

## Lesson 12: Purposes of the Church – Ministry

### **Opening:**

I am not a car guy, but my dad is. He loves classic cars. Earlier this year I took a day and he and I went to a car auction together. As I was reading the material about the cars, I remember one car that caught my attention. It was a 1969 Ford Mustang Boss 429 Fastback. For those of you that are not particularly familiar with classic cars (like me) this Boss 429 Fastback is a rare muscle car that ungoverned could reportedly go upwards of 175 mph. What caught my attention was that the car had only been driven 18,000 miles in the 49 years since it was built. I did some math and that averages out to just over 367 miles a year or about 1 mile per day. Now, I know that people collect these cars and one important thing to the value of the car can be the number of miles it has driven, but in my mind here was a car that was built to drive, and drive fast, and for 49 years it only went about 1 mile per day.

That car made me think about us. Each of us has been given spiritual gifts by God. Those gifts are infused with power through the Holy Spirit, and Jesus shows us how to use our gifts properly (See 1 Corinthians 12:4-7). However, many people fail to use their gifts to the extent that God desires or they fail to use their gifts at all. God gives each of us gifts. We can either take those gifts and hide them – saving them for only us - or we can use those gifts in service to others. Just as a car is meant to be driven so our spiritual gifts are meant to be used.

This week's lesson is about the Biblical purpose of ministry. Ministry is using our gifts to point others toward the glory of God. The result of using our gifts is:

- We fulfill the great commandment of loving God and others (See Matthew 22:37-39);
- The edification, or building up of other believers (See Ephesians 4:12-13);
- Proclamation of the word of God (the fruit of which is seeing people come to know the saving grace of God's redemptive work in Jesus (See Matthew 28:19-20).

### **Central Truths:**

- God calls all His people to ministry and does not call everyone to do everything.
- God calls people to different ministries that encourage the body to grow in Christ and point others toward the glory of God.

- God expects us to spend time discovering and then deploying the use of our spiritual gifts.

### **Purposes of the Church – Ministry:**

The main purpose of ministry is to help people see the greatness of what Christ has done for those that will value His gift of salvation and His invitation to follow Him over the things of the world. It is important to remember that our spiritual gifts should align with the mission of the church. Ministry is not a program because programs can change based on the needs of the church and community. Ministry is a willingness to value the mission of the church (Love God, Serve Others, Equip Disciple-Makers) and to identify ways to align my gifts with this mission.

Read the following texts and write down what they teach us about ministry:

- Acts 20:22-24 (especially the end of V. 24)
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- 1 Corinthians 12:25-26
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- Philippians 2:1-7
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### **Examining the Text:**

Reading the Biblical Text: Romans 12:3-8

<sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup>so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. <sup>6</sup>Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; <sup>7</sup>if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; <sup>8</sup>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.

Look at VV. 3-4 <sup>3</sup>*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. <sup>4</sup> For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function,*

Verse 3 points out for us that understanding who we are in Christ helps us to think honestly about ourselves. If we go back to Verses 1 and 2 in the chapter, we see that when we become Christ followers, He works in us to transform our minds so that we begin to see things in the world around us differently. Knowing Christ changes the way we look at the world, the way we determine what is good, pleasing, and perfect to God. Knowing Christ also means that we get a right view of self from Christ and not from the world. When we learn to see ourselves as Christ sees us, we will understand our worth and value to a God who willingly gave Himself up for us. Therefore, we will not value ourselves too low so as to cheapen the work of Christ, nor will we show arrogance as though we were better than others. Instead, we will understand that we are part of the body of Christ, each valuable enough to God to save, and valuable enough to entrust with gifts for service.

What situations might cause us to doubt our value to God?

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The end of Verse 3 “the measure of faith that God has assigned” and Verse 4 go together. The measure of faith does not mean that God does not treat us all with the same love, nor is this about us learning to have more faith. While God calls all of us to be obedient to Him (and that means following Him even when it seems uncomfortable), God does give us different levels of strength in different areas of our lives, and this keeps us humble and causes us to seek Him.

God calls all His people to ministry and does not call everyone to do everything. Therefore, not everyone in the church has the same function (Verse 3), but we are all called to ministry. Our tendencies seem to fall into one of two categories: 1) either we attempt to take on too much; 2) or we take on too little. Thom Rainer (head of LifeWay research) noted that around 45% of church members are serving in ministry at least once a month. That means that for the ministry of the church to function those who serve must fulfill the ministry that was designed for others.

If you are serving in ways that you are not gifted and called to serve, it can rob you of your joy and effectiveness. Yet, sometimes we get so use to doing certain things that we struggle to let them go. If you serve in too many areas, what may God be asking you to let go of? Then ask yourself, who shows interest in this ministry that God might use to take my place? How can they be properly trained and released to use their spiritual gifts (even if the ministry looks slightly different than when I was doing it)?

If you are not serving, what gifts do you have that God could use for His purposes in the church?

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Look at VV. 5-6a *so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.* <sup>6</sup> *Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them:*

Just as Paul mentions we have different levels of faith , he notes that we do not all have the same gifts. Some people are better at certain things than others because it is in their gift set. Here he explains our gifts in terms of “grace.” Paul wants to remind the church that their gifts were given to them by God. He may have given them natural abilities, worked through circumstances, or brought them under the training of others – but in all these things, God is building us up for ministry.

Think of some ways that God has built you up for ministry? Who are some people or what are some circumstances that God has used to build up your spiritual faith? How can you use those strengths to serve others in the church?

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The principle here is this: God calls people to different ministries that encourage the body to grow in Christ and point others toward the glory of God.

Look at VV. 6b-8 if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; <sup>7</sup> if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; <sup>8</sup> 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.

The list of gifts mentioned here is not intended by Paul to be exhaustive. Other gifts are mentioned (See 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 27-28 and Ephesians 4:11-12 – these lists are not exhaustive either). The list he mentions here includes “prophecy” – which is practical guidance. That means that God gives us insights into certain areas of our lives. For example, we may be trained in a particular field and when the church needs information in this area, we are called by God to use our knowledge to help the church and to serve one another. This should be done “in proportion to our faith” that simply means that we should give advice concerning the things we know. Some people have the gift of service. They want to help others. Some have the gift of teaching and communicate truth in ways that people understand. Some have the gift of exhortation, which means that they encourage others well. Some have the gift of giving. This does not mean that one must be wealthy, rather they are willing to give of what they have to the needs of others. Some have the gift of leadership. The word leadership here refers to those that have influence. The influence that these people have is something that comes because people trust them. Leaders should be zealous, or enthusiastic about ministry that is biblical, builds up the body, and points others to the glory of God. The gift of mercy means that one shows compassion for those who are sick, hurting, or in need.

When we have one gift, we are not excluded from other things. For example, if we have the gift of teaching, we are not excepted from serving others or giving to support the ministries of the church and the needs of others. However, Paul is noting for us that we should focus on the gifts that we are given and not take on too many things at one time, and we need to evaluate ourselves to acknowledge both our strengths and weaknesses.

God expects us to spend time discovering and then deploying the use of our spiritual gifts.

**Applying the Text:**

It is important for us to know our spiritual gifts. We can use tools and the help of others to aid us identifying our gifts. Then, the church has a responsibility to assist us finding ways to deploy those gifts in service to the body and the community. Several tools can be used to help us think about our spiritual gifts and these tools look largely at the following broad areas:

- What do you do well? What do other people notice that you do well?
- What experiences have shaped your life? How could God use those experiences to help and encourage others?
- What has God given you a passion for? What tugs at your heart when you hear about it?

About 20 years ago one of my wife's long-time mentors shared with her, "You will know you are where you need to be in ministry when your deep joy and the world's deep need meet."

How could God use you and your gifts in ministry through the church?