

The Gift of Gifted People (Romans 12:1-8)

Melissa Hatfield, First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, MO

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WATCH/LISTEN: www.fbcjc.org/sermon/the-gift-of-gifted-people

Just before midnight on May 23, 2019, a massive EF-3 tornado tore through our city and neighboring communities, damaging over 500 homes and buildings and displacing hundreds of families and individuals. In some ways, it seems like a lifetime ago. 2020 alone has felt like five years as we split time into pre-pandemic and pandemic. But for many families whose lives were uprooted by the tornado, chaos and constant change have been their normal much longer than the past six months. Some in our community moved away. Many relocated to temporary housing while figuring out the next steps in rebuilding their lives. Some still find themselves in vulnerable situations.

The international non-profit organization, Habitat for Humanity, envisions “a world where everyone has a decent place to live.” This is their mission: *Seeking to put God’s love into action, Habitat for Humanity brings people together to build homes, communities and hope.* In response to last year’s tornado, our local River City Habitat for Humanity brought local organizations and churches, including our own, to partner together to build four homes for families displaced by the tornado. They’ve raised nearly \$345,000 of the \$400,000 needed to complete these homes – and our church, out of your generosity, has contributed just over \$25,000 toward that goal. But just as important is the commitment of time and skills. As a church, we’ve committed to six workdays this summer and fall, volunteering with Habitat and other churches and organizations at these homes on Jackson Street.

The first week of July, around 20 of our youth and adult sponsors, volunteered each day to kick off the Blitz Build. Since then, we’ve had two Saturday workdays for adults, and although the number of volunteers is restricted due to COVID safety precautions, the homes are coming along nicely.

This past Saturday I served with a team of volunteers from our church. We began with some outside work – caulking windows and installing the soffit, before heavy rain forced us inside to focus on drywalling the ceiling for the rest of the morning. Prior to Saturday, I had not done any of these things. I had never caulked a window, and it was evident in the amount of caulk I had on me and the tape protecting the brick when I finished. In fact, I managed to get a nail stuck in a brand-new tube of caulk trying to open it – an accomplishment Bob Bell and Dale Feeler said they’d never seen before. Clearly, I bring unique skills to the construction site.

I’ve sanded drywall before but have never installed it on a wall nor a ceiling. But, thankfully, our team had people there gifted in this skill. They knew how to measure and cut and hoist the drywall in place. And after they secured it with a few screws, some of us less skilled volunteers were taught how to add the remaining screws to lock the drywall in place. There were approximately 50 questions in those first 5 minutes, but our patient leaders answered them all, guiding our efforts, and releasing us to the work. As far as I know, those drywall panels have not fallen yet.

There were times on Saturday where I felt a little like the guy in the bed of this broken-down truck. I'm giving it my all, hoping I'm helping, but feeling like I'm doing nothing other than weighing us down while the rest are really the ones doing the work.

To be honest with you, I've felt like the guy in the bed of the truck a lot the past several months. Maybe you have, too. During this season of life, many of us feel unskilled and ill-prepared for what we are facing. We recognize that things aren't working like they used to, that some things are broken. We know we need to keep things moving, but we aren't sure what to do to move forward. So, we hop into the back of a broken-down truck, pushing with all our might to get it moving and get nowhere. And after months of doing this, we're exhausted and discouraged and feeling stuck. Just like I had never caulked a window or installed drywall, you and I have never lived through a global pandemic. And we most certainly haven't lived through a year with a global pandemic, economic collapse, multiple natural disasters, and a presidential election combined.

Fear has an arsenal of lies and none more destructive than the lies that **you aren't enough, and you're on your own**. You aren't enough for the people you love, the job you have, the tasks of the world, the chaos of a pandemic. You're the only one you can count on and to ask for help or to invite others to join in the solution is a sign of weakness or some kind of burden. The lie you have to have all the answers and solve every problem but knowing full-well that you can't. You can see what a vicious, exhausting cycle these lies creates... *I'm on my own yet I'm not enough*.

On Saturday, had it been just me trying to work on the Habitat house, nothing would have been achieved. But I was part of a team with different gifts and strengths – some with construction, some with providing snacks and drinks, some of us with a willing heart and a desire to learn. And, together, we had the gifts needed to do the work. Together, we were better.

Whether we're talking about a truck to be fixed, a house to be built, a nation that is hurting, or a church living out her mission during very hard things, we are better together. God designed it that way. A relational God formed us, knitted us together with unique gifts and a blueprint requiring us to work with others. And when we work together in unity and love for the glory of God, God is pleased.

The Apostle Paul, a devoted follower of Jesus Christ and one of the most influential leaders among first century Christians, wrote many of the letters included in the New Testament of our Bible. One of Paul's common themes was the unity of the church. Paul often appeals to the church to live as a single community, not uniform, but rather united. A single community with many gifts, but one heart.

Let's look at one of those writings together today in Romans 12:1-8.

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you,

always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

I'm speaking to you out of deep gratitude for all that God has given me, and especially as I have responsibilities in relation to you. Living then, as every one of you does, in pure grace, it's important that you not misinterpret yourselves as people who are bringing this goodness to God. No, God brings it all to you. The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us, not by what we are and what we do for him.

In this way we are like the various parts of a human body. Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. The body we're talking about is Christ's body of chosen people. Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of his body. But as a chopped-off finger or cut-off toe we wouldn't amount to much, would we? So, since we find ourselves fashioned into all these excellently formed and marvelously functioning parts in Christ's body, let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren't.

If you preach, just preach God's Message, nothing else; if you help, just help, don't take over; if you teach, stick to your teaching; if you give encouraging guidance, be careful that you don't get bossy; if you're put in charge, don't manipulate; if you're called to give aid to people in distress, keep your eyes open and be quick to respond; if you work with the disadvantaged, don't let yourself get irritated with them or depressed by them. Keep a smile on your face.

Paul loved the theological image of the body in describing the nature of the church and uses it in multiple letters. It was actually a common theme in his day. Speeches which included the body imagery were commonly used in times of political turmoil – used to encourage members of the city-state, political, or civic group, to maintain unity by eliminating discord for the good of the group. The image of the body was the most commonly employed themes for unity in the ancient world.¹

And it still works for us today.

In this passage, the “body” metaphor reminds us of our connection to one another because we are “in Christ.” Having become part of the family of God and through the gift of grace, Christ-followers are now to conform their lives to their new family. And if we respond appropriately to God's grace at work in us, the result will be unity with one another – a unity comparable to the unity found in the human body.

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[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338253137 A Disability Reading of Paul's 'Body of Christ' Metaphor in Romans 123-8 and 1 Corinthians 1212-31](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338253137_A_Disability_Reading_of_Paul's_'Body_of_Christ'_Metaphor_in_Romans_123-8_and_1_Corinthians_1212-31)

Unity but not uniformity. Paul uses the “body” metaphor in this passage to remind us to be united but that our unity is made of a collection of diverse parts. The diversity does not damage our unity, rather it strengthens it. We are designed to be diverse, and we are to use this diversity to promote unity and love.

One expression of that diversity is our different gifts. Each person is gifted, but we do not all receive the same gift. Our responsibility is to discover what gift one has and then use it for the glory of God and the good of one another, for unity. On Saturday, some had the gift of construction, some the gift of baking, some the gift of encouragement, some the gift of teaching. Each gift was valuable to our mission. Each gift was needed. Each gift was provided by and used by God to help us accomplish the task at hand.

No matter what is ahead for First Baptist Church, God has provided what we need. God is not surprised by anything we are facing – individually or collectively. This year isn’t throwing God for a loop. Only four chapters earlier in Romans 8:28, Paul has affirmed that *“we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”* God is at work for good. We are invited as the body of Christ to be a part of that good work. **When we are committed to the Lordship of Christ, the church has all the gifted people we need.** How can we do that?

- **Let Christ lead.** Commit to the Lordship of Christ. Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Fix your eyes on Christ and embrace what He wants to do in you and through you. Get involved in one of the Let’s Talk small groups to grow you and stretch you. Ask another believer to disciple or mentor you in the faith. Make a commitment to read Scripture and create space to listen to God’s voice in your life. Committing to the Lordship of Christ is the first and most important step.
- **Stay united in love.** We are all so weary of the division in our world, but division is as old as humanity. Paul is addressing this very thing with the early Christians. If there is one place that should be able to model what it means to be unified, it is the church. God has made us diverse and diversity is not only welcomed but needed. Some push for uniformity but that is not what we need to pursue. Unity – being of one heart, one faith community, one Love. We must not let our differences divide us. We must not let envy of gifts divide us. We must not let fear divide us. Church, we have a mission from God to lead people into LIFE-GIVING relationships with Christ and each other. This mission is needed now more than ever. No matter what, we commit ourselves in to stay united in love to our God and our mission together.
- **Be what you were made to be.** God has gifted us differently. The variety of skills, talents, gifts, and experiences we bring go far beyond any list Paul began in his letters. What he wants is for us to be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren’t. Jealousy and envy destroy unity. Pride and arrogance destroy unity. The more we learn to be who God made us to be, the more we can let go of trying to be something we’re not. And when we do that, we are set free to celebrate the gifts of others without

wishing we had those gifts, too. I have a friend who loves people so well. Encouragement is one of her spiritual gifts, and God uses it to bless others, including myself, often. I sometimes find myself envious of her gift, wishing I was more like her. But every moment I spend in envy is a moment I'm not using my unique gifts to be what I was made to be, and I moment I'm not celebrating God working through her. As Paul says in verses 6-8, if you preach, just preach God's message; if you help, just help, don't take over; if you teach, stick to your teaching. Our gifts come with boundaries SO THAT our gifts promote unity, not discord. One body, many parts. One church, many gifts.

Whether we're talking about a truck to be fixed, a house to be built, a nation that is hurting, or a church living out her mission during very hard things, we are better together. In Christ, we are enough, and united, we are not on our own. God designed us to work together and when we work in unity and love for the glory of God, God is pleased.

My friends, no matter what is ahead for First Baptist Church, God has provided what we need. Each and every one of you are a part of that provision. **When we are committed to the Lordship of Christ, the church has all the gifted people we need.**