it within this body of believers. That is why God put you here.
- B. You may be wondering, "Is that my place? Am I a Leader?" Allow me to demonstrate five characteristic strengths of the gift of leadership. We will be looking at the work of Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem to help with this.
 1. *Leaders focus on accomplishing goals (Nehemiah 1:1-4):* As soon as Nehemiah heard about the still ruined walls of Jerusalem, he was filled with passion to do something about it. While the news of the walls was sad to Nehemiah, the goal energized him. Leaders need goals. They are energized by the obstacles and challenges of striving to overcome the hurdle of reaching a goal. They are task-oriented because they want to get things done and go places. They aren't interested in standing still. Some folks are willing to come in everyday and just do the same thing. But Leaders usually aren't. They want to be getting something done.
 2. *Leaders organize people to accomplish the goals (Nehemiah 3:1-32):* Nehemiah was able to organize the people in and around Jerusalem to get the goal done. Leaders don't have to do everything themselves. Don't misunderstand. Leaders are goal and task-oriented, not people-oriented. As they interact with people it is not about the relationships, it is about the accomplishments. However, Leaders are able to bring others on board to accomplish the goal. They are good at assigning and organizing people to get the goal accomplished and thereby accomplish more than they ever could by themselves.
 3. *Leaders look for solutions, not problems (Nehemiah 4:7-23):* When Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites started to get in the way, some folks would have been paralyzed. Some folks can only see problems. But Nehemiah saw solutions. He saw the way to deal with the problems and overcame. Some folks just have a knack for seeing problems. They can come up with 10 problems for every solution. Their favorite phrase is, "Yeah, but..." "Yeah, that would work, but there is also this problem." They love to play the "ain't-it-awful" game and the "everything-is-hopeless" game. That allows them to believe failure is not their fault, it was just insurmountable problems. Leaders aren't like that. Leaders see

problems merely as challenges to overcome. They are constantly on the lookout for alternatives and solutions.

4. *Leaders are not easily quelled by criticism (Nehemiah 2:19-20; 4:1-6)*: When the enemies were trying to sow insecurity and doubt in the Jews, they criticized their wall and their ability. Nehemiah was unmoved by this. He simply kept the people working. Many people hear criticism and begin to buckle. They begin to second-guess and doubt. Leaders are not swayed by every bit of criticism that comes their way. They are often willing to take the heat and keep on moving.
5. *Leaders see the big picture (Nehemiah 2:17; 5:9)*: When Nehemiah was striving to get the people to buy-in to the wall-building, he didn't simply talk about the ruined walls. Rather, he talked about the derision they were suffering. Additionally, when the people were charging excessive interest and selling their brethren into slavery, Nehemiah didn't just talk about the random acts of unkindness. Instead, he talked about walking in the fear of God which would prevent the taunts of the enemies. Nehemiah was able to see behind the surface matters to what was really important. Leaders are able to see the big picture. They don't get bogged down by the surface issues, but look to the deeper issues. Of course, that upset others because they come to a Leader with a certain problem and the Leader wants to deal with the real issue while most people want to deny real issues and focus on surface issues instead. Leaders want to deal with the big picture problems because they know if they don't, they'll only have to deal with another surface issue again later.
- C. If these characteristics fit you, you have a place in the kingdom and this congregation. We need Leaders like you.

II. The Leader's Struggles?

- A. As with all of the gifts, the Leader has some natural weaknesses and struggles. If you have these weaknesses and struggles, don't spend time beating yourself up about them. Certainly, they demonstrate that you have room for growth and areas to work on in your life. However, they don't mean you are bad or un-useful. They simply indicate that you may well be a Leader. You have a role and we need you to fill it.
- B. While King David was a superb leader, we get to see many different parts of his life. In fact, perhaps more than any other character in Scripture, we get to see the good, the bad, and the ugly of David's life. While we definitely could have looked at David as an example of the strengths of leadership, we will use some of the darker days of his life to recognize the struggles that leaders naturally face.
 1. *Leaders can view others as tools for personal benefit (II Samuel 11:1-4)*: How on earth could David commit such an egregious sin? How could he misuse one of his finest soldiers and also take advantage of one of his subjects? Because when he saw Bathsheba, all he could think about was his own potential pleasure. He saw his own benefit and Bathsheba and Uriah became nothing more than tools to give him that benefit. It extended even more when he made Joab an unwitting conspirator in Uriah's death. Because Leaders are goal and task-oriented, but also good at getting others to help accomplish the goal, they can lose sight of the people element. Others simply become objects and pawns to accomplish whatever goal the Leader has. David's was an extreme case focused on sin, but even when the goal is a proper one, Leaders can lose sight of the people element, walking on other's feelings, ignoring the goals and needs of others, all in the name of getting a goal accomplished.
 2. *Leaders can easily be angered when people don't see things their way (I Samuel 25)*: David had a plan. If he took care of Nabal's flocks and herds, Nabal would provide for him on the feast days. When Nabal didn't see it that way, David flew off the handle. I certainly think Nabal was in the wrong. But even David was brought to see that his immediate reaction was an overreaction and improper when Abigail brought him up short (cf. **I Samuel 25:32-33**). Leaders don't understand why others don't see everything the way they do. Leaders don't understand why everyone else doesn't jump on board with them to accomplish their goals. Servers become resentful when others aren't helping out with the service. Teachers become discouraged when others don't listen to their knowledge. In like manner, Leaders can get overly upset when others don't recognize their leadership by falling in line behind their goals and plans.
 3. *Leaders can jump to quick conclusions without considering all the angles (II Samuel 6)*: David wanted the Ark of the Covenant moved to Jerusalem. It seemed like a good idea to him and he jumped in with both feet. He even had the people go out of their way to show honor for the Ark by having it put on a new cart (**II Samuel 6:3**). He quickly surveyed the plans, made a decision, and pursued it. However, he had not considered every angle and it got him into trouble. He had neglected to consider how God wanted the Ark moved. In **I Chronicles 15:13**, David said the death of Uzzah happened because they didn't seek God's

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way on this matter. Leaders are often able to survey the playing field and make quick decisions. They often make good decisions this way. That's one of the things that makes them good Leaders. However, strengths carried to extremes become weaknesses. Leaders have to be careful because they get so focused on accomplishing a goal that they don't consider everything they need to and they get themselves and their followers in trouble.

4. *Leaders can overlook family obligations in the haste to lead others (II Samuel 13-14)*: If there is one thing we see in the Old Testament over and over again it is that good Leaders can get so caught up in leading others that they let family obligations go. Eli's boys were ungodly. Samuel's boys were ungodly. David's kids were messed up. Amnon developed an unhealthy obsession with his half-sister Tamar and ended up raping her. Absalom killed Amnon. Absalom rebelled against David and nearly tore the kingdom away from him. Just before David's death, Adonijah tried to force himself onto the throne rather than letting David establish the next king. The struggle is apparent. Sometimes Leaders can get so focused on the task of leading others that they forget to lead their own families. They end up ignoring their home front in many ways.
 5. *Leaders can sometimes forget who is really in charge (I Chronicles 21:1-7)*: David apparently became proud of the expansion that had happened under his reign. He wanted to number the people. But God had not authorized this. Joab even tried to talk David out of it, but David wouldn't listen. With all of his success and leadership, for a moment, David had forgotten who was really in charge. He forgot that God was the real boss and he needed to surrender to Him. Leaders can sometimes forget that they are not the ultimate authority in the world. This can come in the form of thinking they are above the law. It can come in the form of assuming they are entitled to special privileges. It can come in the form of assuming that because they thought of it, it must be right. Leaders have to remember that they are under God's authority and they need to have a constant reminder of what their place really is. God may use them to accomplish great things as they lead men and women, but they are still God's servant.
- C. If these struggles sound all too familiar to you, your place in the kingdom and this congregation may just be as a Leader. Don't beat yourself up too much. As we said earlier, they show areas where you need to grow. But they also demonstrate that you have a place here. We need Leaders.
- III. Opportunities in the local church for the Leader to motivate and encourage.
- A. There are numerous ways that you can exercise your function as a Leader in the work of this congregations. We have a place for you and we need you to ask, "What am I doing with my leadership ability?" Here are some opportunities for you to use your gift.
 - B. Some opportunities to lead in the congregation as a whole.
 1. Shepherd
 2. Deacon
 3. Planner (curriculum, conferences, etc.)
 4. Workshop or seminar leader
 5. Program leader (Guest Evangelism, etc.)
 6. Mission trips
 7. Goal-setting
 8. Vision-casting
 - C. Some opportunities to lead in your relationship with other Christians.
 1. Mentoring
 2. Studying
 3. New Converts/Struggling Christians
 4. Home study leader
 5. Tap someone on the shoulder
 6. Organizing individuals to accomplish work
 - D. Some opportunities to connect and evangelize.
 1. Leading well on the job
 2. Leadership in community volunteering
 3. Neighborhood leadership
 4. Civic club leadership (Kiwanis, Rotary, etc.)
 5. Affinity club leadership (Toastmasters, etc.)

6. Chamber of Commerce
7. Lead a neighborhood study
8. Lead an on the job study
9. Lead mission trips
10. Organize evangelistic efforts

IV. Improving your leadership (help for the non-Leader).

- A. As we recognized earlier, not all of us have our greatest gift in leadership. But we all have some responsibility to lead (cf. **I Timothy 4:12**). When others are heading in the wrong direction, we cannot back off and do nothing, claiming we don't have the gift of leadership. Instead, we need to step up to the plate and lead.
- B. So, let's wrap up with a little help for the rest of us. How can we improve our leadership and through that leadership motivate and encourage those around us.
 1. *Become friends with a Leader*: One of the best ways to learn about any gift is to spend time with someone who has it. Leadership is no different. Watch the Leader in action. Pay attention to how he or she thinks, reacts, responds, works, organizes.
 2. *Be led*: This may seem odd, but before one can be a really good Leader, they have to learn how to be a follower. If you don't know how to submit to real authority, it is almost guaranteed you'll never know how to wield it either. So, don't just be friends with a Leader, let a Leader lead you.
 3. *Lead yourself first*: Some folks think of leadership as some kind of grand promotion. Therefore, they want to jump into a role of leadership without doing the work it takes to grow into leadership. If you want to grow in leadership, you need to first work on yourself. As Gandhi said, "Be the change you want to see in the world." Before trying to step up to the plate and get other people to some point, work on getting you there first.
 4. *Think of two or three solutions for every problem you think of*: Work on your ability to see options, alternatives, and solutions. Everyone can find problems with anything that is done. But leadership is about overcoming those problems. The only way to do so is to think of solutions. So, the next time you hear yourself saying, "The problem with that is..." stop and force yourself to come up with two or three solution options.
 5. *Remember its none of your business what others think of you*: While Leaders grow from constructive criticism, they allow the pursuit of the worthy goal to take precedence over what everyone else thinks about them. Folks may criticize, but Leaders keep pressing on to the goal. They know that the goal makes what everyone else thinks pointless. When you know you are pursuing a worthy and right goal, determine that what everyone else thinks about you and your goal really doesn't matter. Don't let their criticism paralyze you or stop you from pursuing your worthy goal.

Conclusion:

We all have a place in the kingdom and this congregation. Is yours as a Leader? What will you do about it? When and where will you lead? Don't be embarrassed if you can't do what someone else does. Don't be ashamed because you don't have someone else's gift. Make sure you are pursuing the gift God has given you. We need the leadership, direction, and challenge you can offer through your leadership. As **Ephesians 4:15-16** explains, you are a joint in this congregation and we need the leadership with which you are equipped. If you are a Leader, the question for you is what will you do with God's gift? Are you leading? Who? When? Where? How?



Introduction:

In Christ's church, we must learn to appreciate the differences. Think about the apostles for a moment. How different do you think Matthew the tax collector and Simon the Zealot were? Or you have Thomas, a reluctant late-adopter who hung back and had to see for himself, contrasted with Peter, an impulsive front-man who consistently jumped out front to lead the way. How different were they? All four men made mistakes. They all had struggles. But were any of them bad? No. They were just different. Jesus brought these men with different backgrounds, different abilities, different strengths, and different struggles together. Why? Because He didn't simply want to use one type of person. He has room for everyone. He wants to use everyone. And when a group of different kinds of people work together, they can accomplish more together than they could accomplish individually.

Jesus has continued that approach in the church and in the local churches. According to **Romans 12:3-8**, God has given each of us a unique blending of gifts. Based on that blending of gifts, we can all fill different functions. As we work together, you laboring where I cannot, and vice versa, we build this body up by what every joint supplies (**Ephesians 4:15-16**). Over the past several lessons we have seen some of those gifts. We've examined the Server, the Teacher, the Exhorter, the Sharer, and the Leader. In this lesson, we want to examine the gift of mercy. Perhaps you are a Giver of Mercy. As you listen to this lesson and assess your own giftedness, ask yourself what you are doing with the gift God has given you.

Discussion:

V. Am I a Giver of Mercy?

- A. When Paul talks about those with the gift of mercy, he isn't simply speaking about offering forgiveness. While offering forgiveness is a form of mercy, it is not the equivalent of mercy. Mercy is helping those who are afflicted. Obviously, when I'm afflicted by sin, receiving forgiveness is a help, thus it is mercy. But when we feed the hungry and clothe the destitute, we are also offering mercy. When we give a shoulder to cry on and an ear to the sad, hurt, and lonely, we are offering mercy. When the Good Samaritan **Luke 10:29-37** helped the beaten Jew, he was showing him mercy (**Luke 10:37**).
- B. Certainly, when Jesus teaches the parable of the Good Samaritan and then says, "You go, and do likewise," we see that we all have responsibility in showing and giving mercy. However, based on what Paul says in **Romans 12:3-8**, we understand that some clearly have greater natural ability and giftedness in mercy. What does that look like? Let's examine the Good Samaritan and see some characteristic strengths for the Giver of Mercy. As we go through this list, you will see some significant similarities between the Server and the Giver of Mercy. Understand that the difference between the two is that the Server is more focused on the tasks. The Server sees work that needs to be done and does it. The Giver of Mercy is more focused on the people, their emotions, and need for support. They see people who need to be helped and they help them.
 1. *Givers of Mercy are drawn to hurting people:* Clearly, the Levite and the priest had "more important" things on their mind than the hurting man. They had duties to attend to. Taking time to help the beaten man would get in the way of that, possibly making them unclean and keeping them from their tasks. However, the Samaritan placed the hurt man above every other plan he had. We have no idea what tasks or business the Samaritan might have had, but he put that on hold to help the hurting. Givers of Mercy are often drawn to those who are hurting. They can sense the distress, depression, pain, loneliness. They are drawn to them and strive to help. Others of us, for whatever reason, often walk on the other side of the road. Perhaps we don't sense the need as much. Perhaps we are afraid to get involved. Perhaps we have other things we think are more important. The Giver of Mercy places a priority on the hurting and, therefore, are drawn to them.

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2. *Givers of Mercy take action to remove hurt and distress:* The Good Samaritan didn't simply feel sorry for the hurt man. For all we know, the Levite and the priest felt sorry for the man, but they didn't do anything. The Samaritan, however, did something. Mercy is not merely sympathy, recognizing someone's hurt. It is not merely empathy, hurting along with them. It is doing something to alleviate the pain. Givers of Mercy take action. This is a lot like the Server. However, the Server is more in tune to the task at hand. The Giver of Mercy sees the person in need often with a focus on the emotional and relational aspect of the need (even if the pain is in the physical realm). For instance, a heavy snow falls and a widow's drive needs to be shoveled. The Server sees a drive that needs to be shoveled and no one else who can do it. The Giver of Mercy sees a woman who is saddened by her loss of ability and feels alone because the one who used to do it is no longer there. The Server wants to relieve the burden. The Giver of Mercy wants to relieve the pain.
3. *Givers of Mercy see value (the good) in others:* The story of the Good Samaritan is so jaw-dropping because it involves two people who saw each other as valueless. The Jews and the Samaritans were spiritual enemies. They looked down on each other. They did not value each other. However, this Samaritan saw a man worth helping. We might say it a different way, the Giver of Mercy sees the good in others. Givers of Mercy recognize that we are all sinners. We all need mercy. They look for reasons to love people and want to help them. When some look at people and start to list their faults, it is the Givers of Mercy who begin to remind everyone of their good qualities. There's a great story I once heard about a person who clearly must be a Giver of Mercy. The story is told about an office worker who simply would not get involved in the bad-mouthing of co-workers. When they bad mouthed the boss, she reminded them that the boss had given them a job. When they criticized one woman, she claimed that she always got her reports in on time. When they criticized another worker, she said that he held the door open for her the other day, he couldn't be all bad. They tried to think of someone who was just so bad that she couldn't possibly say something good about him. So, one day sitting around the break room table, one fellow brought up the devil. "Now there's someone not even you can say anything good about," he said to the woman. She tilted her head and said, "Well, all I know is if the rest of us worked as hard on our jobs as the devil does on his, we'd probably all get huge bonuses."
4. *Givers of Mercy are trusting and trustworthy:* Whenever someone preaches on the Good Samaritan, they always point out that with robbers on the road, this beaten man could have been merely a trap. Even if not a fake, the fact that a man had been beaten and robbed meant that the robbers might still be nearby. Perhaps the Levite and priest passed on because they didn't trust the situation. But the Samaritan was more trusting. He didn't assume it was a trap. He saw someone who needed help. Further, when at the inn, he trusted the innkeeper to be honest about the expenses of the hurt man. That is because the man was himself trustworthy. He claimed he would come back and make payment. The implication is that the innkeeper did exactly what was asked. That meant the innkeeper must have trusted the Samaritan. Because the Samaritan was trustworthy, he judged others as trustworthy. Givers of Mercy want to help people, so they tend to be trustworthy. If they commit to something, they do their dead level best to make sure it happens. Because that is how they live, they assume others will do the same. They would never want to hurt anyone and rarely enters their minds that others would want to hurt them. Others are often suspicious. With others, you might have to prove you mean good for them to trust you. With the Giver of Mercy, they assume you mean good until you prove you mean harm.
5. *Givers of Mercy follow the heart over the head:* Let's face it. The Samaritan's decision was hardly logical. As already stated, the presence of this beaten man meant there were robbers about. It could be a trap. The beaten man might even be in on it. The Samaritan clearly had business to attend to because he couldn't stay until the man was completely recovered. But helping this man at all put him behind at least an entire day. Not to mention it just isn't smart to leave an open-ended offer to an innkeeper to purchase whatever he needed. None of that makes much logical sense. But when we see that the man felt compassion (**Luke 10:33**) we see that this man was following his heart over his head, feelings over logic. The word translated "compassion" actually means "to be moved as to one's bowels." While we think of the heart as the seat of our emotions, the ancient Hebrews viewed the bowels as the seat of our feelings and emotions. The Samaritan was not moved by his thinking, but by his feelings. No doubt, those among us who are driven by logic think this is not a strength at all. But notice that the Levite and the priest who thought with their heads and not their hearts are the bad guys in this parable. Givers of Mercy are moved by feelings and emotions rather than thinking and logic. They act based on gut-feelings rather than pure head knowledge.

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- C. If these characteristics fit you, you have a place in the kingdom and this congregation. We need Givers of Mercy like you.

VI. The struggles of the Giver of Mercy.

- A. As with all the gifts, while there are natural strengths, there are some natural struggles as well. Having these struggles does not mean you are a bad person. If you see yourself in these struggles, don't beat yourself up too much. Certainly, they demonstrate that you have room to grow and areas to work in. But having these struggles demonstrates that you have a place here. If you face these struggles, you may just be a Giver of Mercy. We need Givers of Mercy like you.
- B. I had the same problem with this gift as I did the gift of sharing. I am not aware of a good comprehensive example of a person with this gift and the struggles. Instead, we will have to look in several different places to understand the struggles that go along with this giftedness.
1. *Givers of Mercy often fear conflict (Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-3)*: Abraham was certainly a Giver of Mercy. When turmoil arose between his servants and Lot's, he was the peacemaker and granted Lot the first choice of land (**Genesis 13**). When Lot was taken captive by the five kings, Abraham came to the rescue (**Genesis 14**). When God was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, it was merciful Abraham that argued Him down to potentially saving the city if he found only ten righteous souls (**Genesis 18**). Interestingly, despite his willingness to step in and rescue Lot, we see an interesting fear in Abraham not once, but twice. Twice he feared conflict over his wife. He was afraid that both Pharaoh and Abimelech would want his wife and would kill him for her. He was afraid of the conflict and even risked his own wife out of that fear. This is clearly an extreme case, but Givers of Mercy don't ever want to cause pain and don't really want to feel it either, so they have a tendency to avoid even necessary conflict.
 2. *Givers of Mercy can be gullible (Genesis 16:1-6)*: Despite Abraham's faith in God, he allowed his wife to talk him into a crazy plan. Give her children through Hagar. Then when that plan backfired on Sarai, Abraham again simply fell in line with Sarai's plan. One of the Giver of Mercy's strength is that they are trusting. However, when that strength is carried to an extreme they can become gullible, being taken advantage of, submitting to bad planning, just wanting to please others.
 3. *Givers of Mercy can tend toward sadness and depression (Romans 12:8)*: When Paul encouraged the Givers of Mercy, he said they needed to give mercy with cheerfulness. That implies that Givers of Mercy can struggle with this cheerfulness. That makes perfect sense. Givers of Mercy are in tune with feelings and emotions. They want things to be good, but they so often see hurt. They want to see justice, but they so often see injustice. They want to see positive, but they so often see negative. Things don't measure up to the way they ought to be. This can lead to sadness and even depression for those who are gifted with mercy. They can get trapped in their melancholy. Paul encourages them to be cheerful. They need to be excited about the opportunities in which God is allowing them to help.
 4. *Givers of Mercy can be easily hurt by others (Job 12:4; 16:2)*: Job was another giver of mercy. In **Job 1:5**, he was the one who was offering sacrifices to atone for even his grown children. In **Job 29:12; 31:16-23**, Job demonstrated the mercy he bestowed on the poor, fatherless, and widowed. No doubt, Job was in pain because of his own suffering. Like Givers of Mercy often do, he opened himself up to his friends. He trusted them and they stomped on him. In **Job 12:4; 16:2**, we see a taste of his anguish and hurt from his friends. Because Givers of Mercy are so in tune with emotions and feelings, they are often very vulnerable with theirs. That is a good thing. However, it often makes their pain much greater than others when those friends hurt or betray them.
 5. *Givers of Mercy can allow feelings to override knowledge (Job 38:2-3)*: While it is good to be in touch with feelings and even to be guided by them, when that is taken to the extreme, the Giver of Mercy can completely ignore facts in favor of feelings. That is not a good thing. Job certainly felt deeply. With 18 chapters of poetry, we see Job's feelings laid bare. But in all that feeling, he "darkens counsel by words without knowledge." He lost sight of God's immense power and divine nature. He felt that everything was wrong and let that lead him to question even God's propriety. Even Job admitted this in **Job 42:2-6**.
- C. Again, if you have these struggles, that doesn't make you bad or not useful. Rather, it means you may well be a Giver of Mercy. Sure, you need to work on these struggles and continue to fight against them. But you can take comfort in knowing that we have a place for you here. We need Givers of Mercy.

VII. Opportunities for the Giver of Mercy.

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- A. There are many ways Givers of Mercy can be of use in God's kingdom and in this congregation. There is a place for you here. There is a job for you. If you've listened to these characteristics and struggles and seen yourself, you need to ask yourself, "What am I doing with my gift of mercy?" Here are some opportunities for you.
 - B. Some opportunities to give mercy in the congregation as a whole.
 - 1. Prayer
 - 2. Prayer groups or chains
 - 3. Foreign mission gifts
 - 4. Teaching on mercy and grace
 - 5. Helping deacons with service work
 - 6. Involved with benevolence
 - C. Some opportunities to give mercy in your relationship with other Christians.
 - 1. Prayer
 - 2. Hospitality
 - 3. Visiting the sick
 - 4. Visiting the shut-in
 - 5. Visiting elderly or widows
 - 6. Letters, cards, notes
 - 7. Listening ear
 - 8. Weep with those who weep
 - 9. Support and good counsel
 - 10. Benevolence
 - D. Some opportunities to connect and evangelize.
 - 1. Prayer
 - 2. Hospital visitation
 - 3. Nursing home visitation
 - 4. Listen to neighbors and co-workers
 - 5. Volunteer work
 - 6. Helping the beaten, broken, and battered
 - 7. Assisting a Teacher (provide balance)
 - 8. Food pantries, shelters, etc.
- VIII. Improving our Mercy (help for the non-Giver of Mercy)
- A. As we recognized, not all of us have our greatest giftedness as Givers of Mercy. However, we all have responsibility in this area (cf. **Luke 10:29-37**).
 - B. So, let's wrap up with a little help for the rest of us. How can we grow in the gift of mercy?
 - 1. *Become friends with a Giver of Mercy*: As with all the gifts, the best way to grow in one is to be around someone who is good at it. Listen, watch, and imitate.
 - 2. *Spend time in your feelings*: The rest of us are not as good with feelings as Givers of Mercy are. We often try to simply push through them or mask them. Some of us couldn't even really tell others how we felt if we wanted to. We've so ignored, masked, and tried to escape from our feelings that we don't even know the words to describe them. If you want to get better at recognizing emotions and feelings in others, spend some time in your own. If you're sad, sit there in your sadness. I know that sounds odd, but just sit there and be sad. Don't go get some ice cream. Don't watch a comedy on TV. Be sad. You might even call the Giver of Mercy that you are now friends with and talk to them about it. Journal about it. What caused it? Why is it affecting you this way? What does it feel like? What is a godly response to it?
 - 3. *Look for the good in others*: Givers of Mercy look for the good in others. Why not try to do the same? The next time you catch yourself criticizing someone in your mind, don't move on until you've thought of something praiseworthy as well.
 - 4. *Don't condemn the hurting*: Sadly, many of the rest of us tend to think if someone is hurting they must deserve it. Isn't that what Job's friends did? If they were more spiritual, more devoted to God, more like us they wouldn't be going through this. We see the poor and condemn them for not working hard enough. We see the oppressed and condemn them for not being aggressive enough. We see the spiritually struggling and condemn them for not being strong enough. The next time you see someone hurting, don't look for the

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reason that you can hold up in condemnation. Instead, look for a way to help understanding that but for the grace of God, you might just be there yourself.

5. *Put yourself in others' shoes:* While mercy is not the same as empathy, you can hardly bestow mercy without feeling empathy. Empathy is the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes. It is the ability to feel what they feel. Steven Covey wrote about a time when a great paradigm shift produced empathy in him. He was riding the bus when a man got on with two extremely rowdy kids. They were all over the place, in the faces of others, making noise, generally causing a nuisance. The man wasn't doing anything about it. Folks all around were grumbling about it, casting furtive, side-long glances at the oblivious man. Finally, someone had enough and went to the man and said, "Sir, you've got to do something about these kids." The man looked up as if from a fog and said, "Oh, I'm sorry. I guess I'm not with it right now. We're on our way home from the hospital. Their mother just died and I guess they don't really know how to handle it. To tell you the truth, I don't think I do either." All grumbling ceased and empathy abounded. Try putting yourself in others' shoes. What kind of bad day might they have had? What kind of trouble might they be in? What kind of help might they need? How would you feel if you were in their shoes?

Conclusion:

We all have a place in the kingdom and this congregation. Is yours as a Giver of Mercy? What will you do about it? Where will you give mercy? Don't be embarrassed if you can't do what someone else does. Don't be ashamed to hang behind the scenes. But make sure you are pursuing the gift God has given you. We need the encouragement, edifying, and building up you can provide through your mercy. Like **Ephesians 4:15-16** says this congregation is held together by what every joint supplies. We need merciful people like you.