

Grace Made Visible (Part 5) – Gifted and Talented

Matt Chandler – July 13, 2014

If you have your Bibles, would you go ahead and grab them? We're going to be in Romans 12. As you are turning there, let me just quickly remind you what we're doing. We are almost done with our summer series *Grace Made Visible*, which has been a series over generosity, and not generosity that is built upon manipulation or duty but rather the generosity that flows freely once we know and have experienced the grace of God.

Generosity that is wrought with the wrong motivation does nothing really for anyone. We know this in multiple areas of our lives, so really our focus in this entire series has been yes, generosity, but not generosity because the pastor says to be generous but rather because in an experience of the grace of God, we are able to live open-handed lives where we gladly see all we are and all we have as being from God for the glory of God. That's what we have covered.

Last week, we talked about our money and how we should look at our money and how we should consider our money. This week, I want to talk about our gifts and how to think rightly about our gifts in light of God's graciousness and generosity to us. Now, one of the things we've said (if you've missed the series) is that all of us are born with a type of natural, intrinsic gifting. What I mean by that is there are things for all of us that simply came easier than other things. Right? There are things that were just easier for you than others.

Maybe in school that was math and science. Maybe that was English and history. Maybe it had something more to do with the arts, but there was an area of education and an area of really walking out life where things were just easier for you there. That's intrinsic gifting. You didn't really do anything. You were just kind of born with those gifts, personality types, drives, passions, zeals. There's a reason you love the things you love.

I've tried to paint this picture that those things, although present since you were born or developed as you grew older before you know Christ, were not with laser-like focus built and set upon what

those gifts were actually given to you for, but rather, more than likely, like me, you were using your gifts to build your own kingdom. I've kind of used myself as the example.

I was always curious. No one trained me in curiosity. I was just born that way. I'm a very curious man, was a very curious little boy. I am a passionate human being. I just am. You get me on something, and I just get all amped up about it. I would score high on any type of entrepreneurial test. I tend to see opportunity everywhere.

All of those were present in my life before I became a Christian, every one of them. I was hopelessly curious. I would just research all sorts of things. I saw opportunity everywhere. I was a very passionate man. All of those gifts I was actively walking in, but the purpose of all of those gifts in that season is I was going to become a lawyer.

I wasn't just going to become a lawyer; I was going to be a legit one. "You can't handle the truth!" I wanted that moment so bad. "Did you order the Code Red?" I wanted that moment so bad. I would just pray, "Lord, just give me a Jessep, God, just one time. I just want Jessep once." I was going to have a smoking wife. I was going to have a ridiculous amount of wealth, the kind of wealth that you just didn't care. There you go. That's what I'm doing. I'm heading that direction, building a kingdom unto myself. This is where I'm headed.

Then the Lord intervened, and he didn't get rid of any of those gifts. He didn't rebuke me for any of those gifts. He didn't declare that any of those gifts were wrong or bad or horrible. He simply took them and placed them on himself. I'm a high entrepreneur, so instead of just going, "Here are all the ways I can get wealthy," God redeemed my heart, redeemed my mind, redeemed that gift, and now I go, "How do we make Jesus as big of a deal as he actually is to everyone who will hear and understand?"

My passion is almost solely focused on the name and renown of Jesus Christ. My curiosity... Here is what is so great about following the Lord. Last week, a couple who serves in our nursery brought their 90-year-old mother to The Village. That's a little scary because we're loud, and I'm wearing jeans. I'm yelling at everybody. If you're 90, are you really ready for that? I mean, that's not historic church if you're 90. You didn't grow up in that joint.

They even tried to prepare her. They were like, "It's going to be loud. Content is king. Just listen to the content. Don't worry about the volume and the slang. We'll explain slang. Just listen to what he

says about the Bible." They're prepared. She sat in, and then as they left, she began to tell them what God had done in her life.

How cool is it that even at 90, there is still more to learn, still more to grow in, still we haven't arrived? How beautiful is that about our faith? We don't get there until we get there, right? The reason I said that is because I am more confident than ever in the goodness and grace of God and more confused than ever on certain aspects that I just can't seem to figure out, but I'm just hopelessly curious.

I'm just going to keep digging, keep studying. I'm going to read whatever I can. I need to get to the bottom of it. It bothers me if I can't, which I think the Lord just sometimes smirks at me, like, "You idiot. I'm eternal. Really? You're going to figure this out? You're 40. I'm eternal. You see, this isn't going to actually play out like you think it's going to play out. I have always been. You are dew on the grass in the morning." Right?

That's kind of my curiosity. It's just on the Lord. I want to know about the Lord. I want to know how it works. I want to look at this. I'm desirous to know this. All of those things were present, but he redeemed them and placed them on himself. Then on top of redeeming those intrinsic gifts that were once all about me and now have become all about him, he actually brought more gifts than I actually had to begin with.

Now I have gifts that weren't intrinsic gifts but gifts that the Holy Spirit just put into my heart. Here is what is important to know before we get too far down the, "Use your gifts," sermon. If our rootedness in using our gifts is not the gospel itself, then our intention and desire to use our gift will always falter into us taking a backseat and once again becoming consumers rather than givers.

Guilt is a poor motivation for service, and duty is a poor motivation for service. Here is what ends up happening, not just in the church world but really I think in the world in general. I could get up here and preach today about great need and how great need leads to this. When people serve, these are the things that happen. I could do that. What would happen is you would be really motivated.

"What do you need? Kids' Village? I remember that from when I was a kid." We'll all sign up to serve in Kids' Village. What happens is half of you show up for the training, and only 10 percent of you actually ever serve more than a week or two. You just can't be sustained. You stink at it unless the

gospel is what informs and the gospel is what empowers the emptying of ourselves for the good of others. Isn't that serving?

With that said, I want to spend the bulk of our time talking about the beauty of God found in the gospel, what that means for you and me, and then we'll let the text take us to what that means for our gifts. With that said, let's look at Romans 12. We're going to cover eight verses. I'm going to read a little and stop. Don't let any of it make you nervous. We will let you out when we let you out.

Romans 12, starting in verse 1. "**I appeal to you...**" What's that word? Are you embarrassed for you like I am for you right now? "Therefore." Can we try that again? "Therefore." All right. "**I appeal to you...**" What's the word? Therefore. Here is just rule number one in reading your Bible well. When the English word *therefore* is present, it means he's concluding something.

When you're reading your Bible, here is a simply kitschy, corny little rule. What is the *therefore* there for? Why is that there? It's there for a reason. Kitschy? Yes. Helpful? Absolutely. What's the *therefore* there for? He says, "**I appeal to you therefore...**" I plead to you. I beg of you. "**...brothers, by the mercies of God...**"

What we need to look back to is what Paul has been teaching the church at Rome before this moment. He has taught them a bunch of different things, but here is what we can confidently say. In every direction and from every perspective possible, the apostle Paul has said this to this church and to us. We are sinners, and God has saved us in Jesus Christ.

You're looking at me like I made that up. Let's do it. I have all day. Romans 3:21 says this. If you have a background in church, you'll know some of these. This is the Roman Road, or some of it. I won't do all of it. Romans 3:21-24. Listen to this. "**But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it...**"

I love that opening sentence because after my conversion, I was really struggling with indwelling sin, with some issues that had to do with things that happened to me when I was young, all sorts of issues I was walking in. Pastors would say stuff like this. "You're the only Jesus some people are ever going to see."

I would think, "God, that is terrible. Why would you say that to me? How unfortunate for them. Right? A 6-foot-5, gangly, arrogant, struggling with lust and rage 19-year-old is the only Jesus

they're ever going to see? They're going to think Jesus is angry and gangly? Are you serious right now?"

What this just said is God's glory, his righteousness, his beauty will not be manifested by my adherence to the law and the prophets, although the law and prophets point to my need for a greater righteousness. You had a chance there. That was good preaching. You missed it, but we're fine. Let's keep going.

Verse 22. **"...the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe."** How is the glory of God, the righteousness of God going to be made manifest, going to be made visible in the person and work of Jesus Christ? Not in me. In Jesus. I'm not the only Jesus people are going to see. I understand what they're saying when they say that, but Jesus is the only Jesus people are going to see.

Near the end of this sermon, we'll get to explaining some of what people kind of mean when they say sentences like that. Let's keep reading. **"For there is no distinction..."** Here is one most of you will know if you have a background in church. **"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified [made right] by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus..."** Romans 3:23, a part of the Roman Road.

I want to ask you to think about it maybe a bit differently. Here is what I mean by that. I love that this sentence starts with, "For there is no distinction..." If you're here, and you're a guest, and you're a bit nervous, and you don't know where this is going, let me help you real quick. How many of you have not grown up in church? You didn't grow up in church. That's not your story. Mom and Dad didn't load you up in the car and drag you around.

Look around. This is those of us who have not grown up in church. Go ahead and put your hands down. How many of you did grow up in church, Mom and Dad taking you Sunday morning and Wednesday night? Look around. It's important you get how many hands are up right now. Now go ahead and put your hands down.

Let me ask you this question. How many of you in your background is drug, alcohol abuse, maybe promiscuity, and a lot of regret? How many of you would say that? Wow. Look at that. No, no, no. Keep that hand up. Some of you shot that hand up quickly then right back down. No, just keep it up. Do you see that church attendance does not equate godliness?

Let's chat. **"For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."**

Some of us did it with the party scene, and some of us did it with a bunch of church attendance. There is a type of high you can get at youth camp, and some folks got hooked on it. Tell me that Thursday night 45-minute jam session at the end of that hour-long sermon wasn't legit back in the day. There were people who got addicted to that experience.

Just like drugs, alcohol, and promiscuity, they had no desire to actually submit and live for the Lord. They just simply loved that moment. They lived for that spiritual high, not the faith it takes day in and day out to put one foot in front of the next and trust the Lord. They wanted the emotive high, not the, "Here's my heart. I'm in it regardless of where you take me."

The Bible here says all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Grew up in church and got your Sunday school pins, wore your little bracelet with the beads. The blue one is baptism. The black one is sin. The red one is blood. You had that little bracelet. That's legit. It didn't make you a Christian. A lot of people rebelled against the Lord with that, looked the part instead of submitting their lives. It's one of the oldest games in church. In fact, I'll get quite animated about that near the end of the sermon.

Romans 6:23. **"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."** Do you hear it? The wages of sin is death. Here is what you have coming for you, but the free gift... When in Romans 12 Paul says, "Therefore, I plead with you, I beg you, brothers, by the mercy of God," this is what he's pointing back to. "I've told you God is for you. God has made a way. Don't wallow in your sins. God has made a way out. This way to freedom. I'm pleading with you."

Then the next line. **"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."**

When he talks about our lives being living sacrifices, he's once again pointing back to something that he has actually already taught on. This is what God wants us to do, living sacrifices, but earlier in Romans 6, he talked about what he doesn't want our lives to look like.

Here's that text. This is Romans 6:12-13. **"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness..."** He's saying, "Okay, don't give your body over to sinfulness. Don't use the

members of your body (your hands, your eyes, your mind, your brain, your body), don't give them over to sin. Don't do that, but do offer your body as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God."

That's real pretty, ethereal language, but what does it mean? What does it mean to be a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God? We find out in the next two verses a couple of things that are laid before us in regard to lives being living sacrifices. Starting in verse 2, we'll cover them one at a time. The first one. "**Do not be conformed to this world...**" Some of your texts will say, "Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world."

The question I want to answer very quickly is what then is the pattern of this world that stands in opposition to us being living sacrifices? I'm not going to leave the book of Romans. In Romans 1, we see kind of a threefold description of a life that is conformed to the pattern of this world. Here is the first one. We worship and serve creation rather than the Creator.

Hear me. I mean no offense to anyone today. If you are not a Christian, this is how you live. You worship and serve creation rather than the Creator. You don't want God; you want his stuff. You have no intention of loving the Creator of those things; you simply want his things. This dooms you to a life in the kiddie pool.

Do you know what I mean by kiddie pool? You know that's one that's off the big pool and is about 10 degrees warmer? I don't know why. I'm not looking into it, all right. It's just warmer. I think it's because of its shallowness. It dooms you not to play in the ocean of God's beauty and profound depth but instead be a grown man in a kiddie pool.

How? How does this work? Everything that was created was meant to roll past itself to its Creator. The enjoyment of things was never meant to terminate on the enjoyment of things but rather to roll past those things into the enjoyment of the giver of those things. The easiest one is just food, to talk about food. Food is good. Amen? Food is awesome.

Food was meant not just to be eaten as though we deserve it but rather to see it as God's provision and as God's grace, because he gave it flavor. Why does he need to do that? He doesn't need to make food taste awesome. He doesn't need to make dinner feel amazing. Good food, good wine, good friends for four or five hours? That's an epic night, man. That's a night that feeds the soul as well as the belly. The Lord doesn't need to do that. That experience should always roll past that experience to something greater.

Who enjoys the evening more, the one who goes home and lies in bed and thinks, "That fillet was amazing," or the one who lies in bed and thinks, "Who am I, Lord, that you would bless me like that, that you would give me those kind of friendships? I know so many people don't have those kinds of friendships, yet you bless me with those kinds of friends. Who could afford a steak in these times? I didn't have any Ramen noodles tonight. Father, for the fruit of the vine, thank you."

Who has the better night? The one who rolls past the dinner to the Creator of the dinner. We're doomed into shallow trivialities outside of the power of the gospel, and the pattern of this world is those who love creation rather than the Creator. The pattern of this world is also marked by... The second one there in Romans 1 is that we believe the lie over the truth of God.

The lie we believe over the truth of God is simply that we are smarter than God. In 20-something years of pastoral ministry, no one has ever said that to me with their mouth. "I believe I'm smarter than God." Yet, many of our lives are marked by really a posturing that we are smarter than God, and we do know what's best for us. That works in one of two ways.

The first way it can work is, "I don't care what the Bible says. I'll do what I want. I know what's best for me." It works in that way. That's kind of the more aggressive way. The kind of passive, church kid way is, "I just don't read or study the Bible or need to know the Bible because I intrinsically know what is best for me." I'll give you this. There is a way that seems right to you. The Bible will even give that to you.

There is a way that is going to seem right to you. It's going to feel right. It's going to seem right. It's going to kind of get in your gut. You're like, "This is the right way to go." The Bible says, "In the end, that little gut feeling of yours leads to death." This is once again, "I'm smarter than you. I know what's best for me. I know what's best for my marriage. I know what's best for me. I have this." That's a pattern of the world. They want creation rather than the Creator. They believe they're smarter than God. The last one is they fail to acknowledge him.

Allow me to rant. You have nothing to boast in. All you are, all you have, including your intrinsic gifting, was given to you by God. You really don't have anything to make a big deal about. Even if you worked hard, when all is said and done, your hard work doesn't equate the success you've walked in. I've sat down with enough men and women now who are very successful in their field who will talk about being in the right place at the right time.

That means it wasn't your awesomeness that led to your success but rather the providential hand of God. My wife Lauren is a bit of a genetic freak. What I mean by that is she's just brilliant. We got married while we were in college. She graduated in three and a half years summa cum laude. I never saw her study. It was like she could hold her notebook and learn everything. It was like some sort of weird, osmosis, freak-show trip.

She always did that thing where she was like, "Pray for me. I'm just so stressed out. This test is just going to destroy me. I'm just not ready. I didn't study much." I'm like, "Didn't study much? You held your notebook. That's all you did. You didn't study at all." Then she would go, come home. "How did you do?" "Oh, it just killed me. There's just no way. I'm going to flunk out of school. I'm going to end up..." Right? That was Lauren. Then she'd get her test back and make 104.

I still don't have the answer to this question. Where did those four points come from? How do you even go past perfect? Yet, this is what she is, summa cum laude. I never saw her study. Meanwhile, it's 1:00 in the morning. I'm brewing a pot of coffee going through Greek flash cards. She's absorbing what I'm saying out loud as she sleeps and is better at Greek than I am.

Here is what had better not happen. Here is what I know. That's not hard work that brought that to Lauren. God did that to her, and he did not do that to me. For Lauren to boast in her all-A existence... Two B's in her entire life (and to this day she would argue how those professors got it wrong). Here is what happens. If you take your intrinsic gifting, how you're wired, and you begin to walk with a swagger, you become very much like some of the kids I walked with when I was doing student ministry.

Here is what I mean. When I was doing student ministry, there were kids who were born into wealthy families, and they would get their Ralph Lauren polo shirts on, and then there were kids who didn't come from that kind of family. They had their Knights of the Round Table shirt on. Right? Knights of the Round Table had a near identical logo to Ralph Lauren's polo except it was a flag instead of a mallet. Tell me who remembers this. Okay. There is a lot of hurt in this room.

What would happen is I would see our wealthier kids kind of dog and make fun and shame kids who were from poorer backgrounds. I just remember always feeling so frustrated because I was like, "What did you do, kid? You were just born. Seriously, what did you do? What makes you so awesome? You were just friggin' born. You didn't earn anything. You don't have a job. Your money

didn't buy you that shirt. You're better at athletics because your mama can send you to a camp that costs \$5,000 where you're learning technique." Right?

I would find just this frustration in my heart toward that type of kind of lording it over. If you're gifted, don't touch it. It's not yours. God did that for his glory. You're going to make yourself a blasphemer. I don't care what it is. If you're good at it, you're excelling at it, you praise his glorious grace because it is he who did that work in you. See, a pattern of this world is to fail to acknowledge that all that is good and right has been authored and is sustained by God.

It says, "Don't be conformed to the pattern of this world. Don't love creation over the Creator. Don't believe you're smarter than God. Don't fail to acknowledge him as the giver of every good gift." Then he moves into this. "**...but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...**" The renewal of our minds is... Once again, I love this text because what it just said was, "I'm not going to be transformed by trying harder but rather by being given a new heart and a new mind."

Think about that because if you get that backward, you will enslave yourself to empty, vain religion for a lot of your days. I want to try to help you not do that. Notice that what happens here is we are transformed by the renewal of our minds. God changes our mindset, changes the passions of our hearts, and we are not transformed by going, "This is really an issue. I have to conquer this and overcome it," and put all our energy and weight into trying to hurdle this sin in our lives.

Rather, the Bible says we are transformed by beholding the glory of God in Christ. I want all of my energy, all of my vitality, all of my strength, all of my curiosity solely focused on the beauty and renown and glory of God because as you sang growing up in church if you have a background in church, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in his wonderful face, and the things of this earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace."

How do they grow strangely dim? When we turn our eyes on Jesus, not when we turn our eyes to them. It's backward thinking. It's anti-gospel nonsense. How do we renew our minds? First of all, I believe it's vitally important for you to know and understand the Word of God. I never want to lie to you. I always want to be really honest with you. Let me be very honest with you.

Regardless of how many days you live, you will never outgrow having to preach to yourself. I'm so drawn to Psalm 42 where the psalmist argues with himself, "Why are you so downcast, oh my soul?"

Put your hope in God." I just have a ton of respect for a brother who gets in a fight with himself because I don't feel so weird.

Tomorrow at 1:00, I go in for an MRI. I'll get there at 12:30. I'll fill out the same paperwork I have filled out for five years. They'll put a needle into my arm, and they'll slide me into that machine for 45 minutes. They'll take pictures of my brain. Then at 3:00, I get to go to my neuro-oncologist and see what the next six months may or may not look like. It could just be we punt the ball down the field and we'll go back in in January and get another scan. It could be I get thrown back on chemo starting next week. We just literally have no clue what awaits for me.

At 4:50 a.m. this morning, I woke straight up. I just popped up. Do you know what was happening in my mind? It was, "What will we do at The Village if I go down again? What will we do with Acts 29 if I go down again? What's going to happen to my family if I go down again?" I'm having to go, "Whoa, where are we going? I'm not going down."

Now I'm having to preach the gospel to myself. I'm having to tell myself, "Hey, you're in God's hands, Matt. There's nothing you can do. He's for you, not against you. You have all this evidence. You've been in the valley, and you found him there. There is no news you'll get that will take God for surprise, that will cause an emergency to break out in heaven. God is already there. He is already confident. Regardless of the news, you will not, in the long run, lose."

I had to say that to myself this morning over and over again, from 4:50 until I finally went, "Forget it," and got up and got in the shower at 6:00. I'm saying that this morning, and I didn't say it last night. I talked about knowing the scan was coming, but even coming off of saying last night that I was preaching the gospel to myself, I woke up at 4:50. Are you serious? After a week of preaching to myself, I have to get up again? After I preached about preaching to myself, I have to preach to myself again? That's a lot of preaching in a two-day span.

Listen. You're never going to outgrow needing to do that. You're not. Remember the 90-year-old woman I referenced? What was she doing? She was preaching to herself. We don't move past having to tell the truth to ourselves. We're prone to believe the lie. We have to preach to ourselves the truth. You're never going to be so disciplined, so mature, so far along that you don't need to preach the truth to yourself. This is a renewal of the mind.

Look what happens after this. I love this. Here is the first thing a renewed mind starts to do. Verse 3.

"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." I love this.

See what a renewed mind does? A renewed mind immediately begins to attack the self-worth we feel, the self-exalting kind of bent in our hearts that is ever-present about why we should be served and about our stuff. Who is going to take care of us? What about me? Why is that? That starts to immediately be attacked with a renewed mind.

I said at the very beginning of this series that the banner over us all is, "What about me?" If you think about the things we select and give ourselves to, the banner is, "What about me?" People pick churches under the banner of, "What about me?" "What can they do for me? What are the amenities?" They pick gyms on, "What about me?" They pick where they live on the, "What about me?"

"What about me?" is a legitimate question in certain places, but in some places, it's a completely unacceptable one. The renewed mind in this context begins to see itself for what it is. It begins to walk in an objective, visible humility that sees God as supreme and, therefore, me as not supreme. It sees God as supremely exalted and me as simply a servant of the most exalted one.

I have a friend who says it this way. "Slaves can't be celebrities." We simply faithfully serve the Lord with the days we've been given. A renewed mind starts to see our lives rightly in the shadow of God's holiness and grace. The way I've taught it here before is no one is impressed with themselves when they stand at the edge of the Grand Canyon. No one puts their toes or gets on that little glass death bridge thing they built and stands there and looks into the canyon and marvels at their master's degree. No one.

Several years ago, I was teaching in Hawaii. We drove up to the North Shore. We were there in November. While we were there, the Vans Triple Crown of Surfing was going on on Pipeline and the North Shore, and I just watched those fools get in that... Listen. I'm not getting in that water. I'll tell you right now. I don't feel like I'm a cowardly man. Even with some floaties, I'm not getting in the water. All right? That thing is nasty. I watched those guys.

I felt so weak and so small and so pathetic...and awesome. It was like we were designed to feel that way. There is something that pulls us to the ocean. There is something that pulls us to mountain ranges. There is something that pulls us in those moments where our stomachs kind of churn a little bit with delightful fear. Yeah, you were designed for that. That's how we are to behold the Lord. It puts us where we were rightly designed to be.

It's important to see and understand our placement for how God has created the covenant community of faith or his bride to interact and to consider one another. Let's read that now, starting in verse 4. **"For as in one body we have many members..."** Nobody can argue with that. One body here. I'm looking for you. I have hands. I have feet and legs and arms and a head and a neck and a nose. One body, different members.

From there it says, **"...and the members do not all have the same function..."** I don't sneeze with my hand. Are you tracking? I don't sneeze with my hand. I don't cough with my toes. They have their function. That's not their function. Then from there, **"...so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and..."** Listen to this. **"...individually members one of another."**

If you write in your Bible, I would encourage you to highlight, circle, make a note, star, draw a little line to the margin, put, "Wow," however you do it, under that phrase, "and individually members one of another." Here is what that means. For me to be all the Lord would have me be, and for my family to be all the Lord would have us be in this place requires you being all you can be in this place, me using my gift, you using your gift.

There is this synergy that forms with the right gifts being brought into this place for the building up of the body for the glory of God. We need one another. Then from there, look at verse 6. **"Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us..."** Let me stop there before we get to his, "Let us use them." I love the first phrase. We're not all gifted the same. In fact, we are oftentimes drawn to gifts we don't have. Are you tracking with me?

How do we figure out what our gift is, and how do we avoid those first couple episodes of *American Idol*? Are you tracking with me? You know exactly what I'm talking about. I don't even watch it after week three. Once everybody can sing great, I'm done. I don't care who wins it. It's a sociological marvel to me that no one went, "Brother, no." Somebody encouraged that. You don't get that far if somebody didn't go, "Brother, you have it. You have the gift."

If I was doing a PhD, I would do a PhD on what happened there. They are convinced they're nailing it, and they are not. Someone has not loved them. They have not put their arm around them and said, "Brother, your strength is math. Come over here." Nobody did that. They just tell them they're great at it. How unloving and cruel is that? Do you know how it ended? On national television. That's how it ended. It should have ended when they were 7. "Buddy, we're going to learn to color, not sing."

Some of you are like, "What about his dream?" There are certain dreams that need to die, right? If your son's dream was to ride a unicorn with a machine gun, you'd probably have a talk with him. Right? "Buddy, I like that. It's very creative. Draw me a picture of it. Now let's go read some books." We're not going to go, "Let's find you a unicorn." You're going to try to help that dream get shaped.

How do we know what our gifts are? Again, I think here is how it works. One of the parts of our church culture in the West that is ridiculously unhelpful is the massive amount of people who go to church but don't belong to one. See, when you belong to one, others can affirm your gift. Others can tell you you're gifted so you're not guessing. "I think I'm really good at this."

You're in Home Group, and they're having a discussion. You open up your mouth, and when you open up your mouth, just the Word of God... If you got cut you'd just bleed Bible. You're all in it. Everybody is kind of just stunned by your knowledge of the Word of God. You're not doing it because you're boastful or proud; you're doing it because you have been compelled by God to study the word of God, to understand rich and deep doctrines and theologies.

You begin to pour yourself out. Then people are going, "Man, God has really gifted you. It just seems like when we have questions, you just know the answers. You seem to have the gift of teaching." Now you have other people affirming that gift. You have other people encouraging that gift. You have other people kind of spurring you on to exercise that gift all the more.

This happens to me all the time. Young men go, "I just really feel called to preach." I always ask, "Who has called you? Who has asked you to do that? Who has asked you to teach? What's the objective evidence of you being called by God to teach?" For me it was fourth grade boy's Sunday school. A guy named Ronnie just came up and said, "Hey Matt. I don't know where we're going with this, but brother, you seem to have a bit of a knack for this."

First of all, that was way too long for fourth grade boys. Two, that was a completely inappropriate illustration. Third, "You seem to know quite a bit about the Word. You explain it in a way they understand well. I just want to encourage you, brother, to keep growing in this gift." So I just kept trying to grow in the gift.

I think over and over again, this is how it plays out. The body encourages the members of the body in their giftedness. Without belonging and simply going, you never really know what your gift is or how your gift works in the body because some of us don't have gifts that work cleanly in the body. Maybe using me is not fair because it's kind of teaching, and maybe that's the easy one.

Let's look at his list here. **"Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith..."** We're going to talk about prophesy and the sign gifts next week. It should be a good time. **"...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."**

My favorite one in that entire list is the one with the gift of service in his serving. There are gifts present in this room that don't fit cleanly into some sort of spiritual gift test. Do you want me to give you the example? I'll give you a couple. No one has the spiritual gift of parking cars. Are you tracking with me? If we did a spiritual gift inventory type test on you, it would not come back, "Give this brother an orange vest and a flag, and he will nail it. He will have those brothers just lined up perfectly in that spot."

No, it's a gift of service that would drive a man and a woman out into the parking lot when it's either 105 or 30, when it is snowing or raining or beautiful, to enable others to come in and sit down and hear the Word of God and then get out in such a way that is most effective. It's a gift of service. When you have the gift of service, you serve. Nobody in a spiritual gift test is going to come up with, "You should be a greeter."

I would say there are people who probably don't need to greet...they're just grumpy... "Welcome." "Hey, bro. Hey, are you angry?" "No, I'm not angry. This is the happiest I've been in years." You probably don't want that guy greeting. These are just acts of service. No small parts in the kingdom. No small parts in the church. Gifted by God, empowered by the Holy Spirit for the building up of the body according to the faith he provided and the gifts he has given. We're uniquely gifted, uniquely

wired, uniquely placed for the glory of his name with no small parts. Paul's encouragement: "Use them."

Here is how I want to end. It's a complete and utter loss today if what flows out of our service this morning is you all geeked up and motivated going to sign up to some ministry to serve in where it has not been motivated and formed and driven by the gospel. More than I would like for you to volunteer at Kids' Village (and I would desperately like for you to volunteer at Kids' Village), I would love for you to understand the first part of this text.

You would understand and grasp in the deepest parts of your soul the redeeming work of God found in Jesus Christ. The great hurdle we have to overcome, the great hurdle you and I have to get over today in this place, in this church, in this part of the country is that wherever you pastor a church, there are contextual issues at play, issues that kind of come to the forefront because of the place in which you are, and the one that must be jumped over in this place is a near insatiable, indomitable pull toward looking prettier than we actually are.

It's going to damn many of us. It's just an absurd, idiotic, foolish game we play here in Dallas, that week in and week out, our churches are filled with hundreds and hundreds if not thousands and thousands of people all over the metroplex who come into church, and they even know when to raise their hands when we sing. They even kind of do that chest pat thing that's so weird. We have learned to play the game.

If we're honest, if God would, by his grace, even allow us to be honest, that's not who we are. We don't love him. We're struggling. We're angry at God. We're frustrated because of that thing that happened with our mom. We're furious at God because of that thing that happened with our dad. "Where was he in my darkest hour?" We're wrestling with doubt, and we're angry, and we're frustrated, and we're addicted, and we're alone, and we're wrestling with anxiety.

Yet we come in, and I'm fine, and you're fine. *Ding*. No one walks in freedom who walks like that. Here's the thing about the church, the thing that must always be true about the church, or we have failed. The outer edge of the church had better always be grimy. Are you tracking with me? If it's not grimy, then we have begun to try to pretend to be a pretty people which we are not. I don't know what drives that. It's so dumb.

I'll bust you out a list of things you should be doing on Sunday morning rather than pretending. I love me some wake boarding. That would be a good time. Anybody like to fish? Sleep? Brunch? I haven't had brunch in like 20 years. I heard it's awesome. Brunch it up rather than come here and smile. "How are you?" "I'm fine. I'm fine. How are you? I mean, I hate my wife. I'd like to murder her, but praise God I'm here. Jesus is Lord." Why?

If you're addicted, just say, "Hey, I'm addicted. I need some help." If you hate your spouse, go... No, don't do that, it's going to go really bad. Go, "We need help." Don't hold her hand as you skip in here if you hate her or him. Just go, "We need help. It's not working. I'm not okay. I am struggling with this. I can't stop doing this. I can't shake this. Someone help me." Please, I'm pleading with you, appealing to you, by the mercies of God not to do that.

Serve, sure, but serve clean and open. Serve embracing the grace of God toward you. I don't get it. Friggin' Dallas. We desperately need a mountain or an ocean, something. It's like all we have is ourselves as a sport. It's ridiculous. That's funny. You guys are from Dallas. You're like, "That is right. We do." It's so crazy. Here is what I want us to do. Look around. I want to give you the opportunity. I want to appeal to you, therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God.

Quit being a liar. God already knows. Do you think you have secrets, that he just checks in on the weekends? He knows. Here is what's crazy. We talked about this at the last baptism service. Where sin is present, grace is present all the more. Where your marriage is busted, the grace of God is present all the more. Where you're struggling with addiction, anxiety, fear, anger, rage, whatever, the grace of God is present all the more. Where you're struggling with doubt, the grace of God is present all the more.

Why would you hide your doubts? It just makes them stronger. Just go, "I have my doubts." I'm trying to model this. Didn't I just stand in front of all of you and go, "At 4:50 this morning, I was struggling with doubt"? One who has already been delivered out of the fire, a brother who has preaching the Bible for 22 or 23 years now was up at 4:50 this morning, today going, "All right. I'm struggling again. Help me. I know your Word is true." Just preaching to myself, quoting verses to myself like I'm in the elementary school of Christianity.

Maybe I am, but there is no way forward if we can't be honest with where we are. There is no way forward. There is only more shame, more destruction, more weight, more loss, more sorrow in

silence. There is no condemnation for the broken and contrite in spirit. In fact, in Psalms, the Bible says the Lord delights in that. He will never despise it.

Quit trying to be pretty. God knows. Can we just do that together? Can we just say this will not be a place where we play that game? I'm going to pray for us, and then from there, we're going to move into a time of celebrating the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ that empowers and fuels and strengthens our pursuit of the Lord. From there, we're going to sing unto the Lord.

At the end of our service, there will be some men and women up front, some of our pastors, men and women, and if you're that person who, if I gave you an opportunity, would raise your hand and go, "Man, I have doubts. I have fears. I'm living a double life. I'm exactly what you're talking about," I want you to increase in your boldness and come and just confess.

No one will gasp. Are you tracking with me? It doesn't matter what you're going to confess. No one will gasp. No one is going to go, "Oh my gosh, I need help. This is something different than I've experienced." All right? It's not going to happen to you today. We've been here a long time. Prostitution, swinging, same-sex attraction. I could go on and on. You're just not going to shock or surprise us. You'll find us empathetic, compassionate, and prayerful with you, willing to walk the long haul. It could be over today.

For the first time, you could just breathe, rest in his grace. Twenty years of pastoring leads me to know that some of you are just not tired enough yet, not quite there, smarter than me. I don't know what I'm talking about. You know. You're going to be the one person in human history who overcomes this. Maybe by the grace of God, something will get hooked down there deep in your gut, and 10 years from now, when you are tired enough, you'll remember his grace and respond. Let's pray.

Father, for these men and women, I just pray a prayer of thanks for the opportunity to come in and just let the Word of God read us. I thank you as we now respond to the Word by celebrating your broken body and shed blood and then respond via confession and the seeking out of help and just being honest about where we are.

I pray, Father, that you would prevail upon our hearts this morning. I thank you that where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more, and there is no sin in this room with more power than your

cross. Invade our doubts, our fears, our anger, and our addictions, and draw us near. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

I love you guys more than you know.

© 2014 The Village Church