

“Serve’s Up”

Romans 12:3-6a

July 6-7, 2013

Summit Church (Brier Creek Sat/Sun)

Hello Summit Church, it is good to see you here. My name is Danny and I’m one of the pastors here at the Summit.

This weekend various members of our teaching team are speaking at each of our campuses. A half-dozen of us have prayed together, studied together, shared ideas and illustrations together. You know what that’s like, don’t you? Because all of us have been a part of a team at one point or another. Whether it’s a middle school science project or a Fortune 500 corporate takeover or even getting your family ready to go on a road trip, everyone knows what it’s like to have responsibility doled out to everyone on the team, and expect each member of the team to pull their weight and do their job.

And teamwork is fantastic, when it works. But when it doesn’t, it can be downright awful. Take for example one of the more popular memes that’s hitting the worldwide web these days. It’s called “You had one job,” and it’s a tribute to the people who - well, had one single job to do, and they blew it. Now, those of you listening by podcast or online, you’re going to have to trust me, because the next 30 seconds are going to be highly visual. You can play along at home by just googling “You had one job.” For everyone live here, let’s check out a few...

[Slide] First we have the classic “walk” sign. Installed upside down for our Australian friends.

[Slide] Then the painted roadway. This was the lowest bid on that government contract, obviously.

[Slide] Next up, a door at Target that apparently deals with multiple personality disorder.

[Slide] Then another example of why city codes and zoning regulations are so incredibly hard to deal with.

[Slide] And finally, my personal favorite, why you should definitely pay more attention in your geography class.

One job. And sometimes we can find a way to mess up even that. Well today, we’re going to look at a passage that highlights the “one job” that we’ve been given. The one role that’s ours to own and the one thing that we

should be about. We talked about work teams and study groups, but throughout the New Testament we're reminded that the church more than a team. It is a spiritual family. It's the body of Christ. And like a family or a body, every person or part has a job. Everyone has a role to play.

You see, in the New Testament we get a front row seat to watch the early church in action. We see the gifts that each believer had and how God not only gave those gifts, but used those gifts to build his church.

We see how God used apostles like Peter to preach the first sermons that launched the church. We see how God equipped saints like Aquila and Priscilla to disciple new converts to the church, most notably the Apostle Paul. We see how God raised up encouragers like Barnabas and missionaries like John Mark and servants like Stephen.

The thing that I love about the New Testament letters is that it shines a light on the roles of the individuals in early church. If you're a Bible reader, you know that at the beginning or end of most of Paul's letters, there is a laundry list of people that he singles out for greetings. For most of these people, we only know their names, we don't know what they did. But Paul knew. And he knew that the service these people gave not only to him personally, but to their local congregations had a ripple effect that went well beyond the walls of their cities.

These people in the early church knew their one job. They knew the role they'd been given, the giftings they'd been equipped with, and the way that they were being used to build the church.

So let's read together a passage that Paul wrote as an encouragement to one group of believers. You can see it in Romans 12:3-6:

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...

In this passage, Paul pulls back the curtain on a Christian phenomenon known as spiritual gifts. Now if you grew up in the church, you probably remember spiritual gifts, don't you? Maybe your pastor did a 47 week sermon series on every gift out there from prophecy to prayer. And maybe - like me - you struggled for more than your fair share of years to figure out exactly what your gift was.

Or maybe you didn't grow up in church, and the concept of a spiritual gift seems at worst, spooky, and at best, kooky. I mean, what is that, anyway? How do you get it? Who gives it to you? Do you have it handed over in some sort of ceremony? Do you have to send in box tops from a case of communion wafers? And what if you get the gift of celibacy? Can you trade that in? "I don't want the gift of celibacy. Give that guy the gift of celibacy."

You see, I think we've overcomplicated the whole idea of spiritual gifts. I think we've taken something that Paul wrote and turned it into something with far more steps and hoops than it needs. That's why I love these three verses in Romans 12, because before Paul talks about *what* some of the spiritual gifts are, he tells us exactly *why* they're important.

And that's where we have to start, with the why behind the what. Because if we don't understand *why* we're given certain gifts, we'll never understand *what* they are, and more than that we'll never understand how we use them.

The first thing we see in this passage is that

1. All of the Christian life is an exercise in grace.

Look at verse 3 again.

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.

Paul has spent the first 11 chapters of his letter to the Romans explaining the gospel in great detail: what it is, who it's about, why we need it, and why we can't live without it. But at the beginning of chapter 12 he takes a hard right turn and instead of helping us *learn* theology, he helps us *live* theology. He helps us live out the gospel.

And here's what the entire gospel hinges on: grace. It was the grace of God that caused him to look down on a world full of people who had turned their back on him, and to make a way back to him. It was the grace of Jesus that caused him to leave heaven, come to earth, live a perfect life, and die a brutal death so that we could be reconciled to God. It was the grace of the gospel that allows any of us to have our eyes opened to the truth that we can find forgiveness of our sins and reconciliation with our Father and hope for eternal life if we will simply accept the gift of grace he's given to us.

And it's that grace that Paul points us to in verse 3, that grace that all of our hope and eternity hinges upon. And Paul uses that word grace as the

underpinning to his next statement, that we should not think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think.

You see, the church in Rome that Paul was writing to was dealing with some serious unity issues. You had a body of believers that were made up of Jews by heritage - those who had spent a lifetime observing the rules and regulations of the Old Testament. You had a group of Gentiles (or non-Jewish people) who had every religious and non-religious background under the sun, but most adhered to an "anything goes" principle. And now Jews and Gentiles had become believers in Jesus and were trying to figure out how their past lives intersected with their present faith.

Well that was in some cases a recipe for conflict. And Paul knew that there were some in the church at Rome that carried a sense of entitlement. For whatever reason, there were some Jews that felt superior to the Gentiles, and vice-versa. They were thinking of themselves more highly than they ought to think.

Now I'll tell you that I don't know exactly how that translates from 1st century Rome to 21st century Raleigh-Durham. I don't know exactly what it looks like for you to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. But I'll tell you *one* of the things that I *think* that it means.

There's a lot of great things about a church this size, isn't it? I mean, we have all kinds of options and a wide reach and a relative amount of influence and a good sized budget. None of those things are bad. We have lots of things going on for kids and small groups in neighborhoods all over the Triangle and a fancy warehouse with comfortable chairs. God has been good to us far beyond what we deserve.

But with good things often comes pride. We get to the point both individually and corporately where we feel like we *deserve* these things. We develop a sense of entitlement - especially in a large church - that this is the way things are *supposed* to be. I'm supposed to have a Summit campus in my zip code. I'm supposed to have a choice of a half dozen small groups in my neighborhood. I'm supposed to be able to show up on the weekend and find a close parking spot and a comfortable chair and not be asked to scoot in and have a worship leader with an appropriate length of hair that I'm comfortable with and when I come I want the REAL preacher to preach to me and what in the world is a Connections Pastor anyway?!?

Entitlement will kill a church. It will kill a body of believers. It will kill us when we think we've arrived and the church exists to serve us and cater to our every whim and so therefore we don't think about serving others.

Even Jesus got that. If there's anybody in the history of the world who deserved to BE served, it's Jesus. But even he modeled that by saying that he didn't come to be served, but to serve others.

But there's an opposite side to the entitlement coin, and it's probably something that's just as pervasive in a church our size. That's where the problem is *not* that you think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but you don't think of yourself very highly at all. In fact, you're not sure God has a use for you in this church.

I'm not only afraid of entitlement, I'm also afraid that we can have the appearance that this church is so polished, there's no room for the amateur servant. There's no room for someone to explore their gifts and figure out where they serve the best.

If you're new to the Summit, can I try to set your mind at ease? If this place has come across as a well oiled machine, first of all, thank you. And second of all, it just ain't so. There's room at the table for you. We learn together and serve together because we're trying to make much of Jesus together.

Do you know how many times I feel like a kite in a hurricane around this place? Even preparing this message, I found myself comparing myself to other members of our teaching team who are speaking at our other campuses this weekend. There were more than a few times where I thought "I'll bet Ryan's already finished with his sermon. I'll bet Ryan had a better opening illustration than I did. I bet Ryan's sermon will be the one that makes it to the podcast. I hate Ryan."

You don't have to hate and envy other people within the church. That should be obvious, but often it's not. And I hope that's a freeing thing for some of you.

Just like entitlement, our perceived disadvantages will cause us to stop short of what God wants for us. It will cause us to shrink back because of pride or fear. That's where grace comes in. Because we've received grace, we give grace. Because God has lavished his love on us by taking on the form of a servant and serving us, we can lavish love on others the same way. And we do that by serving the body.

So we understand that we must serve. But *how* do we serve? Look back at verse 5.

...in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function... (v 5)

There goes Paul again, making the comparison to a body. And like a body, every part has a part to play. But it's important to see Paul's point:

2. We don't all have the same role, but we do all have some role.

Not all of us are going to be gifted in the same things, would you agree? Not everyone has the gift of preaching (yes, we've been struggling to listen to you this morning. Thank you for clearly illustrating that.) Not everyone is going to lead from the front. Some roles are going to be more behind the scenes, but that doesn't make them any less important.

What I appreciate so much about the Summit Church is that somehow God has given us the grace to get beyond the myth of the Super Pastor. You know what I mean by that, right? You've seen it perhaps in other churches you've been a part of. The paid staff are just that - hired help to make sure that the ministry gets done. You drop some money in the offering plate each week, and just like that we spring into action like little trained monkeys, teaching all the Bible studies, leading all the ministry efforts, taking care of all the problems because after all, that's what we're paid to do.

Here's the problem with the Super Pastor myth: no one among us has the time or the talent to tackle everything within the church. There are certain things that I have a knack for. Areas where I believe that God has gifted me. Things that fall into my skill set. But there are other areas where my role is just not going to be the same as others. Nobody wants me handling the budget, because 9th grade math was the best three years of my life. Nobody wants me leading worship. I've told you, God initially called me to be a worship pastor. Then he heard me sing, and he changed his mind.

There are others around here who are good at one thing and not at another. We're never going to put J.D. Greear in charge of hospital visitation. Let's just be honest - J.D. can be awkward in situations like that. I've told some of you before, if J.D. Greear shows up at your bedside, you are much worse off than what the doctors have told you.

What encourages me here is how so many of you have just taken up the mantle of ministry and decided that you're not going to view the paid staff as hired help. You are the ones that are serving and leading and ministering in circles far beyond what any of us on staff could ever do. By far, the best ministries we have in the community were not ideas that were dreamed up in a staff meeting. Nope, they were areas where a Summit member saw a need, started serving, and then invited others in the church to join in.

That's why Paul reminds us in Ephesians that one of the main roles of the pastor is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. My role is one of equipping...to work myself out of every job that I have.

So our jobs are not going to be the same. What God wires me to do, he may not necessarily wire you to do. And that's okay. But again, the point is not that we have the same role, but we have some role. *You have a role. That's important for you to grasp.*

So we must work towards a culture where not only does everyone count, but everyone also contributes. Look back at verse 5:

...so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. (v 5)

We are members of one another. Continuing in Paul's analogy of the body, what one body part does affects all other body parts. You know this if you've ever stubbed your toe in the middle of the night. Every other part you have rushes to the aid of Mr. Toe. Mr. Brain sets off alarms to everybody else, letting them know Mr. Toe has temporarily gone off the reservation. Mr. Hand reaches down to comfort Mr. Toe, Mr. Foot begins to overcompensate by hopping up and down, and Mr. Mouth chimes in with - well, we won't say what Mr. Mouth chimes in with. But you get the point. What one member of the body does affects all others.

Some of you are kneecaps, and you couldn't be more ticked off about it. What you really want to be is an elbow. But God didn't call you to be an elbow. He needs you as a kneecap. Just be thankful that you're not an appendix. Because somebody's gotta be the appendix.

But one member affects all the others. So it is with serving within the church.

Point #3...

3. When we refuse to serve others, we end up robbing others.

I said earlier that this is a large church, and mentioned some of the pros and cons of that. And one of the temptations in listening to a message like this is to dismiss it because things are already running pretty well as far as ministry teams go. Let's just say for sake of argument that we have 300 people that are serving in various ministry areas this weekend here at Brier Creek. That's 300 people that are serving on First Impressions, Summit Kids, leading in worship, running sound, lights, and video. And let's say that as a result of this message, there is not a single additional one of you that

step up to serve in any way. Nobody else gets involved, it's just the same 300.

While that might be disappointing to me as a communicator, the reality is that we'll probably be okay. We'll still keep plugging along with our 300. Cars are still gonna get parked and the lights are still gonna get turned on and we're not going to toss the three year old class out on the sidewalk. But there is one core principle of serving that we've adapted around here, and it's this:

We ask you to serve not because we need you to serve, but because you need to serve.

Did you get that? If you're a believer, you just need to serve. It's part of our spiritual DNA. It's how God has wired us. And if you refuse to serve the body, it doesn't just affect you. You are robbing other people of the gifts that God has given you.

One of the litmus tests of a healthy church is one that serves each other well. I think we'd agree that there's no place in the church for competition or rivalry, but just a few verses later in chapter 12, Paul gives us one exception to that. He says that the only place where we should compete in church is by giving honor. We should outdo one another in showing honor. We should look for opportunities to honor people by serving people. And when we do that, it doesn't just grow other people, it grows us as well.

So okay, great. We get it, right? We should serve. It's a no brainer that Christians can't be consumers, showing up every weekend to watch the paid professionals perform. We should identify an area of service and then go after it. We should show honor to people by serving them. But the question still remains: what are YOU and what am I specifically supposed to do? What is the spiritual gift we've been given? How has God wired us from the foundation of the world to give back to the church?

The bad news is, I'm not going to tell you. Because as I said at the beginning, I think we've overcomplicated the subject of spiritual gifts. I don't even think the Bible gives us a comprehensive list of spiritual gifts, because I think it goes beyond a 100 question survey that spits out an assessment at the end.

Do you want to know how to discover your spiritual gift? Do you want to figure out once and for all what God has called you to do? Do you want to get off the sidelines and get in the game? Here it is. Point #4. You're going to want to write this down.

4. Stop discovering and dive in.

Just stop trying to figure it out. Stop taking spiritual gift tests. Stop comparing what you think your gift is with what you know someone else's is. Just stop. Stop pursuing a perfect, custom-fit gift, because when you do, you unnecessarily delay the way God wants to use you.

Paul says it like this in the first part of verse six:

Having gifts that differ according to the grace [there's that word again] given to us, let us use them... (v 6a)

Again, different ones of us have different gifts, but we all have some gift. And I think Paul is making a plea to the Romans here: forget about figuring out what your gift is, just jump in and do something. Is there an area that you think you may be called to? Then start serving. You'll figure out soon enough if you're good at it or not. Is there something that needs to be done? Then respond to the need. You might find out that you have a natural inclination for that thing, or maybe not.

Now let me address the issue of *need* briefly. I know that there are people listening to this message that do not serve anymore because you spent years moving from need to need to need and you just flamed out because the needs never ended. There's nothing inherently wrong with meeting needs.

This weekend I've been helping a couple in our small group who is moving. Friday I showed up just after they closed on their house to help get the house ready for furniture to come in. This was a house that was in foreclosure and had been sitting empty for quite a while. To say that it was a "fixer upper" is an understatement. I'm not 100% sure that a few people hadn't been murdered in that house. There were science experiments growing in the bathroom. There were new species of spiders that researchers had never discovered before. The whole place smelled like death eating garlic and onions. So there was a lot of work to do just to get it to the point where we could open the doors of the moving truck and start bringing in furniture.

So I walked in the door and asked that very dangerous question, "How can I serve you?" I was handed a mop and told to take a bucket of Pine Sol and mop down the walls. I didn't even know you could mop walls. I thought mops were for floors. Wall-mopping has never shown up on any spiritual gifts profile that I've ever taken. And I can tell you that after a few hours of wall-mopping, I'm still not convinced that that's what I'm called to do. I will not be starting a wall mopping ministry here at the Summit anytime soon,

although I'm sure our tech team has already bought the rights to the "MopRDU" website.

But it was a need, so I did it. It was short term, temporary, just get the job done need. Sometimes that happens. But other times, I would encourage you, don't just respond to need. Yes, there's a sense that anytime you serve you should be meeting a need, but here's the dichotomy: when you serve where there's a need but you don't have a passion, you'll burn out quicker. If you serve only according to your passion but there's no real need, you're really just serving yourself.

What it all comes down to is this: you should serve because you get to, not because you're guilty to. **Service should emerge from your passion.**

Listen, some of you don't like kids. Can we be real about that fact? I like my kids. Most of the time. But yours, not so much. That's why I don't serve in Summit Kids. It would be like Lord of the Flies about 30 seconds I showed up. Some of you are like that, and you don't need to serve with Kids.

Some of you should never be on the worship team. Ever ever. Ever ever ever. Because you know that your voice would not bless anyone, and you know it, and I know it.

Some of you should never serve on our First Impressions Team, because let's face it, you're a grouch. The last time you smiled was when Reagan was president. You would scare off the average first time guest. "Good morning, welcome to the Summit. Jesus loves you."

So I'm not asking you to serve long term according to need. I'm asking you - just as Paul asked you - to discover the natural passions and wirings God's given you, and serve. When your passions, opportunities, and skills all line up, that's the fertile ground for God to work.

I'm convinced when we get hung up on what gift we have or don't have, we run the risk of making an idol out of something that's supposed to be for our benefit. We should never **confuse the gift with the gift-giver.**

Many of you know this already. You know the joy that simply comes from serving in the areas where God has naturally wired you. I could tell you story after story of where I've seen faithful Summit people serve, and God do great things simply because you've handed over your time and talents to him.

Stories like what we saw just a few weeks ago at Cary Campus, where a couple visited for the very first time. They drove on to the campus and were

greeted by our parking team, who make sure that they got a spot close to the door. They made it to our first time guest tent, where they were greeted and shown around campus. They dropped their children off to the Summit Kids area, where they would be a part of their own worship environment while mom and dad were in worship. And after leaving Summit Kids they were met by another one of our volunteers who engaged them in conversation. They hit it off, and the volunteer could sense a deeper need present in this couple's life. He asked a few probing questions and by the end of the conversation, he actually led them to faith in Jesus. They became followers of Christ! And all of this happened BEFORE our guests ever even walked into the auditorium and saw the "paid professionals" in action.

Or how about this one: recently we got word of a single mom in the community who was for all practical purposes homeless with a one year old, and in premature labor with a high-risk pregnancy. Summit members stepped in and stepped up. They provided a place to stay for the one year old. They bought diapers and clothing and meals for this family. They visited the hospital and prayed and gave rides and helped find permanent housing and jobs and built an ongoing relationship with this mother that is changing the very trajectory of her life. As a matter of fact, this young mom just recently said, "I've never been loved before the way that your church has loved me."

What is that? It's grace. It's a people of grace giving grace to people who need grace. You understand, don't you, that the point of the gifts is not to figure out where you serve? The point of the gifts is not for you to add one more thing to your spiritual checklist. **The point of the gifts is to point people to Jesus.**

God help us if we put on an orange vest and park cars in the parking lot just because we're supposed to. God help us if we lead a class of third graders only because there's a need. God help us if we play an instrument or clean some bathrooms or paint a school classroom or help the homeless or go on the mission field out of a sense of duty.

No. It's grace. It's grace. It's ALL grace. It's the grace we've been given manifesting itself in the way we give to others. It's pointing people not to the gift, but to the giver of the gift.

But pointing people to the giver starts with serving out of grace. And so if that's you today, if you're one who needs to get off the sidelines and into the game, I have a very simple next step for you: just jump in. That's it. You can indicate your interest on the tear off card in the worship guide, or sign up to attend Starting Point this weekend to find out more. Pick a place to serve and start serving. We're happy to help you do that.

We serve because we've been served. We love because we've been loved.
And when we do, we point people to Jesus. Let's pray.