

Lesson 30: Living as a Member of the Body

Romans 12:3-8

³ For through the grace given to me
I say to everyone among you
not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think;
but to think so as to have sound judgment,
as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.

⁴ For just as
we have many members in one body
and
all the members do not have the same function,

⁵ so
we, who are many, are one body in Christ,
and
individually members one of another.

⁶ Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *each of us is to exercise them accordingly*:
if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith;

⁷ if service, in his serving;
or he who teaches, in his teaching;

⁸ or he who exhorts, in his exhortation;
he who gives, with liberality;
he who leads, with diligence;
he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

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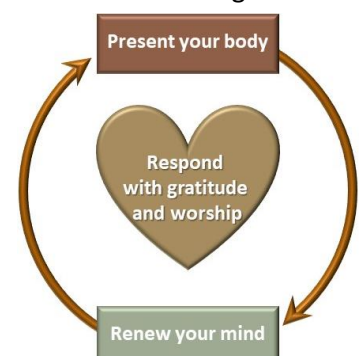
Introduction

Having established us more firmly in the gospel of grace in chapters 1-11, Paul has now turned to the application of grace. How then shall we live? In our last lesson we recognized the first two verses of chapter 12 as a model for Christian living: Respond, Present, Renew. Now from 12:3-15:13 Paul gives us several scenarios in which to apply the model. Where do you think Paul will start? What is his first scenario? The body of Christ.

Paul doesn't argue for it. Paul assumes it. You live out the gospel of grace in the community of grace. You are born again into a body of believers. Paul assumes that when you ask, "How then shall I live?" you are not asking, "Should I live as part of a local community of believers?" Of course, you should. Paul assumes your question is not "Should I live in Christian community?" but "How should I live in Christian community?"

We have agreed with Paul that God is supremely merciful, that we want to present ourselves to God, and that in presenting ourselves to God, we need to know what his good and acceptable and perfect will are. We agree that we do not know his will naturally. We need to be renewed in our mind to understand his will. So, even though we know his will is to participate in a local Christian community. We also recognize the need for continual renewal in how we perceive the local body of believers. We do not just want to present ourselves to service in community, we want to grow in understanding how to present ourselves in a way that honors God.

Remember the three parts of the model. "Therefore brethren by the mercies of God..." that is a response from our heart to the love of God displayed to us in the grace of Jesus. We live as a response of gratitude and worship. That is the heart at the center of our circle. Next, "present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice." At the top of our circle we have the word "present." We do not wait to be perfect. We ask, "What is the wise thing to do?" And we do it to the best of our ability. Recognizing our limited wisdom, we have at the bottom of the circle the word renew. "Do not be conformed



to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” To know God’s will we need to be in this continual process of present and renew, present and renew.

Coming into our first scenario about the body of Christ, Paul does not describe again the heart motive of grace. From this point on, we are assuming the heart motive. Though when you put the model into practice, in a concrete situation, it’s helpful to remind yourself why you are doing what you are doing. Get into the practice of taking a moment in prayer to offer yourself to God out of a grateful heart as an act of worship.

When you think about the body of Christ and some act of service or involvement, envision yourself holding yourself up to God as an offering. Before you go to worship on Sunday, before you enter a meeting, before you lead Sunday school or participate in an outreach or arrive at homegroup or shake somebody’s hand at the door or look at the prayer list or clean up after service, before you do anything, take a moment to mentally present yourself to God. You can see yourself giving yourself into his hands. Here I am God. Because you are so awesome and because you have been so very gracious to me, here I am. I present myself to you as I interact with my brothers and sisters in Christ. This is a service of worship.

And that changes our stance toward the body of Christ. Our approach to the body of Christ becomes most fundamentally a response of grateful worship. It is not most fundamentally about what I will receive, but what I bring. But it’s not what I bring to other people. I bring myself as an offering not to people but to God. And even though I do not always receive what I want from community, I offer myself to God. Even though I might be hurt in community, I offer myself to God. Even though people might let me down, I am offering myself to God.

I also recognize that I do not really know what I am doing. I need to grow in my understanding of the body of Christ. It’s so complicated. I need to know me. I need to know other people. I need to know various aspects of service and activity. And I just don’t know it. I need to be renewed as I go. Paul is going to help us with that. His focus in 12:3-8 is renewal of the mind, so that we can continue to present ourselves in a way that is more and more in line with his heart and his will.

How do we understand our participation in the body of Christ? The text is in three parts. First, you need to renew you mind in how you view yourselves as an individual. Then you need to renew your mind in how you view yourself as a member of the body. Finally, you need to renew your mind in how you view your contribution to the body, so yourself as an individual, yourself as a member of the body and your contribution to the body.

Let’s read the text. This is Romans 12:3-8.

[Read Romans 12:3-8].

I. Renew

A. Renew how you think about yourself (12:3)

Before thinking about the body of Christ, Paul challenges us to think about how we view ourselves. This is verse 3.

“For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.”

The pastor may be tempted to think highly of himself because he gets to preach at everybody else on Sunday and because he receives praises, smiles and handshakes. At the same time there are just as many people tempted to criticize the pastor’s sermons and feel superior to him because he is a little odd or he is not the best speaker or he makes certain mistakes or because he does not live up in some other way.

The pastor is always the easiest example to pick on. He’s one guy, and he is up front a lot. The reality is that we are constantly comparing ourselves to other people in the body of Christ. We are making

mental notes and judgements that sometimes make us feel better about ourselves and sometimes make us feel worse.

Who are you comparing yourself to in your local body of believers? To other single men? To other mothers? To other people doing the same ministry as you? To people doing a different ministry than you? To someone's personality or beauty or success or spirituality or talent? There are people in your church that you look up to and want to emulate, and there are people that you look down on and want to criticize.

Max Lucado wrote a wonderful little book called *You Are Special* describing a people who went around all day sticking either yellow stars of approval or grey dots of disapproval on one another. The main character Punchinello excelled at collecting grey dots.



Paul's focus seems to be towards those people who have gathered a lot of yellow stars. He warns against thinking of yourself too highly. Bring your estimation of yourself in line with sound or sober judgement. Think of yourself rightly.

We can experience the same temptation in the other direction to think of ourselves too lowly. It is not hard to create Facebook or Instagram profiles of other people in our minds. The people with yellow stars, they have a great family of high achieving children and they post photos that show themselves simultaneously serving the poor, succeeding at work, playing with their kids, enjoying exotic vacations. I don't know where they get all the time. We imagine there are these yellow star people. Of course, it's not a clear picture. Social media condenses life into a highlight reel. And it's only what people choose to put up there. It's "face" book. It's where we show our best face. And looking at other people's highlight reels, it's easy to feel like Punchinello. It's easy to feel covered in grey dots.

Maybe we swing between the two, sometimes successfully comparing ourselves and earning stars, at other times failing in comparison, receiving dots. We receive them from other people, but we also receive them from our own internal voice. We are putting stars and dots on ourselves.

Paul's exhortation to sound judgement says, resist thinking about yourself too highly. That's pride. And resist thinking of yourself too lowly. That's not humility. Humility is not thinking badly about yourself. Humility is thinking of yourself accurately, sometimes badly, sometimes with praise, according to God's estimation.



One day Punchinello meets a strange girl named Lucia with no stars and no dots. She is really unusual. They just don't stick to her. And she does not mind. Lucia has met her Creator. She does not define herself by her internal voice. She does not define herself by the voices in society. She defines herself by His voice.

His voice does not say what we want to hear. His voice speaks the truth. It is that truth, the good and the bad that has the power to set us free, if we are willing to hear it. When I think about myself with sound judgement, I think that I am sinful. I am fallible. I am limited. And I am inexperienced. I am also created in God's image. I am gifted. I am skilled. And I have some pretty cool experiences. God does not define me in comparison with other people. God does not even define me in

comparison with Jesus. When I am perfected, I will still not be Jesus. I am being conformed into his image, but not into his being. He is man and God. I am just man. And God has a vision of me as he created me to be. That is the standard he holds me up to. The standard I am being held up to is his vision of a perfect Michael, not any Michael but "Michael Brent" Michael, the standard of his own

vision for me. I am a man in process. I am not yet there, but God has gifted. I still struggle with this body of flesh, with selfishness and pride and lust. That's where I am right now. I have to think of myself with sound judgment. But I am someone going somewhere. To be honest, I struggle to think of myself with sound judgment. We all do. And we all do in different ways, according to our personality and according to our inner voice.

I am a competitive middle child. I have been conformed by my birth order and by my personality. I have this voice in my mind that tells me every day, "You are not good enough. You should do better. You do not live up. You should regret that. You should feel bad about that." I know it is not the voice of my mom or my dad. They have always encouraged me. I know it is not the voice of my brothers who are better than I deserve. It is my own inner voice. I do not relate fully with Punchinello. I have received a high number of gold stars. I get my fair share of praise. Where I do relate to Punchinello is in my inner voice. I move in the direction of false humility. I like the stars. To be honest, I like them, but I often disagree with them. I think other people are wrong when they praise me. I feel like I don't deserve the stars. And I over-correct with self-criticism. I want to call my melancholy reasonable and sound judgement. Sometimes it is. Often, I fail to acknowledge amazing truths about who God has made me to be. He is the one who has said that I am created in his image. He is the one who has redeemed me. He is the one who has gifted me with his Holy Spirit and given me skills and talents and opportunities. Sound judgment for me means acknowledging and accepting all the great things God has put into my life and made into me and also accepting that I am in process. And I am not perfect. And I am not intended to be perfect. I never will have all the gifts. I'll never have the perfect personality. And that's okay. And somehow to be sound in my judgment, I have to accept that.

That's how it is working in me. That's a bit of my inner challenge, my inner voice. As I said, because we each have different personalities and different experiences, you have your own unique challenges in how you think about yourself with sound judgment, at what times that you are tempted to think more highly than you ought and what times you are tempted to think more lowly than you ought.

Paul includes another phrase in verse 3 that we should consider, think of yourself "as God has allotted to each a **measure** of faith." I used to think that meant we each have a different amount of faith. One person has a thimble full, another person has a cup full, another person has two liters full, and in a sense that helps me see myself soberly. There is some truth in that somewhere, I know. It is okay that I am not Billy Graham or Hudson Taylor or William Wilberforce. I act out of the measure of faith God has given me. There is something like that in Ephesians 4:7 where Paul says, "To each one of us grace was given according to the **measure** of Christ's gift." And then Paul talks about how we have one hope, but we each have different gifts. And we should live out of those gifts. That's what Paul is going to talk about in verse 6-8. So, that interpretation could work here.

But I think Paul is saying something different. He wrote in Ephesians 4:13 that our goal should be to grow "to the **measure** of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ." In this sense Jesus Christ is the measure, not as a portion measured out, but as the measure or the standard to which we aspire. I think that is what Paul is saying. This measure is not in the sense of a portion, but in the sense of the standard. If he had used the word grace, I would lean towards measure as a portion. He has proportioned us each grace in the sense of giftedness, which is apportioned differently. But Paul's use of the word faith here, that it's the measure of faith, leans me towards a measure in the sense of standard. Your standard for understanding yourself with sound judgment is not comparison with other people. Your standard is the faith you have received. You should look at yourself through the lens of the gospel. You accept that you are sinful, and you accept that God values you so much he died for you. You accept that you are saved, but not yet complete. You are in process. This is the standard of your faith. It is the measure by which you judge yourself. It is by these gospel truths that you are able to see who you really are.

I love how the stars and dots do not stick to Lucia. She gets grace. She is accepted by her Creator. His love is enough. He defines her. The result is a kind of self-forgetfulness. She is not worried about

judgement. She is not comparing herself to other people. She would be a great friend. Tim Keller describes this result of grace as emotional humility and emotional wealth. Grace shows us who we are in a way that creates "emotional humility" in that we come to understand that we really are no different from anyone else. We have sinned in our own ways, and we have this potential to sin just as wickedly as anyone else. We also recognize that all other people are valued as God's creation just as we are. Grace creates this kind of humility. The gospel of grace also leads to "emotional wealth." When I see myself as I am, what does it matter if someone else gives me a star or a dot, slights me or rebukes me. I am loved by my Father. My honor comes from him. He is filling me up. I can take it from others. I can take some mess. I can let it go. My role in this body of believers is not to find my value in comparison and not to be the one who defines other people by my judgements. My role is to accept myself according to the measure of the gospel of Jesus Christ and to offer myself to God to help his body to grow and to thrive.

Next, Paul moves us from thinking about ourselves to thinking about ourselves as part of a community. Let's read that in verses 4-5.

B. Renew how you think about yourself in relationship to the body of Christ (12:4-5).

"For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."

Verse 4 gives us Paul's standard analogy for Christian community. It's the analogy of a body with many members. He wrote the same thing in 1 Corinthians 12, and the same thing in Ephesians 4. The analogy allows Paul to maintain two realities that are in tension with one another. And as Christians we want to maintain these tensions. We want to recognize the truthfulness of both things. First, Christians maintain their unique individuality when they come to Christ. We are not meant to look and think and feel like every other Christian. We are meant to be unique and different. On the other hand, we do become part of a corporate community, and we have obligation one to another. We are part of a body. Both of these things are true.

How we think about this reality depends in a large degree on the leaning of our cultural values. American values lean towards the individual. Croatian values lean more towards the community. So, Americans are more comfortable with people going off and doing their own thing. Whereas Croatians value more that everyone decide and act together.

A Nigerian man attended our church here in Croatia for a couple of years. And though there is some distance from American to Croatian values regarding community, there is much more distance from Croatian to Nigerian values regarding community. I asked Emmanuel, for example, how long a church service in Nigeria would last. The answer was four or five hours. It would include a meal. Basically, you spend the whole day together. Sunday is a community day. So, for him Croatian church was very individualistic. And I do not think he was ever really able to feel comfortable with our short, everybody come in and everybody leave Sunday service. It just didn't feel right.

So, the person coming from an individualistic society may struggle to understand the reality and importance of Christian fellowship and unity. They just don't feel it as strongly, naturally. Whereas the person coming from a communal society may struggle to understand how to promote individual uniqueness and initiative. It's not their natural bent.

Not only is our view of the body conformed to certain patterns based on our society. It is also conformed based on our experience of church. If you grew up in a local church community, then you have this pattern that you grew up with. So, for example, in a very large church there might be a lot going on, and there are all kinds of ways to contribute, and there is all kinds of stuff to receive. So, we come to church as a place where we do our thing. We give what we give, and we get what we get. But we could really miss meaningful relationship and connection. In a small church, we might be expected to be present three times a week and we might know everybody's name, and we know where everybody lives. But maybe there are only a select few have roles to fulfill. And there is not a

lot of place for us to engage and use our giftedness. Everybody is so similar, we can't see how our individuality fits.

Paul's teaching here is minimalistic. He is giving us a starting point, but we really have to think this out ourselves, according to who we are and according to what our church situation is. He leaves a lot for us to figure out. He does not describe here the optimal size of the body or the activities of the body or the style of worship of the body or the structure or the authority of the body. He is giving us a basic starting point. And this is the basic starting point: Do you see yourself as an individual who has uniqueness and value? Can you accept that God sees how you fit, even if you don't see how you fit? God sees you. God sees your uniqueness. God sees how you contribute.

And can you accept that the Christian life is intended to be lived in community. You do not belong to yourself. You belong to God. And God has placed you into community. Just as you were not created to experience life apart from relationship with your Creator, you were not created to experience life apart from a community of believers.

And this is deep in who God is. In some mysterious way, God is one, and yet, God is many. The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are an eternal community. So, we image God as individuals in how he has created us, but we also image God in community and in the love of community. How do we show the love of God as an individual? Well, we don't. You have to have at least two. And he is three. So, in community we are able to image God in a way that cannot be done as an individual. This is God's plan. God's plan for us is to be individuals who are part of a community. It is not a uniform community. But it's a unified community.

So, if you withhold yourself from the body of believers then the body is lacking an eye, or a finger, or a foot, or an ear. When you withhold you, you are withholding something valuable that God has designed to help make the body complete. And do not try to over think it. Your value may be in a place you have never realized. You might be the perfect person to bring comfort or challenge or connectedness to some other person you are not even aware of. Without you, they might never fit. If you are struggling, and you are needy, and you just can't imagine what you have to offer at this point in your life, people in the body need to love. And God might need you in the body not for what you give, but that you provide opportunity for other people to grow in love as they give to you.

Again, I do not want to over think it. You do not have to see your value. It is helpful. It is motivating. It is desirable. We want to know how we fit and why we matter. But whether you know or not this is a point of faith, a point of renewing your mind. Are you willing to accept the truth that you are part of a larger community? If you are in Christ, you are a member with others who are in Christ. That is a spiritual reality, even if your community may seriously struggle to live out that reality. The difficulty of living out who God has made us does not change the spiritual reality. That is true just as much for us as a body as it is for us as individuals. My difficulty in living out the Christian life, doesn't change the fact that I am born again. And our difficulty in living in Christian community doesn't change the fact that we are a spiritual body. So, are you willing to accept by faith that you are a member of a spiritual body? And are you willing to accept by faith that God says you matter to that community?

"For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."

Paul wants us to be growing in how we think about ourselves. And he wants us to be growing in how we think about the body. And he wants us to be growing in how we think about our contribution to the body. He gives us a list of how the Spirit of God equips us differently.

Let's read the list again. This is verses 6-8.

C. Renew how you think about the use of your gifts (12:6-8).

"Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *each of us is to exercise them accordingly*:

if prophecy,	according to the proportion of his faith;
⁷ if service,	in his serving;
or he who teaches,	in his teaching;
⁸ or he who exhorts,	in his exhortation;
he who gives,	with liberality;
he who leads,	with diligence;
he who shows mercy,	with cheerfulness."

Paul also gives lists of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians in the passages about the body of Christ. None of the lists are the same. The list to the Ephesians is for leaders who need to use their gifts to equip everyone else for service. The list to the Corinthians includes miraculous gifts like healing and speaking in tongues, which had become problematic in the Corinthian church, and Paul needed to say something about that. The Romans list is fairly unique. Only the gifts of prophecy and teaching are mentioned in Corinthians or Ephesians. The rest of the gifts listed here are unique to this list. And even though a comparison of these three lists is quite interesting, especially if we add the one from Peter. That's a topic for another study. For now, let's just stick with what we have here in Romans.

I am assuming the giftedness in Romans is not natural talent but a gifting of the Holy Spirit. That is the clear statement in 1 Corinthians. John Stott argued in his book *Baptism and Fullness* that in recognizing God's sovereignty, we should not be surprised to see that some of our natural talents and learned skills fit nicely along with our spiritual giftedness. God envisions us as whole people. He is at work preparing us for the body of Christ long before we believe. It is no problem to develop in us skills and talents that will come to life spiritually only after our new birth. On the other hand, our skills and vocation may not line up with our giftedness. A teacher may or may not have the gift of teaching. A business executive may or may not have the spiritual gift of leading. We have to consider ourselves with sound judgment. Let's consider the list and then consider how we identify our own giftedness.

Paul starts the list with prophecy. Prophecy can include telling the future, but that is not what biblical prophecy is all about. In the Old Covenant, prophets either brought covenant as a mediator like Moses or they called the people of God back to the covenant, like Elijah, Isaiah and Micah. So, it is this calling people back to God's word which is the essence of biblical prophecy, to call people to the word of God in light of current circumstances, with a view towards future blessings or future consequences, depending on the response of the people to the word. Prophecy differs from teaching in that biblical prophecy is an act of revelation. The prophet receives the word of God and communicates the word of God to the people of God. Which is one reason prophecy is treated very seriously in Scripture, because the prophet is claiming to have a revelation from God. The seriousness of prophecy as a gift is seen in its placement at the beginning of the gift lists. Here Paul lists prophecy first. In 1 Corinthians and Ephesians he lists prophecy second, but only after apostleship.

Paul adds that the prophet should exercise the gift of prophecy "in proportion of his faith." And as with the "measure of faith" reference above, "proportion of faith" could have to do with the amount of one's faith or with the standard of faith. Since we are talking about prophecy, I lean towards standard of faith. The words of the prophet should be in accordance with the gospel of Jesus Christ that the prophet has come to believe in by faith. It's that personal vision, the opening of the eyes to see the gospel that creates the standard by which the prophet should measure his prophecy. Is it in line with the revelation of the gospel of Jesus Christ?

The gift of service comes next. And it's a root word meaning to wait on tables. It takes us back to the seven men chosen by the apostles in Acts 6 to organize contributions for widows. This fits with the

idea of a deacon who helps with the material care and organization of the Christian community. The phrase "if service in his serving" indicates that if this is his gifting then he should use his gifts accordingly. If you have the gift of service, then serve. The same phrase is used for teaching. If you are gifted at teaching, then teach. The gift of exhortation could mean comfort or encourage, or it could mean urge others to live out the truth. I am not sure we have to make a decision or choose between one or the other. Since the gift comes right after teaching, I think about it in terms of communicated truth, whether that truth is communicated to spur someone on to action or whether it's communicated to give comfort in grace. Either one fit with the idea of exhortation, helping others to see the truth.

The one who gives could be one who serves the church in a ministry of distributing material resources, he could be in charge of a food pantry, or he could be gifted to give from his own resources. Again, I do not think we have to limit the gift too narrowly. We can recognize that it might manifest differently in one person than in the other person. Paul says the one who gives should do so with simplicity. It also might mean to be generous. Simplicity is the clearer meaning. Again, both work. Our giving should be done with simplicity, and it should be done liberally. The next gift means literally to preside over. It suggests the idea of leadership in the church. And it should be conducted with diligence. The final gift of showing mercy might have in mind the care of the poor, or the sick or the elderly. And Paul says to exercise this gift with cheerfulness.

Paul's gift list gives us a snapshot into the activity of the local church. You can imagine this. That Paul is writing to the Romans and this is what he expects. He expects that there are people there who are practicing the gifts of prophecy, who are involved in service, who are teaching, who are giving exhortation, who are giving out of their resources, who are leading and who are showing mercy. He has not limited his comments to leaders. He is directing his comments to all the members of the body. So, we could take this for ourselves. We are being called to participate in these various kinds of community activity in the teaching of the church, in the service, in the exhortation, in giving, in acts of mercy.

We need to grow in our self-knowledge so that we can present ourselves for service according to our giftedness. This fits with Paul's early challenge to consider ourselves with sound judgement. Don't go after the gifts that bring prestige in your circles. Don't try to be somebody you are not. On the other hand don't deny the giftedness you have. Consider your strengths and your abilities and seek to be developed along those lines.

Of course, this raises the question, "How am I gifted?" How do I know, how do I discover how God has gifted me? Here are three practical recommendations.

First, engage in ministry. Find ways to serve in your local Christian community, in your church. Renewing of the mind generally follows presenting the body. You cannot fully know who you are without giving yourself to the work of the church first. And do it generally. Try to be involved in different ways of serving. Be humble. Do not seek position. Respond to needs. Serve in different ways. Learn how to share your faith. Learn how to lead a small group. Teach children. Serve in a ministry of care or worship. Help wherever you can. And you learn about yourself by the doing. That's first.

Second, as you present yourself in service over time, trust God to use you in the lives of other people. You are praying. And you are trusting God. You are offering yourself as you serve. And in service or organizing or giving or teaching, if you see others coming closer to God because of your service, then that is a sign of your spiritual giftedness at work in what you are doing. So, ask for feedback. Seek development. Ask others that you trust how do they see you fitting in, or how do they see you giving yourself to the body.

Third, Paul always connects the analogy of the body with the gifts of the Spirit and then with instruction about love. We see that pattern in 1 Corinthians. 1 Corinthians 12 is the body and the gifts. 1 Corinthians 13 is one of the greatest passages on love in the Bible. In Ephesians 4 we get the

body and then we get the gifts and then we get a passage on love in the body. And here in Romans it is the same thing. Paul introduces the body metaphor in 12:4-5. He describes the various gifts in 6-8. And then he exhorts us to love and that's going to start in verse 9. Here is something I heard a long time ago from pastor Tom Nelson, and I think he is correct. It stuck with me. The Spirit of God intends to build the body of Christ up in love. He moves in us to show love to other people in line with our giftedness. As you are walking with God, the needs you see and the way you are moved to love will manifest how the Holy Spirit is at work in you. He is moving in you to care for and build up and contribute to the body of Christ in a way that is in line with who he has made you to be and how he has gifted you. So, your gifts come out as love and compassion.

II. Present

So, what does this look like in the way that we present ourselves in the body? Imagine as one example that you know a couple in your church going through a rough time in marriage. How do you show love? Someone with the gift of giving might tell the husband, "Hey, you know what. I know you have been going through a rough time. There is this great marriage conference coming up. I want you to know that I have already signed you up, and I paid for it. I want you to be blessed. The hotel is covered. The conference is covered. If it helps you guys, don't pay me back, pay it forward, you help somebody else. If it doesn't, just don't worry about it. I just want you to have a chance to see if it could help you out."

Another person with the gift of mercy might say to the wife, "Let's go to coffee." She would listen. And she would relate. And she might cry. She would communicate, "You are known, you are loved."

The exhorter might kick somebody in the butt. "You just got to shape up man. Do you know what you have in your wife? Do you know what God has, I know you know what God has called you to do. I love you bro, and you need to man up. Let's pray."

The teacher might take the couple into the word or give a great book or sermon series. They want to teach and help them see God's vision for marriage.

The servant might offer to watch the kids for the weekend, so they can get time together.

We meet needs, we love, according to how the Spirit of God is stirring in us.

How is God calling you to present yourself in the body of Christ? What are the needs? How can you contribute? Not everybody has the same availability at every stage of life. If you have little kids at home, you have to be careful how much time you spend away from them at church. But what can you do? You have to think of your situation with sober judgment. How can you offer yourself as a member of the body? What is God calling you to do?

One last thought. We do not always get to work in areas of our giftedness. Sometimes God calls us to serve in an area of need. "This is just the need. We need somebody to do this whether you are gifted or not." You may have a burden that you believe strongly needs to be addressed by your local church. You may believe 100% that God put that burden on your heart, that the church is failing if it doesn't reach out in this way, if it doesn't meet this need. God may have put that burden on your heart for you to do something about it, not your pastor to do something about it. This is a problem I see over and over in local church. There is a need. A layperson, stirred up by the Holy Spirit, recognizes the need. And the layperson expects the pastor or the elders to meet the need. A pastor is limited. He does not have all the gifts, and he doesn't have all the time. And elders are limited. They do not have all the gifts either, and they don't have all the time. And our church body is limited. There are certain things we can contribute, but we have limited resources and limited time.

If the Spirit of God has put the burden on your heart, you might be the solution to meeting that need. It is the right, it is the responsibility of elders in a church to respond respectfully to every need. But then they have to answer according to what God is teaching them or saying to them as leaders.

And their response might be, “We are going to do something about that. You are so right. We need to address that.” Or the response might be, “You are exactly right. That’s a huge need. And we think you are the person to do something about it.” Or they might say, “You’re right. That’s a need. It’s not where our church is right now. And you could be the person to do something about it. But we don’t believe yet. It’s not the right time for you to take that on. It’s not the right time for our church. We’d love you to contribute in what we are doing right now as a community. We’d love to see you grow in Christ. And just see where God takes this burden, takes this vision that he has put on your heart.”

When Paul says, if you are gifted, use your gift. He does so with the understanding that we are part of a body. And being part of a body creates challenges. We start by learning to regard ourselves with sound judgment and by accepting that God sees us as members of a body. We seek over time to contribute to the body in accordance with our spiritual gifts. And that is going to require growth in love, because as soon as we start contributing as members of the body, there is going to be mess. One of my favorite proverbs is, “Where there are no oxen, the stables are clean.” If we didn’t have any people, everything would remain orderly, everything would be clean. But as soon as you start adding people, as soon as we accept sinful people into our church, as soon as they let me in, we’ve got sin. And we are going to have conflict. And we are going to need to grow in love. Without love the parts of the body grate on one another. Without love the world can’t see that we are true disciples of Christ. Love is essential. And that is Paul’s topic in our next lesson.

Reflection Questions

1. What stands out to you as important, confusing, interesting or strange in Romans 12:3-8?
2. Thinking of yourself with sound judgment, what would you say are three of your weaknesses in participating as a member of the body? Also, thinking with sound judgment what are three of your strengths? (Which list is harder for you to come up with?)
3. Does your culture value more individuality or community? How does this play out in how people view the local church? Or what people expect from the local church?
4. What does it mean to consider yourself a member of the body? What do you give up personally or what are some of the challenges in putting the needs of the community above your own desires and needs?
5. What is something you could do personally to help promote a sense of community in your local church or in a smaller group within your local church?
6. Do you feel like you know what your spiritual gifts are? Have you seen God working in the lives of other people as a result of your contribution? What do others see in you? How are you moved to love other people? Do you have a drive to teach? Do you comfort? Do you serve behind the scenes? Do you often feel moved to give?