

Sermon Title: From God, To You, Through Me
Scripture: Romans 12:3-8
Series: When Love Gets Difficult
Date Delivered: 9/21/25

Message Main Idea

God is transforming us into a community increasingly marked by the generous exercising of gifts for the building up of Christ's body.

Fallen Condition Focus

We easily fall back into conforming to "this world's" assessment of ourselves and seek to use our gifts for self first.

Christ's Redemptive Focus

Christ has incorporated us into a spiritual community where His Spirit uses the diversity of gifts for personal and corporate maturation.

Introduction

Pray

Let's begin by praying together.

Psalm 86:11 says, "Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to [revere] your name."

We come before you, God, humbly seeking your instruction and our inner transformation. Our desire is that we may walk in your ways, God, and so express our love to you.

Speak, Lord, your people are listening. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Arouse Attention

Imagine being at a gift exchange where a small envelope lands in your lap. It's too small to be socks or a scarf and not the right shape to be cash. So, you're intrigued. Your turn comes around and when you open it you find a gift card to your favorite restaurant. You flip it over and on the back a number is written in permanent marker that almost makes you fall off your seat.

You do some quick math and you realize you can order your favorite dish ten times over. All the sudden your Friday lunches for the next several months show up as "unavailable" in your calendar.

Surface FC

A second thought crosses your mind as your calendar and mental calculator fade from your mind's-eye: Is a gift this wonderful meant for me only? Perhaps the thought in the giver's mind

was that I would have a party, gathering all my favorite people and share my favorite meal. That thought is nearly as wonderful as the first! What do you do?

Connect to Audience

You see, each of us come into this life with our pockets stuffed with gift cards already loaded. Instead of being to restaurants, these cards are our inherent skills, abilities, and areas of gifting God designed to go with us.

As we've been learning from Romans 12, the kingdom of this world says, "These are for you, you, you, you!" While the Kingdom of Jesus Christ says, "Not yours, not yours, not yours."

Frame Up MMI

As you open up your pockets and inspect the ways in which God has gifted you, did you know the Bible offers timely, practical wisdom on just what those are for.

Introduce Passage

Turn with me to Romans chapter 12, verses 3-8

Last week David gave us a deep dive into verses 1 and 2 of chapter 12. This week and next week we're focusing on verses 3-8. In view of God's mercies, his gracious work to save us and bring us to himself, Paul begins to outline the ways in which Christ is transforming us. His pattern: "Not this, but this." Here, in verse 3, Paul begins his "not this, but this pattern" by highlighting the change God is making in our thinking as it relates to our skills, abilities, and gifting.

Today's passage begins:

³ 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, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. (ESV)

Point 1

I want to begin by highlighting verse 5. Let's follow Paul's logic backwards here and I think it will make a lot of sense.

we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

One of the first things that catches our attention in these verses is the communal nature of all that Paul is saying. I don't know about you, but thinking communally comes quite unnaturally

to me. Born and raised in Western culture, I have been taught from a young age the virtues of independence, self-starts, and me-first. While not inherently bad, these ideals of Western culture serve us poorly when it comes to living out our identity as a member of Christ's body.

When a man, woman, or child places their faith in Christ, the God brings them into a mysterious spiritual union with Christ and all his people. And this person becomes a citizen of an interconnected, inter-dependent, and diverse community. Take your mind, for a moment, to the grapes that grow in my sister's backyard..

Techniques for grafting grape vines have been around in Rome since before Paul wrote this letter. In grafting, a farmer joins two tissues of plants together so they continue to grow as one plant. Really, what it does is allow the plant to express desired traits in fruit from another vine, while preserving the healthy, established roots and stock. This is just the perfect picture of what happens to us when we place our faith in Christ. We are grafted into the life of Christ, and all his people. We become one with the True Vine and all his people. Our very identity becomes mysteriously, intricately linked with that of Christ and all our brothers and sisters.

Look with me to verse 4,

Each of our bodies have many parts, and each one of those parts do not have the same function.

Here, Paul makes two simple, yet important connections.

First, just as the human body is made up of many parts, so it is with Christ's people.

In one person alone, there are some 200 bones, some 650 muscles, and over 70 organs. All of these independent parts are connected through an elaborate system of nerves, connective tissue, and blood vessels. Truly, it is a work of Divine engineering and artistry.

A second important connection is this: Just as each part of the body has a unique, God-given function, so it is with Christ's people. Simply put, the eye has a different function than the bicep, the thumb, and the liver.

Add to that our understanding that individual body parts contribute significantly only as they work with the whole, then you can see how the body is a wonderful picture of God's spiritual community: diverse, inter-connected, and inter-dependent.

So, those gift cards in your pocket, the ones you received, are to you, but you begin to get the sense that the lavish gift is not for you alone.

Verse 3,

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, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

Belonging to Christ's spiritual body should drastically change how we see ourselves.

In the first of his “not this, but this” pattern contrasts in Romans, we see him saying, “Don’t think of your self more highly than you ought, but with sober judgment...Putting it in a slightly different light, “Not in Pride, but in light of your faith.”

Where do we see that? Paul says, “Think with sober, or sound, judgment.” This contrast is poignant because “Sound judgment” was one of the primary virtues in the Greco-Roman world and was specifically contrasted with pride. Today, just as then, this world’s way of thinking says, “Look at all those gift cards, loaded and ready to spend! You must be proud to have all that!” This mindset leads to pride, manifesting as arrogance, egotism, self-love, vanity, and the like.

In what ways are we supposed to think of ourselves in the Kingdom of Christ? Paul links it here, “we are to think according to the measure of faith.”

“Now wait a minute! Am I to measure myself by the amount of faith I have?” At first examination we might conclude this, but then we’re left wondering how Paul can then advocate for humility.

This phrase calls us to see ourselves in light of our faith, thinking to all God has done, like we studied in Romans 5 & 8. There we read how God does what humans are wholly unable to do: save ourselves from the consequences of our sin. This generosity to the undeserving on the part of God is what Christians call grace. We are loved by grace, not by merit. We are brought into God’s body by grace, not by merit. And we are kept secure in God’s love by his grace, not by our merit.

So, when we think of ourselves, we think in light of what our faith says: we are grafted, by grace, into this body of Christ. That leads to humility, a reasonable judgment of self in view God’s mercies.

Transition

Now that we understand how to think of ourselves with the Kingdom mindset, part of this diverse, inter-connected, and inter-dependent Body of Christ, what do I do with this load of skills, abilities, and gifts?

Point 2

Picking up in verse 6, we read...

⁶ Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

Paul highlights seven specific gifts that God has given to individual members of this Christian community. While not exhaustive, it covers many.

Put in their proper light, these gifts work to one end. This explains why my gifts are not primarily for me.

Listen to 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the **common** good. (ESV)

Or Ephesians 4 (selections from 4-16)

There is one body and one Spirit” and “grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” (ESV)

WHY?

“growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. ¹⁶ He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.” (NLT)

God is not unclear about his grand design and his grand goal in building an interconnected, interdependent, and diverse community. Through love, we are to grow into a community that looks a lot like His Son, more and more so every day.

If this is God's goal for us, Covenant Church, we are well on our way. This church body is remarkable in the way that it loves one another in sacrificial ways. That can only be evidence of God's working in our midst. Yet, God says there is wondrously more he wants to do in and through us. As we individually and corporately, follow God on the path to maturity, think how our church family would only be stronger if we saw more of the gifts listed in verses 6-8.

Just a brief survey is sufficient to demonstrate this:

In Paul’s day, Prophets, Teachers, and those with the gift of Exhortation all had the important job of revealing God’s will and then helping the Christian community live it out. While there is wide debate on the gift of prophecy, which is direct revelation from God, suffice it to say we need so many people to come alongside one another to read and teach God’s Word today. Whether that is with toddlers, teens, or those in the twilight of their years, there are hungry souls eager to have some of us serve through teaching God’s Word.

Teach, not for yourself, but for the sake of others.

Serving is listed here as a specific gift and there are many in whom God has placed a heart that loves to serve. Our world that says, “take care of yourself, yourself,” This is

stifling for many when their means are tight or their health is suffering. Here, we are invited into loving service for the benefit of another.

Serve, not for yourself, but for the sake of others.

In the next one, Paul calls on those who are gifted to contribute to do so generously. The group of men, women, and children that Paul would be addressing in Rome would look very different from our church today. In general, most people who made up the church in Rome would be living in perpetual food insecurity. This was life in the first century. However, there were several who became believers in Rome, who were men and women of greater means. These folks would often be the hosts of churches meeting in their homes. While God loves it when all Christians worship through giving, Paul is also clear that there are some to whom God has given a specific gift to be generous in their giving. That gifting may not have anything to do with one's amount wealth, but rather is an inclination of the heart.

Give generously, not for yourself, but for the sake of others.

For those to whom God has given the gift of leadership, Paul instructed them to do it with zeal. In an age, when influencers are a dime a dozen, true LEADERSHIP, I think, is much more rare. Countless people on social media are trying to get us to think and behave a certain way, but leaders invite us on the journey with them. An influencer takes no risk in the decision that you make, a leader is walking right there with you, sometimes right in front of you.

Lead with zeal, not for yourself, but for the sake of others.

Lastly, we read of the act of mercy and the encouragement to do it with cheerfulness. To be a physical expression of God's compassion in cheerfulness to the hurting and vulnerable among us is a beautiful, wonderful gift.

Act in mercy, not for yourself, but for the sake of others.

I wonder, where are you in the process of exercising your spiritual gifts for the benefit of Christ body? Paul Tells us in Ephesians 2:10 that God has prepared good works in advance, for us to walk in. That means that, for each person here, we can be confident that God has a prepared place for us to jump in.

Perhaps you're in the process of getting to know yourself and what might be your potential gifts. There are people here at the church who would love to join you in that journey and help you figure out just how to do that. Simply go to our website "covenantepc.org", the "ministries" tab, then click on serve. There you'll be guided into the next step in figuring that out.

Or Perhaps you're a little bit farther along in this journey of knowing yourself and how God has gifted you to bless the body. If that's the case, I would recommend picking up a copy of the Covenant ZINE. While not exhaustive, it is a very comprehensive guide to how you can grow and manifest your gifts for the benefit of Christ body. Open it up and take a read. In looking at the middle section, you can see that there are small groups. There are opportunities to tell other people about Jesus, a section about serving. There is a section about children's ministry

and student ministries. There's a section about Purdue oriented ministries and, there's a section about global ministries and missions. There is no lack for ways to get connected and manifest those gifts of the Spirit God has given you here at Covenant.

Closing

The heart of this passage is to invite us into deeper transformation, beginning with how we view ourselves, in light of God's mercies in Christ. God's invitation is for us to see ourselves as vitally connected to this wide, diverse group of people and to see those skills and abilities we possess as being his gifts not to us, but to his people through us.

When my family moved into our home, my Father-and-Mother-in-law gifted us 6 folding chairs. When you get to homeownership, you actually get excited about gifts like these. So, we were pretty stoked. I didn't realize it at the time, but I would rarely be the one benefiting from sitting in one of those chairs. The gift given to me, and my wife would actually be a blessing to countless students, family members, and friends as God brought them in and through our home. We use those chairs to cram just a few more people around our table or in our living room. Those chairs have become a means of others tasting and seeing the goodness of God.

In much the same way, our gifts are waiting to be discovered like a present on Christmas morning. And when you do find it, although the tag has your name on it, when you open it, you actually find it's for all of us.

Let's Pray: Father, we cannot help but be changed in light of all that you have done for us. Help us no longer see the skills, abilities, and gifts that you have given as for ourselves, but for one another. We offer ourselves and our gifts back to you in a fresh way. Amen.