

The Gift of Service

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.

If it is serving, let him serve;

if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully (Romans 12:6-8).

Worship

Read responsively Psalm 72:1, 5-14.

L: Endow the king with your justice, O God,

G: the royal son with your righteousness.

L: He will endure as long as the sun,

G: as long as the moon, through all generations.

L: He will be like rain falling on a mown field,

G: like showers watering the earth.

L: In his days the righteous will flourish;

G: prosperity will abound till the moon is no more.

L: He will rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.

G: The desert tribes will bow before him and his enemies will lick the dust.

L: The kings of Tarshish and of distant shores will bring tribute to him;

G: the kings of Sheba and Seba will present him gifts.

L: All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him.

G: For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help.

L: He will take pity on the weak and the needy

G: and save the needy from death.

L: He will rescue them from oppression and violence,

G: for precious is their blood in his sight.

Prayer: Dear Lord, you served us by sending your Son into this world. He took on himself human flesh and blood and died for our sins. He continues to serve us today by sending his Spirit, by helping us understand your message of grace, and by giving us gifts to serve your people. May you continue to give some of your people the gift of service so that your church does not languish under a backlog of tasks that need to be completed. Help all of your saints see to the needs of their fellow believers. Amen.

Getting Started

1. Read Romans 12:2. What are some ways Christians might be tempted to use spiritual gifts according to the pattern of this world?
2. In the second part of the verse Paul tells us what the antidote to this is. What is the antidote to living according to the pattern of this world?
3. How do believers renew their minds?

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4. Read Luke 10:38-40. Most of us know the account of Mary and Martha. Mostly, we remember Jesus' rebuking Martha for being too preoccupied with the preparations to listen to Jesus' words. Martha had her faults, but she had some fine qualities. Can you identify them?
5. Read Philippians 2:25-30. In what ways did Epaphroditus serve Paul? How did he serve the Philippian congregation?
6. Read Mark 10:42-45. How does Jesus' life serve both as motivation and as a model for every Christian in his or her service?

Is This You?

Joe was always buzzing around church. He lived only a few blocks from church, so every week he would drive his riding lawn mower over to church and cut the grass. For many years, the church never had to put up a summer lawn mowing volunteer list. You would also see him at church on every work day. He loved to have the outside of the church mirror the beautiful message of the gospel that was taught there every Sunday. No sooner did the pastor finish announcing that something had to be done around the church, Joe had already volunteered. He also worked at the summer VBS. If something had to be built, if pieces had to be made for a craft, or if some task had to be done, it was Joe who did it. He never complained and he never looked for praise.

Janice had the same attitude. She was a gifted musician and singer. Her joy was providing music for the worship services. She was always happy to play the organ for a wedding or sing for a funeral. It was her opportunity to testify about the Savior. She knew that other organists got paid to play, and she fit into the rotation and received a check at the end of the month. But that is not why she played. She loved music, she appreciated the talents God had given her, and she could not help but be of service in that part of congregational life.

7. In what sense could we say that Joe and Janice *needed* to serve? (Cf. Romans 12:7)
8. Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 and Luke 17:10. What kept Joe and Janice humble about their service so that they did not look for praise?

Or Is This You?

Bob got up on Saturday morning, ready to do some work in his shop and watch a game on TV in the afternoon. At breakfast, his wife reminded him that it was their turn to clean the church. "Again?" asked Bob?
"It's been six months since we've been up," said his wife.
"That long?" Bob responded. "Honey, why don't you represent our family this morning? I've got plans."
"Why don't you go? It's a way of serving the Lord."
"You're right," Bob responded. "It's not that I don't want to serve."
He did get a sense of satisfaction after the work was over. "Okay," he sighed. "You're right. Give me a second to get ready."

9. Read Ephesians 6:7. Bob's initial lack of desire to serve *may* indicate that he was not blessed with the spiritual gift of serving. What did Bob's wife help him to understand? How did that change his attitude?

10. Why is the gift of service so important to congregational life?

A Step Further

11. Armin Panning writes in his People's Bible commentary for Romans: "Paul enumerates seven gifts... He could have made his point listing fewer than seven. He no doubt could have extended the list beyond these seven, had he wanted to." List variations of the gift of serving that you can identify in our congregational life? In your life outside the context of the congregation?

Summary

God has given some people the gift of service. Such people willingly take on tasks that need to be done for the good of God's kingdom. They are not put off by menial tasks, but consider them a joy. They have their eyes open for ways to serve as they arise and often pitch in to get these things done before they are asked. This is a valuable gift. It can take on many shapes and forms depending on time and place.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help all of us serve you willingly. Pour out the spiritual gift of service on people in our congregations and synod. Enable them to work for you and find their pleasure and satisfaction in bringing glory to your name. May our congregations recognize such people by giving thanks to you for opening their hearts to serve you as they do. Amen.

The Gift of Giving

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage;

if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously;

if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully
(Romans 12:6-8).

Worship

Read responsively Psalm 112:1-9.

L: Praise the LORD. Blessed is the man who fears the LORD,

G: **who finds great delight in his commands.**

L: His children will be mighty in the land;

G: **the generation of the upright will be blessed.**

L: Wealth and riches are in his house,

G: **and his righteousness endures forever.**

L: Even in darkness light dawns for the upright,

G: **for the gracious and compassionate and righteous man.**

L: Good will come to him who is generous and lends freely,

G: **who conducts his affairs with justice.**

L: Surely he will never be shaken; a righteous man will be remembered forever.

G: **He will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD.**

L: His heart is secure, he will have no fear;

G: **in the end he will look in triumph on his foes.**

L: He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor, his righteousness endures forever;

G: **his horn will be lifted high in honor.**

Prayer: Dear Lord, you have blessed us more than we deserve. You bless your creation with food, clothing, and shelter, and you fill our hearts with joy. As your people, our joy is complete. We have an eternal goal and glory awaiting us, a place where we will enjoy the riches of living in your presence forever. Help us look beyond this world and what our riches can buy us here. Help us use what you have given us to help others share in our eternal joy. Give the special gift of contributing to many in our church body so that we are able to do more than the minimum amount of mission work and worker training. May our church body be able to afford quality training and reach a larger and larger number of people. Amen.

Getting Started

Read Ephesians 4:7-16.

1. Who gives us spiritual gifts?
2. Why does Jesus have the right and the power to give spiritual gifts to the church?
3. For what purpose does Jesus give spiritual gifts to the church?

The Gift of Giving

4. Read Luke 8:1-3. Who supported Jesus during this earthly ministry? What led these women to support Jesus out of their own means?
5. In Romans 12:8, Paul instructs those who have the gift of giving to “give generously.” The Greek word translated “generously” means “whole-heartedly” or “with single-mindedness.” It refers more to the attitude and motives of the giver than to the amount given. It describes giving that is selfless, without reservation, and expects nothing in return. Compare this with what Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 9:7.
6. Read 2 Corinthians 9:8. On what basis can Christians give so “generously”?

7. The “giving” described in Romans 12:8 is not necessarily limited to financial giving to directly support gospel ministry. Look at the following passages in which the same Greek work for “contributing to the needs of others” (μεταδίδωμι) is used, and describe the giving in each context:

- Luke 3:11
- Romans 1:11
- Ephesians 4:28
- 1 Thessalonians 2:8

Is This You?

Jacob and his wife had always wanted to give more. Whenever the congregation treasurer reported that offerings were low, Jacob gave a little more, and he prayed that others in the congregation would help also. When Jacob’s parents died, Jacob received a large inheritance. Times were good. He invested wisely, and soon he and his wife were well off. He was happy, not just with his money but with the opportunity to give in a way he had always dreamed of. He immediately gave the church a trust fund to help the students who were preparing for the ministry. He used his money to foster the spread of the gospel. When the congregation needed a new addition to the church, Jacob gave a large donation to kick off the building program. It was almost like he was waiting for another plea for funds so he could give. Often he gave anonymously. He needed to give more than the church needed his money. He didn’t want anyone to praise him. He was giving first to the Lord and then to the congregation, and the last thing he wanted was for someone to pat him on the back for a job well done. That would have spoiled things for him.

8. Why is it a blessing for the church to have members with the spiritual gift of giving?
9. Agree or disagree: Since godly giving is giving freely in response to what we have received from God, the church should not talk about ministry “needs” (whether monetary or otherwise).

Or Is This You?

Mary managed her money carefully. She was very systematic in making and sticking to a budget. She was presently giving 6% of her income to the Lord. She had a plan to add 1% every year until she reached 12%. Sometimes she treated her giving more like a line item in her budget than a real spiritual act of service to her Lord. She gave to her Lord, trusting that he would provide for her needs. It's not that she gave reluctantly, for she truly believed that every Christian should help support the church and was glad to be a part of that work.

10. Is it wrong for a Christian merely to strive to give a regular part of his or her income to the Lord and bypass special opportunities to give? Why or why not?

11. At a church council meeting, Frank said: "If everyone in the congregation just gave ten dollars more per week, we would have no trouble paying their bills. Let's just tell them that next Sunday and really make a point of how easy this would be." Evaluate Frank's idea in the light of Romans 12:8.

A Step Further

12. "I'm not sure what spiritual gift I have. How do I find out?" Whenever the talk turns to spiritual gifts, some Christians ask that question. What advice or encouragement can you offer?

Summary

God has given some Christians the spiritual gift of contributing. They are quick to give to whatever need the congregation might have. They are eager to help a neighbor in need. They may actively seek out ways to financially support the work of the synod. Such giving can help overcome the obstacle of lack of funds so that the congregation or synod can focus on spreading the gospel. The Lord tells his people to give with a single-minded attitude, seeking only to foster the Lord's work and not to gain glory for themselves. The Lord wants all his people to contribute regularly out of the wealth God has given them.

Prayer: Lord of all, you give some of your people the spiritual gift of contributing. We thank you for this gift and pray that you would lead these people to give in such a way that you alone receive the glory. Help all members of your congregation grow in the grace of giving so that your work is not hindered due to lack of funds. Amen.

The Gift of Leadership

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously;

if it is leadership, let him govern diligently;

if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully (Romans 12:6-8).

Worship

Read responsively Proverbs 4:5-12.

L: Get wisdom, get understanding;

G: do not forget my words or swerve from them.

L: Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you;

G: love her, and she will watch over you.

L: Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom.

G: Though it cost all you have, get understanding.

L: Esteem her, and she will exalt you;

G: embrace her, and she will honor you.

L: She will set a garland of grace on your head and present you with a crown of splendor.

G: Listen, my son, accept what I say, and the years of your life will be many.

L: I guide you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths.

G: When you walk, your steps will not be hampered; when you run, you will not stumble.

Prayer: Dear Lord, give us God-fearing and wise congregation leaders. May they lead because they want to serve you, and not out of any selfish, worldly ambition. Help our leaders be true servants, putting the interests of those they serve ahead of their own. Give our leaders a heart for the gospel message and help them dedicate their time and efforts to helping your kingdom grow. Bless their efforts with success. Inspire those they lead to follow them willingly. Help them learn leadership by your example. Amen.

Getting Started

1. "I'm not sure what spiritual gift I have. How do I find out?" Whenever the talk turns to spiritual gifts, some Christians ask that question. What advice or encouragement can you offer?

A tool to consider: <http://www.wels.net/get-involved/volunteer/spiritual-gifts>

2. Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-6. Sometimes people feel they must discover what spiritual gift they have before they can serve the Lord. Evaluate that thought on the basis of these verses.

The Gift of Leading

3. Based on the following passages, develop a list of leadership qualities and/or approaches that characterize Christian leadership:
 - Matthew 20:25-28
 - Philippians 1:3-6
 - 1 Timothy 4:9-16

Is This You?

God had clearly blessed Steve with the ability to lead. When he was first asked to serve on the church council he was a relatively young man. He was nervous about his new position. But right away he felt at home. He worked well with people. His fellow church council members liked the way he spoke and presented his ideas. They didn't feel threatened even though some of his ideas were quite ambitious. When he suggested new things, he imparted a certain confidence that God would bless them if they but put themselves in his hands. When he was elected to be the congregational chairman several years later, he was very humble about it. He knew this was a greater opportunity to serve, but he also knew that he would have to ask God for his grace as never before.

Cindy, who worked hard at giving, did not have to work hard at all as the chairwoman of her ladies' group. She not only presided at the meetings, but also took part in a number of hands-on activities. She seemed to be able to get everyone to work together well. There was no bickering and everyone enjoyed their tasks. Her problem, however, was that she tended to leave things until the last minute. In her personal life, she was quite disciplined. But in her leadership roles she could be rather disorganized. She tried always to remember Paul's words in Romans 12 about leaders: "let them govern diligently." Her goal was to be diligent in organizing the meetings and following through with the tasks the group assigned to her.

4. What good leadership characteristics did Steve possess?
5. Cindy rightly thought about Paul's words about how God wanted leaders to lead, and she recognized a weakness in herself. How might Christians like Lois deal with such weaknesses?

Or Is This You?

Bill joyfully served around the church, but he didn't like meetings. His wife had to remind him how it was his responsibility to attend quarterly voters' meetings go. He went, but his mind was on what needed to be repaired at church or some task that needed to be done. One day Bill was asked to serve on the church council as property chairman. Because of his dedication, the nominating committee thought he was the obvious choice for the position. But Bill knew himself well enough to decline. He wasn't being lazy. He had had less than positive experiences in meetings. He always tried to be respectful, but he ended up getting into arguments. He also tried to express his thoughts well, but no one seemed to completely understand what he was talking about. He decided that it was better for him to work by himself and maybe with a buddy of his on things that helped the congregation have a good place of worship.

6. Some questioned Bill's refusal to serve, but he was simply evaluating himself with sober judgment. How do you tell the difference between a person who is avoiding God's call to serve and one who is simply evaluating himself accurately?
7. When is it appropriate to ask a person repeatedly to serve in a certain position, and when is it best to let the matter rest?

A Step Further

1 Peter 4:10-11—*Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.*

8. Underline as many phrases in this verse as you can in which God is given credit for the spiritual gifts we have. Then circle the phrase that describes the motivation and purpose for how we use our gifts.

Summary

God gives certain people the ability to lead others in the work of the church. To be good leaders, Christians need a spirit of humility, love for the Lord, and a desire to see the gospel spread. Other qualities are less tangible. What makes a person effective in a leadership role is hard to define. Often, the best way to learn if a person has this gift is to give that person a chance to lead and see what happens. The gift of leadership is vital to a Christian congregation. Since it is easy for leaders to become lax in their work, Paul urges leaders to be diligent.

Prayer: Dear Lord, give us good leaders, who display a spirit of humility and love for this congregation. Keep them humble. Lead them to bring the needs of the congregation to you and then answer their prayers. Use them to keep bickering and pride far from us. Bless their labors and may their good spirit spill over into the congregation. Give us a spirit of cooperation and willingness to help so that our leaders can do their work with joy. Above all, may our Savior's name be glorified among us through the leaders you provide. Amen.