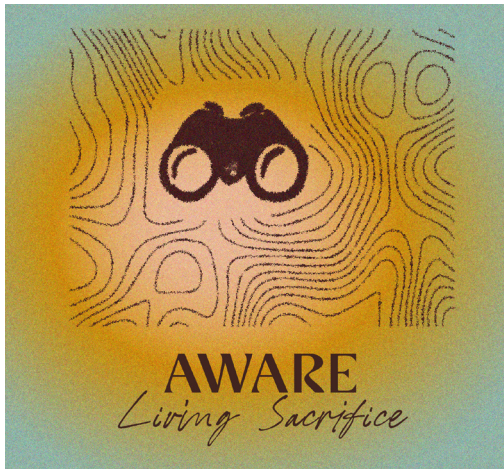


Sermon Growth Guide

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AWARE | Romans 12:3-8

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Key Verse: Romans 12:4-5 “For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ, we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.”

Big Idea: No Christian, regardless of age or experience, is self-sufficient or expendable in the Body of Christ. We belong to each other. The gifts given by God bear fruit for us all.

Foundations

Paul uses the image of the human body in Romans 12 and also 1 Corinthians 12 to effectively describe the diversity of gifts within the body of Christ. There are many gifts. In Romans, Paul highlights the gifts of prophecy, service, teaching, encouragement, charity, leadership, and mercy. In 1 Corinthians, he identifies the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, and speaking in different languages.

In both passages, Paul stresses all gifts are given by God’s grace and for the building up of the church, the Body of Christ. No gift is more valuable than another gift. No one person is superior to another’s. In 1 Corinthians 12, we read “The eye cannot say to the hand ‘I don’t need you,’ and the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you.’... those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.” The feet were considered unclean, and in pairing it with the head, Paul is making a radical statement.

Kenneth Bailey writes in *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*, “The sin condemned is not pride but self-sufficiency. The deepest problem is not “I am better than you” but rather “I don’t need you.” From the beginning, Christianity was born, nurtured, and sustained in community.

Understanding God’s Word

Together read Romans 12:3-8. Paul “gives legs” so our faith “can walk.” Paul describes the functional unity, equipping, and care of and for the church through the gifts of grace given by God. But first, he reminds this unlikely mix of Roman Gentiles and Jews that honest judgement is required in a community of faith.

Applying God’s Word

Consider people who display the gifts of mercy, service, teaching, encouragement and charity. How might you thank them? Do you know people who have these gifts but are reluctant to use them in the church? How might you encourage them? What about you? Is your service simply filling up your calendar or is it bearing fruit? Are you sober or under the influence of the world?

Witnessing God’s Word

Paul longs for believers, gifted by God’s powerful influence, to work side by side. Some hands, some feet, some heads, some eyes. Last week Mateen asked us to imagine a church of 3000 deployed in the city. What kind of impact would we make?” Can you identify and celebrate where First Pres. is serving as the body of Christ?

Many have been asking, how is it going planting a church? Were any of you here when I left 10 years ago? I was slim and trim with a full head of hair and no gray in the beard! In all honesty, the last 10 years have been an incredible joy and this church prepared me much more than I realized. Kim and I are deeply grateful to this church.

You all have been walking through Romans this summer and I have always thought that the Letter to the Romans is Paul's Magnum Opus of all his letters and I also believe that chapter 12 is the Magnum Opus of the letter itself! If I was forced to preach 1 chapter from the bible for a year, it would easily be chapter Romans 12! The first half of the letter stretches the mind, with brilliant theology. The Second half of Romans stretches the will because the rich theology must eventually grow legs and walk out the door. Paul is reminding us that our faith in Jesus is not just a "think-able" faith, but it is a "live-able" and actionable faith.

Today, we look at Paul's brilliant metaphor that shows up in several of his letters, "The Body of Christ" which compares the function of a church to a human body. If there were TED TALKS in the 1st Century, this idea of Paul's would have gone viral.

3 For 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. 4 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your[a] faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead,[b] do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. (the word of the lord)

It was 1988 and I was 11 years old. I grew up in a family that loves the St. Louis Cardinals and

at the time I was fascinated with a specific player you have never heard of. His name was SLIDE: Jose Oquendo and in 1988 he played all 9 positions on the field in a single season. They called Jose the Secret Weapon or El Arma Secreto. He was Mr. Utility. It just so happens I received the Mr. Utility award for my high school time and it meant the world to me. I was the gringo version of Jose Oquendo, the Swiss Army Knife of the 9th grade Glendale Falcons. I felt useful. I desperately wanted to be useful, I still do! My guess is that many of us want to be...of use in this world. I think this is true in terms of our faith as well...most of us as Jesus followers want to be useful to God. But how? How are you and I useful in God's Kingdom? So much has to do with understanding the way God has wired us and the spiritual gifts He has given us.

This might not shock some of you that know me, but I'm going to walk through this text backwards...because it makes more sense to me that way! First...let's look through this list of gifts that Paul mentions.

The Gifts: Look at verse 6... We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. These are God distributed abilities given to believers. There are roughly 20 spiritual gifts mentioned in the bible (this is not an exhaustive list). You don't have them all...but at least 1! Some of these gifts fall under the theme of leadership and speaking (up front gifts), some gifts service oriented, behind the scenes, and some are gifts of faith and wonder. There is no hierarchy of gifts; each gift is needed in this church body, my church body, just like we need each of our own body parts. You can think your eyebrows are unimportant until you go bald and your head sweats!

Paul says...If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith;

Prophecy- in this context, it means boldly declaring God's truth in any type of setting at any time.

This is not just for us robe wearing pastor types! This gift has been given to people in these pews Is that you? Do you know someone with this gift? Tell them if you see it!

Serving- there is faithfulness and loyalty from these folks. They meet practical and tangible needs for the community of faith. They are giving rides, folding bulletins, delivering meals, washing the dishes, stacking the chairs. They are the HANDS of the Body of Christ. Is that you? Do you know someone with this gift? Tell them!

Teaching-these folks are gifted in making God's Word clear and applicable. They teach our children, new believers, small groups and they mentor others. If the gift of serving is the Hands of the Body, teaching is the MIND of the Body of Christ. Is this your gift? Who has this gift? Tell them and thank them!

Encouragement- v8. These are the people who speak life and courage into the lives of others. You know them because they edify (build up in faith) and they exhort (encourage in the faith). These folks are cheerleaders or the Mouth of the Body of Christ. Is this you? Who has this? Tell them!

Giving- these people are simply generous. They use personal abundance to meet the material needs of the community and they find joy in doing it! They are the Outstretched Arms of the Body of Christ... and they are sitting here now. Is this you?

Leadership- these men and women give direction and organization to the mission of the church. While "leaders" are more visible, the real work is often behind the scenes.

They are not the head of the body, that is Christ alone, but leaders help the body move, function and remain healthy. Do you have this gift? Who does? Tell them!

Mercy- 20 years ago, Sara McLachlan had a commercial wear she sang a very sad song and begged people to save the dogs and cats from the shelter. If you bawled at that each time it came on...you might have the gift of mercy! Those with this spiritual gift

are happy to give time to others. They act with compassion towards the broken and hurting in the community. These people are the heart of the body of Christ. Are you a mercy person? Not sure? Are you tearing up right now?

Some of you are asking...how do I discover these gifts from God?

My gifts and most gifts are discovered in authentic Christian community, not from on an online quiz. It was mature believers who repeatedly said a powerful line to me, I see ____ in you. They called out my gifts

That is why I said after each gift description... who has this gift? Go tell them you see it in them! Imagine how a church could change if more people began to say I SEE THIS GIFT FROM GOD IN YOU? I see your heart for the poor and overlooked! I see your love for God's word, or your gift of patiently listening or creativity.

Discovering our gifts helps us understand our Kingdom usefulness.

And discovering the gifts we don't have is life giving as well, but most importantly, we must know the why of the gifts we've been given. Why did God distribute a specific spiritual ability to you? Why do you have teaching, mercy, leadership, service?

To build up the people of God, the Church...which glorifies God.

Your gifts and my gifts are for the common good, not just for ourselves.

Think less like the harmonica you got for Christmas that you don't want share, and more like a kickball that requires other kids in neighborhood for it to be useful.

Ok...now we've made it all the way back to beginning. Look at verse 3. Paul says Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment. Using your God Given Gift requires SPIRITUAL SOBRIETY. When someone is under the influence of alcohol, they aren't thinking clearly. This happens to us spiritually as well. Sober judgment means not

having a distorted or exaggerated view of yourself. Paul is speaking of inflated egos, yet some of us can be our own worst critic.

Either way, this is not sober thinking or judgment.

Ok a quick rabbit trail, church folk can fall under the influence of things that are often just as dangerous as alcohol or drugs. People at my church are under the influence of the opinions of others, drunk with cynicism, bitterness, and anger. I can be under the influence of fear or comparison. All of these cause us to lose sober judgment about ourselves, neighbors, our loved ones and about our God! Hear me on this....

honest evaluation of ourselves must start with our identity in Christ. This is spiritual sobriety and any other standard will subject yourself to some other influence besides Jesus Christ. Let me give you a very real example of sober judgment concerning my own spiritual gifts. There will be a day when I will say I have lead Hope Community church of Wilmington, NC as far as I can...it's time to step aside. A new leader is needed. My prayer is that when that time comes, I will be sober about who I am in Christ and sober about the limit of my gifts and abilities. This is what Paul means by sober judgement about our gifts and it is a real gift to organization, team and the body of Christ. Going back to this Idea of me wanting to be Useful for God.....the Jose Oquendo of Ministry. There is a huge difference between productivity and fruitfulness. Christians are good at being busy and we bless it somehow! When productivity is the goal, it will feel frenetic...never ending. Fruitfulness feels deliberate, earthy, slower. It feels faithful.

As we spend time thinking "soberly" about our spiritual gifts, it might help to think about being fruitful with your gifts over being useful, although Mr. Fruitful doesn't

sound as cool as Mr. Utility....it probably a healthier way to understand our gifts!

Fruitfulness always is a result of abiding in Jesus. He is the Vine, you and I are the branches. Fruitfulness is the daily rhythm of Receiving his love and reflecting that love back and to others.

Fruitfulness is about becoming and not simply doing.

Productivity is about the things we want to achieve fruitfulness is about the person we are becoming in Christ. Do you see the difference?

Fruitfulness is Spirit dependent, while productivity is often Nate dependent.

Religious activity doesn't mature us on its own, If it did...the Pharisees would be super mature! It is by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit that we are matured and formed. Any lasting fruit seen around this church is a result of Holy Spirit. Fruitfulness flows from faithfulness and God has called us to be faithful with our gifts.

Ok...I'm going to land this plane....no Christian (regardless of age or years following Jesus) at First Presbyterian is self-sufficient and no Christian in this place is expendable. You were designed to depend on God and to bear spiritual fruit.

You and I are not the head of the body and that is by design.

You and I don't have all the spiritual gifts, and that is by design.

And not one of us is unemployable in the Kingdom of God...

And that is by design.