

Faith and Transformation

These are wonderful!" exclaimed Lucinda, the women's ministry leader. "I'm going to put mine on my bathroom mirror, so I can read it each morning."

"I think I will frame mine and take it to work," offered Tiara.

"See," whispered Nicole to her friend Jordyn, "and you didn't think it was a big deal."

The "it" were 5 x 7 poster cards in lavender, fuchsia, yellow, and white with personal affirmations and corresponding Scriptures, all done in calligraphy of varying colors. Designs of hearts and other shapes bordered the laminated cards. Some of the 20 affirmations included "You are BEAUTIFUL, Psalm 45:11," "You are UNIQUE, Psalm 139:13," and "You are LOVED, Jeremiah 31:3."

Jordyn loved all things arts and crafts and had recently created a poster card for Nicole to cheer her spirits.

"I wish you would get involved in our women's ministry," Nicole had said after getting the card. "You have a lot to offer."

"No," Jordyn had replied. "Most of those women are married with children. I'm also not a ministry leader."

"That doesn't matter," Nicole said. "You have a gift to share with the women at Victory Outreach."

So, Jordyn made 50 affirmation cards.

"Sister Jordyn," said Lucinda, "we didn't know you had the gift of arts and crafts. Our Valentine's breakfast is soon, and we could use your artful eye and touch."

Nicole nudged Jordyn again and smiled.

1. Why is it important to feel needed?

2. What happens if a person doesn't feel needed or isn't used within the Body?

3. Why is it important that each member of the body uses his gift within the Body?

Parts of the Body

Romans 12:3-5, KJV

3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

4 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:

5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

Romans 12:3-5, NIV

³For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

⁴For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

The apostle Paul spends the first three-quarters of his letter to the Romans expounding on the doctrine of how we are saved by God in Christ through faith. In chapter 12, he starts from a new angle, explaining what it looks like for us to live a life shaped by that truth.

From the very start of this passage, Paul models the attitude that he wants his readers to adopt. He knew that, as an apostle chosen by God, any authority he had was ultimately a gift to be stewarded, rather than an award he deserved. Therefore, he makes it clear that the root of his authority is the “grace given” to him (vs. 3).

Paul encourages his readers to take a similar mindset—rather than taking pride in their status and ability, they must think soberly about their true worth. In this context, “sober” thinking means thinking in a balanced, appropriate way (vs. 3). For Christians, Paul points out that sober thinking is rooted in faith: faith in God’s ultimate worthiness, our sinfulness, and the love of Christ, which bridged the gap between the two. Truly faith-based thinking is therefore humble thinking.

While the end of verse 3 may seem to imply that Christians gain status according to the differing amounts of faith they have, it is more likely that the Greek word *metron*—or “measure”—refers to “a sufficient amount.” Paul is therefore exhorting his readers to view themselves, and one another, in light of the faith that God has gifted to everyone, regardless of their earthly position, status, or resources.

Yet, while every member of God’s people has an amount of faith, not every person has the same role. To illustrate this point, Paul compares the members of the church to different parts of one human “body” (vs. 4). Like parts of a body, church members may have different functions; but all of them work together in a united way, seamlessly accomplishing tasks that can only be done as a team. Every person’s unique role is important because that role is something only he or she can do.

Verse 5 takes the illustration a step further. Not only do these different members complement one another, they belong to one another. Members no longer belong only to themselves, but also to the other members of the church—because ultimately, every single member belongs to Jesus.

4. *What authority did Paul have to share these commands with his audience?*

5. *According to this passage, how should Christians regard themselves?*

6. *How is each member of a church like a part of the body?*

7. *As members of a church body, who do we belong to?*

Do Your Part

Romans 12:6-8, KJV

6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith;

Romans 12:6-8, NIV

“We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your

7 Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching;

8 Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

faith; ⁷if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Though the root of the “grace given” (vs. 6) to each member of Christ’s Body is the same, that grace expresses itself in different ways. Different Christians receive different spiritual gifts, and no two Christians’ usage of those gifts will look exactly alike. Two things, however, are clear: We are all called to be good stewards of whatever we’ve been given (Matt. 25:14-30), and we are to steward our gifts by using them to build up the church (1 Cor. 14:12).

Verses 6-8 provide a series of quick snapshots of what good stewardship looks like for different types of giftings. As we can see from other passages in the New Testament, the gifts mentioned in verses 6-8 do not form an exhaustive list (see 1 Cor. 12:7-10; Eph. 4:7-11). Neither do they form some sort of definitive “ranking” that allows us to compare the importance of each gift against the others. Each one is God-designed and necessary for the Body!

Paul begins his list by explaining what faithful use of the gift of “prophecy” looks like. While there are differing views among Christians as to whether prophecy continues in the same manner today as it did in the New Testament-era, the prophecy mentioned here involves speaking words given directly by God. Prophecy was particularly valuable for building up the church (1 Cor. 14:1), but also particularly dangerous if spoken falsely (Matt. 24:24). True prophecy, in that case, required speaking expressly according to “faith” in God’s truths and His person.

“Serving” can refer to the sort of servant-hearted work that every Christian is called to do for other Christians (see Gal. 5:13). But when Paul mentions people with the spiritual

gift of “service” in verse 6, he is quite possibly referring to those with the official position of deacon. Deacons were called to do specific administrative service to help the church as a whole (Acts 6:1-6). For those given the gift of this role, the most faithful thing that person could do was to be active within it, rather than only wearing a title. The same is true of those given the gift of “teaching”: People entrusted with the authority to faithfully teach God’s Word were supposed to do it thoroughly and consistently. Similarly, verse 8 reminds us that there are those especially called to “stir up” the church to good works, exhorting and encouraging others, even in the face of opposition or unpopularity.

Every Christian is called to give, but some are gifted with the opportunity to give more resources than others. Yet verse 8 makes it clear that it is not the ability to give that ultimately matters, but the heart behind one’s giving. A good steward of the ability to give does so sacrificially and without fanfare.

Leaders are given a special charge, as well. Those gifted with leadership opportunities are called to be active in their roles, making decisions and setting examples with energy and enthusiasm. Faithful leaders see a vision through.

The final gift in this list is mercy, which involves the ability to help those in distress or in need. Showing mercy to others as they experience difficult things can sometimes be awkward, stressful, and time-consuming. But Christ-honoring joy can come from knowing that each one of us has received abundant mercy from the Lord.

Throughout this list, we can find a call to action no matter what our spiritual giftings may be. We are all parts of a living body, and living bodies move. Only dead ones lie still.

8. *Why do we have different spiritual gifts?*

9. *How does this passage show that everyone’s spiritual gifts are similar?*

10. *According to this passage, what is the most important attitude for those in positions of leadership to have?*

Every Person Matters

In anticipation of Sunday morning, the Hutchinson family barely slept Saturday night. The opening Sunday of their new church meant a lot to all six family members; even the four-year-old son sensed Sunday's significance.

Pastor Hutchinson rose before dawn to pray and read through his first sermon in the new church. Sweet aromas filled the kitchen as Mrs. Hutchinson prepared delicious cinnamon rolls for after the service. Jeremy, the oldest son, packed the Bibles and hymn books by the front door without being reminded. Mary, the second child, gathered all the instruments to be used during the service. Joshua quickly got dressed, so he could help his younger brother get ready in time for family breakfast.

The Hutchinson family was surprised to arrive at the new church and meet Mr. and Mrs. Rankin already there, finalizing things needed for Communion. Soon other families arrived and helped wherever needed. The first Sunday of the new church exceeded the Hutchinsons' expectations. God had answered their prayers. A new Body of Christ had started and would be sustained since everyone played his or her part.

The family was amazed how new people attended weekly and those who joined the church quickly contributed to its growth. Ms. Davidson used her green thumb to keep beautiful flowers at the altar and outside. Samuel joined the church and quickly offered to play the drums during worship time.

At the first anniversary of the church, Pastor Hutchinson and his family realized how much their responsibilities had been reduced. Everyone knew that he or she played an important part in the growth of the Body of Christ.

11. *What role does joint ownership play in a person's active participation on a project?*

12. *Why must all responsibilities in the Body of Christ be seen as important?*

13. *How do you view your participation in the Body of Christ?*

On the Field, Not in the Stands

The actual working of the Body of Christ can be correlated to a football game. Often you have the 11 main players using their gifts for God's purpose and a few standby players, and everyone else sitting in the stand watching God's purpose play out. Yet, unlike a football game, in the Body of Christ, God has given every member a specialty. Some members' participation may be unseen, but they are essential for the Body. For example, the water boy may go unknown and unrecognized, but the players need and appreciate what he does to enable them to play.

► *Are your gifts being used in the field, or are you wasting them by sitting in the stand? Write a statement of commitment here to be in the field today, even if the spotlight isn't on you. The Body needs your gift(s). You might start by listing your gift(s) and then ways you can use them in the Body.*

KEY VERSE

[We have] then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us. —Romans 12:6a, KJV

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. —Romans 12:6a, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of January 29 through February 4

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Ephesians 3:14-21 — Strengthened with Power through the Spirit.
- Tues.** Psalm 89:1-13 — Sing of God's Might.
- Wed.** 1 Chronicles 16:8-22 — Rely on God.
- Thurs.** Revelation 11:15-19 — God Reigns in Power.
- Fri.** Romans 1:8-17 — The Power of God for Salvation.
- Sat.** Ephesians 6:10-18 — Be Strong in the Lord.
- Sun.** Isaiah 40:12-13, 25-31 — Wait on God, Who Gives Strength.