

Ministry in the Spirit - 2. Servanthood & the Gift of Serving

by Michael Flowers

The sermon emphasizes the importance of servanthood and utilizing spiritual gifts within the church community for the common good.

Duration: 29:21

Scripture: Romans 12:6

Topics: "Servanthood"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by praying for his words to be pleasing to God. He then invites the audience to turn to the book of Romans, specifically chapter 12, to reflect on spiritual gifts. The speaker shares a parable about indefinite pronouns and emphasizes the importance of using our gifts for the common good and celebrating each other's gifts. He also encourages the audience to recognize and employ the gifts that God has given them. The sermon emphasizes the need to not compare past experiences but to focus on being in a place of intimacy with God and serving Him wholeheartedly.

Transcript

Let's pray together. Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing in your sight. Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

Well, if you have your Bibles, let's turn over to Romans. If you have your app or your phone, whatever it is. Let's turn to Romans 12, if you'd like to follow along.

And we're going to continue a reflection in Romans 12 about some of the spiritual gifts that are here today. We're going to cover about two of those gifts today. Just some real basic reflection on them.

But first of all, I want to tell you a little parable. And you may have heard this before. Does anybody know what an indefinite pronoun is? Okay, yeah.

It's indefinite, right? I mean, you're trying to describe someone, but it's not specific. It's somebody. It's anybody.

It's. Yeah, it's like that. Somebody.

Anybody. Nobody. Everybody.

That's an indefinite pronoun, right? Here's this little parable. It goes like this. This is a story about four people named everybody, somebody, anybody and nobody.

Anybody heard this before? There was an important task to be done and everybody was sure that somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it. But nobody did it.

Somebody got angry about that because it was everybody's job. Everybody thought anybody could do it. But nobody realized that everybody wouldn't do it.

It ended up that everybody blamed somebody when nobody did what anybody could have done. Have you experienced this in your work environment or in church or wherever? I mean, this applies everywhere, doesn't it? Things that are completely undefined, you know, but you're hoping that everybody will just sort of, you know, be led by the force or something, right? Oh, man, we've all experienced it. Well, you know, Paul today is trying to alleviate this story of indefinite pronouns here, and he's trying to bring some definition to the church in Rome about some of those spiritual gifts that could be helpful for this community that it's not an exhaustive list at all.

It's just a suggestive list. And all of these are ministries of Christ. Let me say that.

So it's Christ has all of the gifts, right? I mean, he is the gift and he distributes some of those gifts to individuals. And so Paul is describing it from a, we could say, Christo centric way. The New Testament church is described.

What is a New Testament church? I would say it's a sacramental body with many members and functions infused with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. That's one way of describing it. There's many ways we could describe this bride of Christ, right? And to live in a local congregation in indefinite terms produces similar outcomes, right? This is why every member is called to serve with defined and recognized gifts for the common good.

And we discover those gifts within community. We don't discover our gifts in isolation. Right.

I'm going to go away and find out what my gifts are. I've never seen anybody find out what their gifts are going away in seclusion because a gift is meant to be what? Giving it away. Right.

It's never meant to be kept to yourself. It's oh, this is who it's mine. You know, it's just like Liz was telling me the story of of our granddaughter's second birthday.

And she was there last Sunday and she had all of these all these wonderful little friends come, you know, and then they all came in and they went straight for her toys. And she's going, like, my mind, you know, she was like, I'm so glad you're here. Those are mine.

Those are mine. I'm so glad you're here. Thank you.

Thank you. Those are mine. Those are mine.

I can't handle this. You know, it was so great. And isn't that the way, you know, don't we all like struggle with mine, you know? Oh, man.

Even though service is a gift. Employing any of the gifts is service, right? It's serving someone else. Right.

And it's modeled by the greatest servant of all. What's his name? Yes. Who did not come to be served, but to give his life as a ransom.

You see, the only way God could go was down. Right. You understand God can't go up any higher by by nature of being God.

So the only movement he could take is to condescend and descend down and become human being, become a human being to deal with this issue of mine, you know, so that the gifts are not for us and all of our gifts that God has given us are not for us or for others. Right. They're meant to be given freely.

You have received freely. Yes. Right.

That's the idea. And that's the modeling of Jesus, the greatest servant of all. Though serving is one of the gifts, as I've said, it's we call them gifts of the spirit.

More technically, they're gifts of grace. When you look at the word charismatic, that's the Greek word for gift. It's broken up.

Charis is the word for grace. And so charismatic is something given to us out of God's grace. Paul is not separating it from the spirit, but it is a gift of grace empowered through the Holy Spirit.

Right. The spirit is called the spirit of grace in Hebrews. The spirit of grace.

And so every Christian is called really to serve. That's the idea that Paul is getting at here. There's many old family chores.

If you're a part of a community, right, that need to be done. We get this because we tear down and we set up and we do other things. But there's other needs throughout the week that maybe some folks need for if they're ill or if they need rides or if they need just all kinds of needs that if we're aware of them, we can meet them.

Right. That don't have anything to do with this morning's worship. Those are family chores.

Those are being part of a family, learning how to serve one another that way. It takes relationship. Right.

It takes knowing one another and knowing what those needs are. And sometimes we're not good at letting people know what our needs are. Right.

And I would just say, hey, let your needs be known. You know, let your dreams be known. Let yourself be known.

Right. We need to know and be known by one another. And it's easy just to hide out in a persona that doesn't go very deep.

And this is really not a place where we can go very deep, except in worship. But we need greater avenues of building community and service outside of Sunday morning. And so it's just like helping out where things need to just get done.

That's that's one form of service. That's not necessarily the gift of service. That's a general everybody.

Hey, how can I help heart? How can I help heart? Right. And that's for the common good policy. It's for the good of all of us.

Right. And then there's also employing those defined, not that indefinite pronoun, but those defined gifts that, you know, that you have and that God has given you. And that we can all recognize and celebrate.

Yeah. We're called to celebrate each other's gifts and recognize them and build people up and speaking identity and speaking to the treasure and people, those gifts that have been hidden and covered over. We're called to recognize those things by the grace of God and speak those out and encourage one another that way as well.

First, Peter 4:10 says this is each one has received a gift. Nobody's left out. Everybody in this room has received a gift.

If you're a Christian. As each one has received a gift, employ it. Employ it.

I like that word. Are we employed this morning? Are we unemployed? Right. No Christian should be unemployed.

Employ it in serving one another. Employ it. Express it in serving one another as good stewards.

OK, here it is. As good stewards. We have a stewardship of the manifold.

Grace. Whoa. It's a beautiful word.

We can just hang out on that for another 20 minutes of the manifold. Grace. The many splendid grace of God.

It's so beautiful. The manifold grace of God is so beautiful. And he makes his people beautiful through the grace that he gives us out of Zion.

The perfection of beauty. The psalm says. Shines forth.

The perfection of beauty shines forth. This is what grace does. And so from a biblical account, everybody's a charismatic.

Oh, now I'm stepping on some toes. From a biblical account, then, everybody's a charismatic. I've had people tell me, well, I'm not charismatic.

I'm going like, I know what you mean. I know exactly what you mean. Let's go back to the New Testament.

Because you're not talking biblical now. You're talking in reaction or in some other form of cultural-like disassociation. But that's not a biblical understanding of what a Christian is.

And so I'd say every Christian is a charismatic. I don't like titles. I don't use that word a lot because it's misunderstood.

It's misunderstood. Just like when people say, I'm not a charismatic. I get that.

I totally get that. But every Christian has one or more spiritual gifts to employ. And let me say, in humble service.

In humble service for the common good of the local church, right? It's a biblical adjective, this word charismatic. It's a biblical adjective from the Greek word charismata. Paul describes every Christian as being filled with the Holy Spirit and given definite gifts to build up their local community of believers.

It's just so often we don't spend enough time unearthing what those gifts are and speaking and identifying those gifts. And so they're what we would call latent gifts, right? Even Romans 12, 6 says having gifts. That word is charismata there.

That's where we get charismatic. Having gifts. Charis.

The word grace. Charismata is the Greek word. Having gifts that differ.

Having charismata that differ. According to the grace, according to the charis. According to the grace given to us.

Let us use them. Yeah, so this is a call to action. In learning how to use our gifts.

For the common good, to bless others. Yeah. And to use those gifts when I don't feel like it.

To use those gifts at all times. Because that's why it's service. It's not when I feel like it.

Right? It's rising above that. Because that's the part of the old nature. The flesh and being in control.

Right? Because if we served when it was always convenient and we felt like it. I wouldn't do much serving personally. I don't know about you.

But if I live out of my feelings and my perceived lack of time. All that stuff. You know, I'm not going to do that much.

So we have to push beyond that. You get it. You get it.

You do it. Preaching to the choir with some of this stuff. Okay.

Paul is saying that then that these words charis and charismatic grace and grace gifts. He's saying that we're not only saved by charis. We're not only saved by grace.

But we're gifted by grace. Okay. We're gifted by grace.

For the common good of blessing others. And as I said, no Christian should be unemployed. And so if you're a member of St. Aidan's or if you're working towards that.

I would just say you're hired. It's a great job. I'm here to tell you about it.

There's a lot of jobs to be done. You're hired. You're not unemployed today.

Amen. Now, some of us may be put off by the word charismatic. I want to go through a few of those.

Okay. It's come to be identified with just different movements that are charismatic movements. Right.

For better or for worse. Right. Which seek to exercise the gifts of the spirit.

And then due to offering in those movements, differing theologies and practices. And those movements have different corporate cultures. Some turn us off, some turn us on.

Their style of ministry. Even the volume of ministry. The volume coming out sometimes.

It depends on a lot of times we judge whether it's God or not by our personalities. And we have to really watch that. Because a lot of times ministries that are more extroverted get rejected by those who are more introverted.

Ask me how I know. It's often used as a personality type. Like he's a charismatic individual.

Right. We use that in our culture. That's a very charismatic person.

That's not what we're talking about, is it? That's not the biblical understanding of charismatic. And typically that kind of personality type is a highly extroverted individual. Right.

They get all the press. Right. The highly extroverted people get a lot of the press and a lot of the attention.

And they build mega churches. Right. I mean that personality type with a gift typically does that.

You typically typically don't see a very laid back introverted ministry. That's this massive thing going because generally type a extroverted pastors lead those ministries. I mean, thank God for them.

But not everybody is a type a extroverted Christian. Right. And so many of us find ourselves more comfortable in a liturgical setting because it's not necessarily going to be driven by personality.

Right. A lot of ministries that are charismatic ministries can be driven by personalities to personality. We say personality driven ministry.

You take that personality equation and there is no ministry. People will leave because they're following that person. That is not a healthy way to gather people unless that person is Jesus.

I mean, we want to be Christ centered. Right. Not Michael centered or any other great priest that we may get to come along.

Right. We want you know, we want to be Christ centered. That's why the altar is in the middle of this ministry.

Right. We don't have this here. And most of the time when this is here, that's not even there.

That doesn't exist because it's all about the guy and the word I'm bringing forward. Hallelujah. Now, I'm just having fun.

I'm not making fun of anything because I've been in all of this. You can tell. And I love it all.

I love I love God's wild kingdom. Right. I was raised watching wild kingdom and then got translated to the church.

Right. It's the wild kingdom. Noah's Ark.

I mean, you know, it's biblical. Right. It's a type of the church.

We love it all. We're not being critical of anything. But some of us really do struggle with the word charismatic because of these things.

Right. You may be in reaction from being turned off by a former charismatic church. You may have been in a charismatic church and you may be throwing the whole thing out because you got hurt or you got disillusioned or you whatever valid reasons.

And therefore, charismatic has a bad taste in your mouth. And a lot of people out of reaction are going to places in reaction. Ask me how I know I've been there and done that.

I've done all of this, man. I just I'm preaching out of my own psychology here. It's just yes.

How long did I stay in reaction? Heal me, Lord of reaction, because I tend to react still very quickly to things. I don't want to be that way. You may be turned off by charismatic because you've stereotyped it.

There's a certain stereotype of what it's like and you've got it nailed. Nothing's going to get beyond that stereotype. But, you know, none of that has to do with what we're going to be talking about.

We're going to be talking about what does the scripture say? The gifts of the spirit are all about. And I think in this culture, in this context, we're going to be able to work this out in a fresh way. That's my hope.

We're not attempting to copy a movement or a past experience. And I've had a lot of past experiences that I could go, wow, I want to reproduce that. And a lot of us tend to do that.

I mean, if we had a really great experience, it always has to hit that high note. And it's never good enough until it hits that note. Right.

Oh, man, church used to be so awesome. That kind of thing. Well, why isn't it so awesome now? Because it's made of a lot of people.

Why aren't you experiencing so awesome? Because you're a part of it. So there we go. And so we're going to begin with Paul's list of seven gifts in Romans 12.

I'm going to skip prophecy in this list, not because I don't want to deal with prophecy, because I want to deal with it more. And so when we get into 1 Corinthians 12, I'm going to deal with prophecy there, because in 1 Corinthians 12 through 14, it has a lot to say about prophecy. This only has two words.

It's an important gift to look at. And so we're going to deal with serving and teaching. And we may only deal with serving today.

I'm going to quit at a specific time. So if I quit before I finish, say amen. All these gifts reside in the fullness of Christ.

And so what is serving? What's the difference between serving and the gift of serving? What's the difference between the general call to serve, like all of us have, right? And what is that gift of serving? OK. Paul uses this word, and the word is diakonia. What does that sound like? Yeah, deacon.

But it's used very broadly, and let me illustrate this. It's often translated ministry, this word is. It's used both for the ministry of the word, OK, those who are ministering the word, and then those who are ministering at tables in the same chapter in Acts 6. So why should we neglect the ministry of the word, the apostles are

saying, when we need others to do the ministry of helping the widows in the feeding of the distribution of food? OK, so it's the same word there.

The apostles were needing help, and they were neglecting preaching the word right after Pentecost. You know, I mean, this is a fresh church, and they're saying, like, we need help. We need to ordain deacons.

And so they did that to help administrate the feeding of the widows. Now, in the Roman Empire, humility was not a virtue at all. And so this thing about serving and being the least and being the last, Jesus said, if you want to be great, be the servant of all.

Now, Aristotle would have never taught that. Plato would have never taught that because it wasn't a virtue to lower yourself. Condescension was viewed as weakness, and weakness was viewed in very bad terms in the Roman Empire.

So people were always about power and prestige and places of honor if they could get there. And they worshipped people in those places, namely the emperor. And so when Jesus comes along, he turns all that on its head, and he says, no, no.

The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over you, but not so amongst you. Who wants to be great will be servant of all. So he's turning the culture of life all upside down.

He's saying, no, this is over here. All of that way of living is in the flesh. We've talked about this in Galatians.

Flesh meaning this present evil age under the reign of sin and death. That's what we're being rescued out of. And so being rescued out of that calls us into a completely counterintuitive way of living as a community in Jesus Christ.

And, man, if we could just live the words of Jesus, we'd be fine, right? Wow, it's amazing. Jesus is saying there's nothing wrong with wanting to be great. It's just the way that greatness gets expressed.

So what's the difference between the general call of servanthood and the gift of service? We recently had lunch with a friend of ours that we've known who just moved to Kansas City. And we've known this person since San Francisco days. And we were having lunch with her in the midst of the conversation.

We were just talking about church and ministry and stuff. She just said, just spontaneously, I love to serve. I was like, say that one more time.

No, I got it because I know this woman and she is gifted in serving. It's the gift. And, you know, that is the gift when someone says, I love to serve.

Yeah, it's beautiful. That's the gift. That's what it is.

That's that's what it is. What is it, Michael? That's what it is. How can you describe that? It's an inner motivation, you know, that, you know, even if you can't relate to it, it gets expressed and it's beautiful.

And it's not to gain position or, you know, I'm just sort of paying my dues so that I can do the greater things. That's not that it's not a stepping stone for this person. You know, a lot of times the diaconal ministry ordination ministry is a stepping stone to the priesthood.

You know, Father Dio really had problems with that. He always he always talked about that. And I said, but you have to become a deacon to be a priest.

He says, yeah, but too many of them, they just they're not really deacons. They want to be a priest. They don't want to be deacons.

Oh, I get that. I get that. That's why when you're ordained to the priesthood, you're still.

A deacon, when you're consecrated as a bishop, you're still a deacon and a priest. You never trade one now. Oh, now I got promoted.

No, it's not promotion. It's demotion. The way up is down.

It really is. It's taking on more responsibility and more servanthood. And it's it's ten times harder to be given the place of a bishop and serve all of those churches in the spirit of Jesus, especially our bishop.

He's rector of a 1500 member church, close over 30 churches. That's a big job. That's grace.

He does it with grace. Someone that doesn't have the grace gets appointed to the position. What a disaster.

A lot of times that happens, too, right? People get appointed into high level ministry positions. They don't have the grace for it. And they they have so much destruction behind them, you know, because they're trying to do it, but they don't have the grace for it.

I love serving. That's the gift. Remember the story of Mary and Martha? When Jesus comes to hang out, Martha just immediately assumes that Jesus is hungry.

She didn't ask him and she gets back there, man, and she's just like smoke is just coming out of the kitchen, you know, and Mary's in there at the feet of Jesus. Just I love you. I love you.

I love you. I adore you. You know, Martha, she comes in there all huffed out, man.

You know what's going on? I'm trying to do all of this for you, Jesus. She's angry. And and that's Martha and Mary's adoring.

You know, she's adoring Jesus. And she said, whoa, you're concerned about a lot of things. It's just like Jesus.

I didn't ask for the menu. You know, I just wanted to come and hang out. And so you think Martha has the gift of serving? I don't really know.

It doesn't look like it. Martha and Mary are used as and I think sometimes wrongly used as a paradigm of active ministry and contemplative ministry, contemplative being Mary and Martha being active. We don't want that to be a paradigm of active ministry.

People serving out of anger and frustration. Right. I'm not going to ask you of hands, but I know if you've ever tried to do anything, you've experienced that.

We felt like I'm the only one like Elijah in the cave. Right. I'm the only one, Lord.

Nobody cares about this church. Right. And that's a person with great ownership.

But just now I've got six thousand others who haven't bowed the knee to bail. Right. That's just what God said.

OK. All right. And so I think Mary and Martha probably isn't a really good paradigm for those two polarities.

But I think Mary is a good paradigm for contemplation. And I think Martha, when I asked the question and I don't know the answer to this, does she have the gift of service? I would think, well, I would assume not. But let me ask you this.

Have you ever tried to do anything? You say you get the gift. OK. I'm gifted in this.

You're a gifted cardiologist. I mean, but I'm gifted, so I'm not going to go to school. I'm not going to study.

I'm not going to develop myself because I don't have the gift. Right. And so you get in there and you start just dealing, acting like a cardiologist because you know you have the gift.

No, you had to work for it, Steve. I mean, you had to go to a lot of schooling. Right.

Yeah. I mean, that's the way it works. I mean, if you get the gift of teaching.

Oh, good. I want the gift of teaching so I don't have to study. No, that's not the way gifts work.

Right. You have to be developed just because someone has the gift of teaching. That's a difference.

That's the grace of effectiveness born out of great study. And if you don't have the gift, you won't study because you won't like studying. If you like to study, you just might have the gift.

And it's OK if you don't like study. Right. It's OK.

There's different skill levels of teaching and communication and all of that. And some of us bumble through because we have the job description. Right.

Yeah. OK. So.

But I love to study. Yeah, I do. And I'm called to teach.

So I'm doing it because I'm a pastor. And so that Mary Martha question. Just ponder that.

Ponder that. Now, I'm going to stop because I don't have time to finish. I just ponder Mary and Martha and just ask, where might you be in that house with Jesus? Where might you be this morning? You feel frustrated or are you sitting at the feet of Jesus just like I don't know what the tasks are, but I love you.

That's a good place to start. Right. Intoxicated with God.

Yeah. And then you can serve kind of stumbling around and slurring your words. We won't care.

All right. It's time to go to the creed. Right.

Let's stand together.

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