Romans 12 (Part 2) • Being the Body of Christ

Pastor Paul LeBoutillier · September 13, 2026

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Romans, chapter 12, as we continue our study. Last week we covered two whole verses, two whole verses, and as we started chapter 12 it was wonderful. What we're going to be dealing with here tonight is we're going to be talking about being the body of Christ, and the Apostle Paul has some exhortations to us related to that. So let's go ahead and read through verses 3 through 8. Follow along with me as I read.

I'm reading out of the ESV, and it goes like this. For by the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we though many are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them. If prophecy in proportion to our faith, if service in our serving, the one who teaches in his teaching, the one who exhorts in his exhortation, the one who contributes in generosity, the one who leads with zeal, the one who does acts of mercy with cheerfulness.

Let's stop there, and let's pray. Father, as we get into the scripture tonight, as we look more deeply into the things that are given us here in this passage, we pray for your Holy Spirit to minister grace among us that we might hear from you, hear your voice, that we might walk in wisdom and be able to see how this word applies to us tonight. And Lord, give us the strength, courage, and wisdom to put these things into practice. We look to you, and we thank you, Father, for these exhortations, and I think it goes without saying, Lord, that we are in great need of insight, wisdom, and grace to be the body of Christ that you've called us to be. Do this work among us, Lord, we ask in the precious name of Jesus our Savior, amen, amen.

I think it goes without saying, well, I don't know if it goes without saying, I'll tell you that I have learned over the years that I think one of the biggest questions people have related to being the body of Christ has to do with simply knowing what your gift is. I get that question constantly, Pastor Paul, how can I know what my spiritual gift is? How do I know how the Lord has gifted me? And so forth. And you know, those can be very challenging questions.

You know, there's a longer answer to that question, which I'm really not prepared to give tonight, but we're going to be talking tonight about giftings, and how they fit in, and how we should be responding to the gift giver. You'll notice in the verses that we're looking at here tonight, Paul begins by exhorting us according, he says, to the grace given us, right? In other words, he starts by saying, I'm going to exhort you according to the grace given me, and I'm going to talk to you about the grace given to you. And so he begins by saying, I recognize that God has given me the grace to be an apostle. And along with that apostolic calling, I have a responsibility to talk to you about who you are, and how you are the body of Christ, and how you work together.

And that's what I want to do. And so Paul recognized that grace. And that's something that we need to understand as well. And we need to recognize the grace that is upon our lives. And his first exhortation here, you'll notice, is that we would simply be humble in the way that we think about ourselves, and in the way we present ourselves, and the giftings that we receive.

You'll notice he says, I say to everyone, not to think more highly, think of yourself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. So the first thing Paul says is, I want you to walk in humility. In whatever the Lord has gifted you to do, whatever the Lord has gifted you to be, I want you to make sure you walk in humility. And essentially what this means is, don't have an exaggerated view of yourself, and or of your importance. You know, I've got to be careful how I say this, but none of us is critical.

We are members of the body of Christ, we'll talk more about that in a bit, but God did really well before you came on the scene, he'll do okay after you leave, and he can raise, and I don't mean to make you feel bad, I'm just saying, this is how we ought to see ourselves. This is the way we ought to think about ourselves. It's like, hey, I'm here, I'm here for a time, I have a gifting, God has given me the grace to operate in that gifting, and I want to do everything I can to be faithful, right? I had somebody recently write me and just say, Pastor Paul, how do you, how should we define success in the ministry? That's easy.

Faithfulness. That's it. It's not numbers, it's not how much adulation you receive, it's all about faithfulness. Whatever your calling may be. And I believe that that calling varies greatly.

But he says, don't have an exaggerated view of yourself, and I think this is also important not to be envious about the giftings of others as well. You know, because we can, we tend to apply the same ideas about importance that the world applies to positions, you know what I mean? We tend to see certain positions in the body of Christ as more important than other positions in the body of Christ, and we've got to get over that because it's not about worldly definitions and that sort of thing. So we're to maintain our

humility by remembering some rather important things that God has told us about giftings. And I want to show you some things on the screen, first from 1 Corinthians chapter 12.

Check this out. Paul writes to the Corinthians and says, to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. And all these are empowered by one and the same Spirit who apportions to each one individually as who wills, as he wills. So there's two important things that are really kind of said here. And he says that your gifting, whatever it may be, is given to you for the common good.

And that basically means you've been given a gift to bless others. It's not to bless you. It's to bless others. And the other important thing that Paul says there is that it's God who gives them. It is he who apportions those gifts.

And those gifts are not for self-promotion or appearing more spiritual. The problem that was going on in Corinth, not necessarily Rome, but in Corinth, is that they, I think some of the believers there did think that they had been given spiritual gifts to look spiritual. And so Paul had some interesting questions to ask of them. Let me show you on the screen also from 1 Corinthians chapter 4. It says, what do you have that you did not receive?

And if then you received it, why do you boast as if you didn't? As if you didn't receive it? These are rhetorical questions to remind believers like you and me that what we have, we have from God. And that means you can't boast about it. You can't say, look what I got.

It was God who determined, and he gave you that gift, and you have that gift. And so we glorify God, not ourselves, in the giftings that we've received. And then in the end of verse 3, you'll notice that Paul encourages us to have sober judgment about the giftings that we've been given. That word or that phrase, sober judgment, just means sound thinking. When you hear the word sober in the Bible, don't think of the opposite of inebriated.

Because sober simply means sound thinking, solid level-headedness, right? So he says you're to think of yourself with sound thinking or sober judgment. And then he says that you are to consider the gifting that you have according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. Now you need to know that that's a rather interesting and even somewhat controversial statement that the apostle made there because it is actually rendered differently in different translations of the Bible. You know I'm reading from the ESV.

That's right. what mostly I'm showing you up on the screen, but let me show you this in the New King James version up on the screen. This verse says, For I say through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly. And then

here's that phrase, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. If you compare that with what the ESV says, they're somewhat different, and they have a slightly different nuanced meaning to them.

And I'll just tell you that the reason that it is different in the ESV and the New King James is because it's a fairly difficult phrase to translate from the original Greek. Some Bible students think that Paul is referring to the amount of faith given to you to exercise the gift that you've been given, and others believe that Paul is referring to the common faith that we've all been given, the measure of faith that all believers have received. Personally, if you're interested in my personal thoughts, personally I think Paul is saying that God has measured out different levels of faith according to the giftings that He has distributed among the body of Christ. So I think what he's saying is we need to measure our faith realistically according to what we've been given. I don't know if that makes sense, but I'll try to explain it a little bit differently because I've always kind of applied this idea to myself as staying in my own lane, or staying in the lane that God has apportioned for me.

And what I mean by that is I've tried to be careful in my 40-plus years of ministry not to go beyond what God has gifted me to do and to be. In other words, what has God given you grace to do? Do that and think realistically about that, and perhaps do it according to the measure of the faith that you have, and so forth. I've always said to people that I've always felt like God not only gave me a guitar, metaphorically I can't play the guitar, but He gave me a guitar and it's called Bible Teacher, and it only has one string. And that's all I do is pluck my one string, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding.

I can't even do a whole song because this is all God has given me to do. But I think about that and I think, well, you know what? I'm going to take what He's given me, even if it's one string, and I'm going to play it faithfully. And I've tried not to go beyond that calling. You know, a lot of pastors get involved in a lot of things, and I've always kind of scratched my head to be completely honest with you.

And you know what? They're doing what God's given them the grace to do, but I have never really traveled. You know, while a lot of pastors were taking tours to places, and there's nothing wrong with that if they have the grace to do that, I never did that. In the 35 years that I pastored Calvary Chapel, Ontario, I stayed home and just taught the Bible. And it's one of the reasons I got through the Bible three times and started on a fourth.

I mean, the entire Bible. Because I felt like I was trying to be true to what the Apostle Paul is saying here. You know, function in your gift according to the faith that you've been given, and stay in your lane. Don't try to get out of your lane. Because you know, sometimes we get pressure from other people to try to do things that is outside of our gifting.

And you know, can I just tell you something? When you get outside of your gifting, it doesn't go well. You end up doing dumb things. I don't want to get on a rant here, so forgive me if it feels like it a little. But I've never been a big fan of churches that kind of have a rotating leadership structure.

And what I mean by that is I think that there are people who are called to be leaders in the body of Christ. That's a calling. And it's not a two-year calling or a four-year calling, it's a lifetime calling. And that's pastors and elders and that sort of thing. And when you force things into a situation where their calling kind of times out, and you have to replace that person with somebody else, you are running the risk of bringing somebody into that position that doesn't actually have that calling.

And this particularly is an issue with churches where it is more of a congregational rule. I was raised in churches with a congregational rule as a kid. I didn't really know it at the time, I learned it later on. But in churches where there's congregational rule, the pastor really isn't a leader at all. He gets up and he preaches on Sunday, and I mean preaches, there's really no teaching, and he's considered an employee of the church, right?

Which makes me shudder to think about that, especially when I hear the words of Jesus when he says that the hireling cares nothing for the sheep. So you've got a hireling pastor and you've got the body of Christ that is in this rotational position of leadership, you know? Men and women, and I remember that because my parents did that, they rotated in and out of leadership, and you rotate for a while, and what ends up happening is you get people with a specific gifting who are forced into a different gifting. They're forced to function in an area of leadership that they're really not called to, they're not equipped to do, and they don't have the grace to do it. And that's why you get, you know, groups that are in leadership in churches that are arguing about whether or not they should paint the building, and there are bigger issues to deal with, you know, because they're just not called into that position of leadership.

So I really think we need to stay within our lane, whatever you're called to do, whatever you're called to be, be that, and be satisfied to be that, and don't be pressured to be something else, right? Anyway, okay, I'm going to step off my soapbox now. Now in verses 4 through 8, you'll notice that Paul goes on to discuss the diversity of gifts given by the Lord. Look with me first in verse 4. He says, for as in one body, and now he's talking about our physical bodies, he says we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, and you know, this is the Apostle Paul's favorite word picture.

His word picture is to help you to understand the functional relationship of the body of Christ to your own physical body, and it's a really good one, and so he used it often, and he said, you know, your body isn't made up of the same parts. There's different parts. You have arms and legs and ears and eyes and nose

and mouth, and they have different functions, and that's important to make up the whole body, and as it is also with the body of Christ. We should expect to see that kind of diversity in the body. In fact, the more gifts that are operating, the better, you know?

Can you imagine if the whole body was a servant and there were no leaders, or they were all leaders and no servants, or something like that? So we should expect to see that kind of thing, and we must also remember what Paul says in verse 5. He says, so we though many are one body in Christ. So here's the, this is the interesting thing. Within the context of the diversity of gifts, there is also unity.

So in fact, we call it diversity in unity. We are diverse in our gifts. We are united as the body. We are one body. We are not two bodies, or three or four or ten or a thousand.

We're one. The body of Christ is one, because there's only one head of the body, and it ain't me and it ain't you. It's Jesus. And so since there's only one head, we know that there's only one body, and so we understand that we are to walk in a recognition of the diversity of our gifts, with at the same time understanding the unity of the one body, and that's hard. It's easy to come out of my mouth, but it's very, very hard to walk out in reality.

And the reason is, is because we're so very different. We come from different backgrounds. We were raised different ways. We have different giftings, and sometimes we don't appreciate other people's giftings. Do you know that's interesting about human nature?

We want people to be like us. You know, I've been married for 48 years, and I can tell you that the goal of most married couples is to spend their lives getting their partner to be... just like them, and we want our partner to think like us and talk like us and respond like us, and we get angry if they don't, you know, if they think differently or if they feel differently or respond differently. Well, you know what, we bring some of that into the body of Christ as well, and we struggle with people who think differently. We struggle with people who want different things and have different ideas, and there's another element that goes along with it, too, and that is that each one of us possesses a sinful nature that rears its ugly head from time to time, and because there's a sinful nature in the midst of all that diversity and difference and difference of opinion, we step on each other's toes on a regular basis.

You know, I understand how easy it is to hurt people. I used to tell the people in my fellowship, if I haven't hurt your feelings yet, I will, and if you haven't hurt mine yet, you probably will, and we're just going to have to learn to get over ourselves and learn to accept one another and embrace one another and

forgive one another, but that's hard. Do you know how many people once went to church but no longer attend church anywhere because they've been hurt? Do you know how common that is? I'm sure you do.

Some of you may even come from a situation where you went to a church for a while, you kind of got your toes stepped on hard, and then you stayed away for years before you made your way back to the body of Christ. It's hard, and nobody ever said it was going to be easy, but because there's that sinful aspect to our personalities as well as the diversity of gifts and all the other differences as well. But here's the interesting thing that the Apostle Paul wants you and me to know about being the body of Christ, and it is what he basically says at the end of verse five when he says, and individually we are members one of another. Think about that phrase, we are members one of another. We don't usually think about that, we think, well I'm a member of the body of Christ, and we say it in kind of a non-personal sort of a way.

But what if I said this, you're a member of me and I'm a member of you, because that's what Paul is saying here, and what this speaks of is another one of Paul's favorite topics, and that is the interdependency within the body of Christ. And see, that's the problem with getting hurt and staying away, withdrawing, and that's what we do as humans when we're hurt, I mean that's common, that's kind of a universal response. You get hurt, you back up, you draw back, and it makes sense emotionally because, good grief, I don't want to put myself in a place where I'm going to keep getting hurt, I want to protect myself, and that's our natural instinct, I need to protect myself. Here's a problem with protecting yourself, we are interdependent, and that's what Paul says. In fact, let me show you on the screen, 1 Corinthians chapter 12, he says, "...the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you, nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are actually indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable, we bestow the greater honor, and our presentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which are..." Excuse me, "...our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require." And then he goes on to say, "...but God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together. If one member is honored, all rejoice together." Together. Does that sound distasteful to you? Together.

Sometimes people do. They think togetherness is distasteful in the body of Christ. I'd rather just stay home. You know, we live in the day and age where you can just get online and you can find your favorite Bible teacher and just listen to them teach through the Bible, and you don't even have to get out of your

jammies. You can just sit in home, have your cup of coffee, and it doesn't matter if you did your hair or took a shower because you're alone.

But that belies that whole interdependency that Paul is talking about, and essentially what we're doing there is we're kind of saying to the other members of the body, I don't need you, you know, which is exactly the opposite of what Paul is saying here. We do need one another in the body of Christ. Isn't that just the worst? I mean, here we are coming in from all these different backgrounds and thought processes and church backgrounds, mercy. You know, as a pastor, I always loved it when somebody came up to you and said, well, in our last church, you know, it's like, tell me all about it.

I want to know what you did in your last church. You know, and we bring all those things into it and we mix it up and sometimes people get on our nerves. And yet we have to remember what the Word says. We are interdependent as the body of Christ. We need one another.

You need me, I need you. I need you. I'm here because I need you. And I recognize that from the Word of God. And so I want to stay connected to you and I want to receive from you and encourage you to receive from me that which is from the Lord, that which we have to give.

And we all have something to give. I honestly don't believe anybody was left out in the area of gifting and some of them might seem uninspiring to me. But those giftings are just as important to you compared to others because, you know, there's a lot of giftings in the body of Christ that don't ever require you to ever have a microphone or a spotlight on you. But those giftings are just as important as any other gifting in the body of Christ. And it's so important that we remember that.

As he concludes this section, begins to exhort us in the usage of various gifts, how we use them and so forth. You'll notice in these last verses, I'm going to read them again. Beginning at verse, well, we'll start six. That's the beginning of a sentence. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.

And then he begins to name various gifts. If prophecy in proportion to our faith, if service in our serving, the one who teaches in his teaching, let him do it, you know, according to the grace given to him, the one who exhorts in his exhortation, the one who contributes in generosity, the one who leads with zeal, the one who does acts of mercy with cheerfulness. Let me put these, well, we already got them up on the screen there. There's the gifts that are mentioned. It is certainly not a comprehensive, complete and exhaustive list of gifts, but it's some of the gifts that Paul makes mention of.

And you can apply the things that he says to these gifts to any gift or to any calling. And, you know, there are spiritual gifts, there are natural gifts, there are gifts that some people don't even consider gifts or callings. I believe that there are some women who are called to raise their children and that's their calling. And God wants them to do it in faithfulness. I think there are some spouses who are called to pray for their spouse to know Christ.

And that might be something they do for the entirety of their married life. And they don't really step out of that necessarily during the course of their marriage. Their marriage might be 50 years or more and they spend that entire time praying for their spouse and we all are kind of pushing this person to do something else and their calling is to pray, to pray that spouse into the kingdom, however long that may take. And we need to recognize that different people have different callings, different giftings, different grace. How do you know if you have the grace to do something?

It's easy. It doesn't mean it's always going to not, it's not going to ever come with difficulty, but it's easy from the standpoint. Well, it's what Jesus said, my yoke is easy and my burden is light. We put yokes on people, we put burdens on people, and it weighs them down. Jesus said, my yoke is easy.

And you know what he talks about, about a yoke. You know what a yoke is, that thing that went over a horse or mule or ox, you know, that they would hook up the plow or the cart or whatever to, and they'd pull it. So that's their yoke. And that course became synonymous with one's burden or calling, their calling. So here's my question to you.

Is what you're doing easy and light? Or is it drudgery? And again, I'm not saying it's always going to be without challenge. You know, we cannot base our calling on challenge or lack of challenge. I've had people say to me, Pastor Paul, I really felt like God was calling me to move to this town and to be here and to minister in this area.

But I've had nothing but difficulty ever since I got here. And I'm beginning to think that maybe I didn't hear God correctly. And I always ask him the same question. What does difficulty have to do with anything? Aren't you glad the Apostle Paul didn't judge his calling based on difficulty?

He'd have turned around and gone home after the first trip. Well, before the first trip was even over. All the persecution and challenges and problems that he ran into, good grief, shipwrecked, beaten, stoned. I believe he was even stoned to death and the Lord raised him up. But that's just my opinion.

Don't tell anybody. That's what the Bible says. But the point is, it was full of difficulty and challenge. And then he spent a lot of time cooling his heels in prison. He said, I know what it is to be naked and without food, without proper clothing.

But did he ever question his calling or who he was in the body of Christ? It has nothing to do with those kind of challenges. I believe Paul still understood that his burden was light because he had a passion and a zeal to carry it out. This is all I want to do. And that's one of the ways that you know that you're walking in your calling.

You want to do it. It's delightful. It even gets you out of bed in the morning to accomplish it. And so you can see the things that are listed there. Prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, and showing mercy.

We're going to talk about these here tonight because it's important that we understand all of these things. He first mentions prophecy. And prophecy is very simply the supernatural gift of speaking forth a message from God. Don't think that prophecy always has to be foretelling. A lot of people assume that prophecy is synonymous with foretelling an event that is still to come.

That may involve that. And there are certainly lots of those in the Bible. But prophecy is also forth telling which is just simply to speak a message from the Lord. And that could come in and it doesn't have to be thus saith the Lord in King James English. It can be simply I just feel like the Lord's laid on my heart a word for you.

And you judge whether or not it's for you. You pray about it. You decide. But this is what I feel like the Lord has burdened me for you. And you give it.

And that's a prophecy. And prophecy is important. And it's important that that we understand that the gift of prophecy has not passed away. It will one day. In fact we're told that these things will pass away.

But it's when Jesus returns. But for now the gifts of the Spirit are all functional. It doesn't mean we have to be weird or you know and bounce off the walls. But it does mean we need to recognize that the gifts are here. They're available.

And prophecy is one of them. What should prophecy be about? Let me show you a passage from 1 Corinthians chapter 14 up on the screen. Paul writes the one who prophesies speaks to people for their up building and encouragement and consolation to console them. Isn't that interesting?

That's what prophecy is about. That's what prophecy is going to primarily include. Up building, encouragement, consolation. So prophecy says if the Lord has laid words on you for other people, then do it according to your faith. Do it according to the grace given you.

You know. Prophecy doesn't have to be weird. It can be very gentle. It can be very tender. And it can break you when you're the recipient.

I had a guy come up to me one time years ago when I was still a very young man. And he says, I have a word from the Lord for you. And of course you always kind of brace yourself, you know, when somebody says that because there are some wackos that want to take prophecy to an unhealthy level. But he said, this is the message I feel like the Lord gave me. He just wanted you to know he loves you.

That was it. And I burst out crying. I literally started sobbing because, you know, we all know doctrinally speaking, you know, that God loves us. For God so loved the world, you know, we know that we're part of that. And we quote that and we all say, yeah, you know, and if you were to be given a test, does God love you, I'm sure you'd get the answer right.

Yes, God loves me. But you know what really makes a difference? When he tells you, I love you. I just started bawling, you know, because it just became real. But that was a simple word of prophecy, you know.

He goes on to speak of service. The New King James uses the word ministry here, which I think is a rather unfortunate rendering because the Greek word is diakonia and diakonia is related to the word deacon. And the function of a deacon is one who serves. A deacon is not one who leads necessarily. It is one who serves.

And the basic idea behind a deacon is someone who gets their hands dirty. They're functionally working in all kinds of practical ways. Could be waiting tables, cleaning, whatever, you know. Could even be like a security ministry or something like that. But serving in this way, it is functional and it is so necessary in the body of Christ.

We need people who are just willing to be servants. And they love it. They love doing it, you know. They don't want to get up and lead. They don't want a spotlight on them.

They don't even want anybody to know their name necessarily. They just want to serve. They want to just be there and help. And they're the people that come up to a pastor and say, hey, do you need somebody to help set up chairs or do you need somebody to clean? Or how about mowing the lawn?

Do you need somebody to help you there? They just want to serve. Just want to serve. Paul says, if that's the grace that's on you, he says, then do it. Do it in proportion to what God has given you.

Next, Paul says, one who teaches in his teaching, you know, let him do it in proportion to his faith. And you know what teaching is. It's what's happening right now. It's giving instruction. Honestly, the best description of a teacher is found in the Old Testament, in the book of Nehemiah.

Let me show you this on the screen. It says, they read from the book of the law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read. And I quoted that out of the NIV because I kind of like the wording there. And I think they nailed it. That's the gift of a teacher, is to take the word of God and to make the meaning clear.

And that includes dissecting and looking into words and their meaning and so forth so that people understand. So they have a greater understanding, you know. And it's obviously an important gifting in the church. And it's very different from preaching. Teaching and preaching are two different things.

Preaching is more exhortational, which he talks about here in a minute. Teaching is instructional. And if you look in your Gospels, you'll see that Jesus did both. In fact, it'll say it in the same verse. He says, he would preach and teach.

So he would exhort the people and he would instruct the people. Very different things. Next, and this preaching is really the next one. Here in verse eight, Paul says, '"The one who exhorts in his exhortation."' Here's an interesting Greek word for exhorts. You ready?

It's parakaleo. It's very similar to the word paraclete, which is what we use to define the Holy Spirit and his role. And that's why parakaleo is used here for one who exhorts, because a person who exhorts is someone who appeals to someone, someone who comforts others, and at times, someone who pleads to others. Literally, have you ever had the Holy Spirit plead with you? I'm sure the Holy Spirit has comforted you, but has the Holy Spirit ever pled his case or exhorted you?

Well, that gifting is now on some of you. You have the gifting to exhort. And that might mean you're pleading with someone who has backslidden, or you're comforting someone who has just lost a loved one, or you're appealing to someone who has withdrawn from church because they've been hurt. And that's your gift. And you can do it better than I can do it, because you're gifted and you have the grace to do it, and it comes easy to you.

You're drawn to people that are hurting and need comfort and encouragement. You're drawn to them, and that's one of the ways you also know. He says, next, the one who contributes in generosity. I referred to this on my list as giving, because the New King James actually says one who gives, and that's a good rendering. He's talking about people who are given resources and the grace to be generous with those resources.

In other words, they don't hold on to God's resources like this. They hold on to them like this, and they're willing to give them away when the need is there. They obviously have to walk in discernment and not be stupid about the way they give away their resources, because you can hurt. You can actually hurt. You can do harm by not walking in discernment.

I've always struggled with people who are panhandling on the street corners and just looking for money, because we had a guy in our church who used to work at a convenience store that was right next to a very, very popular place in Ontario where the panhandlers would sit there with their cardboard signs, and this guy, he told me. He said, I'd watch them out there. They'd sit out there for an hour or two and get their money, and then they'd come in and buy beer, and I thought, ugh, you know? That's not where I want my money to go. Better off if I feel the Lord calling me to do something is to run over to a place and get him a sandwich and hand him a sandwich and a bottle of water or something like that, because I want to give responsibly, but there are people who are gifted in this area, and I'm willing to bet there might even be some of you in this room who God has not only given resources, but he's given you a heart of generosity to give, and you are to do it according to the grace given you.

You're to walk it out, and you're to be faithful, but responsible at the same time, right? Next is leadership on the list, or leading, as it said there. The NIV says if it is to lead, do it diligently, and some people are gifted to lead. They have a leadership gifting, and it is a calling, and it is the grace of God that enables someone to be able to walk in that role of leadership. Now, here's the deal.

Here's the problem, and I alluded to this earlier on. We look at people in leadership today like the world looks at people in leadership, and we look up to them, and there's not to say that you shouldn't respect people for whatever position of gifting they have. Paul even tells us to do that, especially elders who teach, but you can take it too far if you take it to a worldly perspective, right? And we do that, and so we have to remember that the way we see people and the way people are called to lead is different in the body of Christ than it is in the world. Let me show you what Jesus said from Matthew chapter 20 up on the screen so we can see it together.

It says Jesus called them, and that's his disciples, to him and said, you know that the rulers of the Gentiles lorded over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Look what he says here. Look what he says. It shall not be so among you, okay? What is he saying here?

Leadership is different for you, okay? He says, whoever would be great among you must, in fact, be the servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave. And then he tells us the model that leaders in the body of Christ are given, even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. So what Jesus ends with in this little dissertation about leadership and how it ought to look in the body of Christ is he says, and I am the model for how you are to serve. I am the model.

You are to imitate me in your leading, not the Gentiles, not the way they like to lord it over people and enjoy that position of power and dominance. That's not your calling. Leading is leading people to Jesus. It's leading people for their good, and as you lead, you serve. You are a servant leader, probably one of the best ways to say it, and that's the way leaders ought to be, and that's what you ought to see in your leaders.

You ought to see a heart to serve, right? And then finally, the last thing on our list is showing mercy, and it is said this way. The one who does acts of mercy, he is to do it or she is to do it with cheerfulness or with a cheerful heart, but I want to remind you what mercy is because this is what makes mercy hard. Mercy is not getting what you do deserve, and what that means is an act of mercy is showing favor, not only to someone who doesn't deserve it, but they actually deserve the opposite. They deserve punishment, chastisement, anger even, you know, possibly, a rebuke, and yet they get mercy, and that is one of the reasons why Paul says mercy must be carried out with cheerfulness because you can dole out mercy, you know, through gritted teeth, you know?

I forgive you sort of a thing, you know, which sounds terribly convincing, doesn't it? No, it's with a cheerful heart, and why do we have a cheerful heart? Why do we extend mercy? Because we've received mercy. We are the recipients of mercy, and because you have received mercy, you are to give mercy, and especially those who are so gifted.

Now, let me just say something about the gifting of mercy. Mercy sometimes can have trouble operating on its own because mercy often will overlook what a person has done to such a degree that they can, they gotta be careful. They have to operate with discernment just like the person who's generous, you know, because mercy can end up enabling people in a negative way if there isn't proper discernment. I guess that's all I'll say about that, but what I wanna do is I wanna end by sharing with you just some important passages about mercy because this is an important topic to God. Our God is a God of mercy,

and He wants us to be people of mercy toward others, and especially those who are so gifted and have received the grace to do it.

Let me show you on the screen three different passages. First, from Zechariah chapter seven. "'Thus says the Lord of hosts, "'Render true judgments, show kindness, "'and mercy to one another.'" Matthew 5, seven, you'll remember in the Beatitudes, Jesus said, "'Blessed are the merciful, "'for they shall receive mercy.'" And that principle of sowing and reaping. And then from Luke six, "'Be merciful even as.'" Your Father is merciful." And that's again the model, just as Jesus is the model of leadership for leaders, our Father in heaven is the model of mercy for us to show mercy. He says, be merciful even as your Father is a God of mercy and has extended mercy to you.

Amen? These are such important reminders, but this is all about being the body of Christ. All of this is about walking in our gifting, walking in our calling, and understanding the diversity of gifts that are in the body of Christ, allowing those diversities to exist without demanding that everybody be just like you and think like you and act like you and respond like you. But to also remember that within the context of that diversity, we are called to unity as the one body of Christ who expresses the heart and love of God to a lost and dying world. And you know, Jesus said that the world would recognize us as belonging to him by the love we have one for another, and we need to have that in the body of Christ.

And I, again, I know it's hard. I know it is. You got to know that as someone who's pastored as long as I have, that I've watched a lot of people get hurt, be hurt, and hurt others. And I know that it happens. It's going to happen.

But that doesn't remove our calling. We don't get a free card, a free pass to become a dismembered member. That's my term for somebody who isn't fellowshipping. I call them a dismembered member because they're a member of the body of Christ, whether they want to be or not. They're a member of the body of Christ by faith in the finished work of Jesus on the cross, but they may be dismembered in their membership to the rest of the body because they've withdrawn and stayed away.

There's an exhortation given to us in the book of Hebrews that says, we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, which is the habit of some. So even by the time the book of Hebrews or the letter to the Hebrews was written, people were already withdrawing from fellowship. And the writer says, it is already happening. It's the habit of some people to ignore that call to be the body of Christ. So let's not do that.

Let's not let that happen in our lives. Don't forsake coming together and being the ecclesia, the gathering, the body. Amen? Let's pray. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you so much. We thank you for this word. We thank you for the exhortations. And Lord, we confess to you tonight that these things aren't easy. These things aren't simple.

There's a complexity to what we've just studied here in the word as it relates to being the body of Christ and functioning in the diverse roles that you have given. But Lord, this is our calling and this is what you've given to us to be the body. And I pray, my Father, we pray together as believers united in prayer that we would walk in the unity of the Spirit and we'd protect the unity of the Spirit, that we would walk in understanding and discernment and grace and mercy and tenderness toward one another in the body of Christ. And Lord, help us to be faithful in all that you've given us to do and to be. I thank you, my Father God, for the diversity of gifts that you've given among the people who are here.

And I pray in Jesus' name that they would be faithful and that when they stand before you, they would have no reason to be ashamed, but that they would be able to say, I took what you gave me and I invested it in the kingdom. Father, help us to be faithful. We thank you and praise you. In the authority granted us through the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, and all God's people said together, Amen.