

LOVE YOUR CHURCH

WEEK 4 – SERVING: USING THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT FOR THE GOOD OF THE BODY

What is the purpose of our gifts in the church?

Tony Merida makes the following comment about the early church.

"Followers of Christ are not spectators in the church, but servants in the church. As a Christian, you shouldn't think of your church as "the place where I listen to sermons" but as "the place where I serve." To be sure, listening to sermons is important. But church members are contributors to the ministry of the church rather than consumers of that ministry—and contributing involves giving your time, talent, and treasure for the health and growth of your church." – Merida

How important is motivation in your daily life?

MOTIVATED BY THE MERCY OF GOD

Merida writes,

"As we look to the cross of Jesus, we're reminded of what God has done for us in Christ. Our sins are forgiven, we have right standing with God, and we enjoy peace with God." – Merida

In Ephesians 2 Paul describes our former condition,

Ephesians 2:1–3 (ESV) "2 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."

How does Paul describe our former condition?

Ephesians 2:4–5 (ESV) “4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—”

Paul states it this way in Romans 5.

Romans 5:8 (ESV) “8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

How should these truths shape our perspective in terms of service towards our blood bought brothers and sisters?

Look again at Romans 12:1,

Romans 12:1 (ESV) “12 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Regarding this verse Merida writes,

“The point is to give your whole self to God (6:13). This is our ‘spiritual worship’ (12:1), which is better translated your ‘reasonable worship/service’ or ‘rational worship/service.’ That is, when you look hard at God’s mercy to you, offering yourself to him is the logical, rational, reasonable response.” – Merida

He then goes on to describe what it means to worship as a “living sacrifice”,

“...our sacrifice is personal: we offer up ourselves to God in worshipful service. We worship by serving, not simply by what we do on Sundays or by singing in our services. We are called to be wholly consecrated worshipers, being committed to God in every realm of life. It’s as if we’re putting ourselves in the offering plate! This death to self is considered to be ‘holy and pleasing to God’ (v1 NIV). This is an astonishing thought: that the God of the universe is brought pleasure whenever you or I offer ourselves sacrificially in the service of his people!” – Merida

In verse 2 of Romans 12 we read,

Romans 12:2 (ESV) “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Merida then writes regarding this renewal,

"We're to make a break from the "mind that is set on the flesh" (8 v 7), which typifies humanity, and the debased minds of pagans (1 v 28), Our minds are to be renewed by the Spirit (7 v 6; 8 v 27). This involves giving our minds to that which is good, right and beautiful (see Philippians 4 v 8), and not returning to our old way of thinking (Ephesians 4 v 22-32). It involves filling our minds with the truth of Scripture (Colossians 3 v 16). It involves meditating on the glory of God in Christ (2 Corinthians 3 v 18)." – Merida

Merida closes this section with this encouragement,

"So as you think about whether and how to serve your church, ponder the mercy of God toward you. Ponder what you deserve: judgment. Ponder what he's give you instead: salvation. This should stimulate a life of worshipful service." – Merida

How is this challenging you right now?

Secondly we should be...

MOTIVATED BY THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

Merida moves on to verse 3 of Romans 12.

Romans 12:3 (ESV) *"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."*

Merida quotes Tim Keller at this point,

"We need to acknowledge what we are good at and what we can do—because doing this makes us able to serve others. We are to think straight about ourselves; neither too low nor too high." (Romans 8 - 16 For You, p 109)

Then regarding the phrase "measure of faith" Merida writes,

"...the phrase 'measure of faith' refers to different spiritual capacities that God apportions to each person, and it is then equivalent to God's distribution of 'spiritual gifts'. So God has given a measure of grace and faith to each member of the church. Each believer has been gifted (1 Peter 4:10). We should not think too highly (nor too lowly) of ourselves when it comes to these gifts, but rather be humble and faithful stewards of them." – Merida

How many of you have been gifted by God to serve in the church? [all of you have!]

What are you doing with them?

In verse 6-8 Paul calls us to, as Merida points out, “*use our gifts with excellence and passion*”.

Romans 12:6–8 (ESV) “6 *Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 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.*”

According to these passages what should our service be characterized by?

Mark 10:42–45 (ESV) “42 *And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 43 But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*”

2 Corinthians 8:9 (ESV) “9 *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.*”

Romans 12:8 (ESV) “8 *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.*”

Merida then writes this,

“In all the detailed discussion and debate about spiritual gifts, let me underscore the obvious point here: use your gifts passionately for the good of the body. You need to be in a local church to be strengthened by the gifts of others, and you need to be in a local church because others need to be built up by your gifts! Gifts are not given for your own self-enjoyment or self-exaltation, or to build your platform. A Christian has no right to withhold his or her gifts from the church. God gave us these gifts because he loves the church, and we are to use our gifts for the good of our brothers and sisters”
– Merida

Now at this point we might be asking how do we determine our gifts? And should we only serve according to our gifts? Regarding the first question Tim Keller provides two ways we can discover our gifts.

1. **Self-examination:** He writes: "What do I enjoy doing? Am I any good at what I enjoy? What kind of ministry is fulfilling? What problems do I most notice? What opportunities do I notice?"
2. **Experience:** It really takes experience along with trial and error to figure out your gifting. Keller writes, "It is best to try all kinds of ministry as a way to learn your spiritual 'aptitudes'" Keller also suggests studying the biblical lists of gifts in order to see how they align with your experience.

Now regarding the second question, "Should we only serve according to our gifts?" The answer is no. Merida writes,

"While serving in your gifting will bring greater fruit and joy, we shouldn't neglect other aspects of Christian service. Someone may have the gift of contribution but that doesn't mean that only those with that gift should give financially to the ministries of the church! Someone else may have a gift of teaching, but that doesn't mean they are the only ones called to make disciples by teaching (Matthew 28 v 18-26). Still another church member may not have the gift of mercy but we're still all called to show mercy (Micah 6 v 8). So, I would encourage you to be on the lookout for particular ways to use your spiritual gifts, but at the same don't be bothered if you are volunteering for service in a place where you may not be most gifted; see it as an act of loving service. Don't wait on the sidelines for the perfect opportunity to serve, but jump in and get involved." – Merida

I would be curious to know how have you discovered God's gifting in your life?

Thirdly we are...

MOTIVATED BY THE RETURN OF CHRIST

Merida points us to 1 Peter 4:7-11,

1 Peter 4:7–11 (ESV) *"7 The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. 8 Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. 10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: 11 whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."* – Merida

Why would Peter respond this way to the return of Christ?

Merida writes,

"Often the anticipation of the return of Christ stimulates wild fanaticism or a drastic withdrawal from the world, but Peter doesn't mention anything extreme here. Rather, he emphasizes basic Christian living: being self-controlled and sober-minded so that we can engage in effective prayer, earnest love, gracious hospitality, and the exercise of our gifts. All of this service and speaking is done by God's strength, for God's glory." - Merida

Finally, Merida writes,

"...don't limit your service to those things that are convenient, exciting, or likely to be noticed by others. Serve out of love for Christ and his people, even if that service seems mundane or trivial. When you see Christ and hear him say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant,'" you will be glad you did!" – Merida

So to recap Tony Merida has shown us three things that should motivate us to serve one another. 1) God's mercy in the gospel, 2) the Spirit's gifts, and (3) the Son's return.

ACTION STEPS

1. Dwell deeply on gospel truths to give you regular motivation.
2. Remember that discipleship involves more than knowing things. We must go and serve.
3. Use the preaching of the word and the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper as ways to cultivate a heart for service.
4. Be a servant not a critic.
5. Stay in touch with the volunteer needs of your church and offer to serve as you can.
6. Ask your church leaders where the particular needs are and offer to help as you can.
7. Pray that you and your fellow church members will "serve the Lord with gladness!"