

Stirring Up Love Through Christian Ministry **Romans 12:1-8 (ESV)**

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1 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. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

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. 4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

Years ago, the *Readers Digest* shared a story about three country pastors that were meeting together for coffee when they discovered that each of their churches had the same problem. That problem was that their church buildings were infested with bats. These bats were disrupting the worship service. One pastor moaned, "I tried to take care of the problem with a shotgun. I got a shotgun out and just began blasting away. But all that did was put holes in the church ceiling and the bats are still there. They're still active." The other pastor said, "Well, I was close to a solution. I trapped them. I trapped every one of them, put them in the truck, drove them out fifty miles, and let them go. By the time I got back to the church, they were there. They beat me back." The other pastor had kind of a smug smile on his face as he listened. He said, "Well, I found the solution." And they with eager ears said, "Well, what did you do?" He said, "Well, it's simple! We voted them into membership and they haven't been active since." (Congregational Laughter!)

The disconnected church member is not an endangered species. Such a one is as common as a crow. This bird has a nest in every forest and a perch in every tree. And it's tragic for a number of reasons, not least of which is that passive church members keep the whole church from accomplishing the mission that Jesus, her Head, has given her. And we lose the experience of the glory of God in the midst of His family. As followers of Jesus, we remember that He Himself gave us, His church, a mission to accomplish. This is what He said, and it applies to every one of us.

Matthew 28:17-20 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to

observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Jesus commands us to commit ourselves to laboring with Him in His church to accomplish the mission that He came to accomplish. We remember that through the incarnation, God designed for His Son to accomplish a mission when He came here. And the mission is that of seeking and saving the lost. It was a mission that He was to accomplish through the instrument of a weak, human physical body. Jesus’ body was weak in that it grew tired and weary and it needed rest. It needed sleep. It was weak in that it was limited to all of the finite aspects that a human body has upon itself. It was limited in that it got thirsty and needed a drink. It became hungry and needed nourishment to be strengthened. And yet in wisdom, God chose for Jesus’ ministry to be fulfilled through a weak instrument; the instrument of a human body.

And we ask the question: Why didn’t God choose a supernatural or at least a super-human body for His Son to do His work? I mean, after all, if Jesus had Superman’s body, for instance, able to fly from one city to another city like a speeding bullet, wouldn’t He have been better able to do the work to accomplish the mission that God sent Him to accomplish? What would have happened if Jesus’ body was special and it never got tired, it never needed to sleep, it never needed to eat or drink anything? How much more Jesus might have done in His three short years if He hadn’t confined Himself to this weak, limited instrument of a human body! And yet, God chose to align His working with human frailty, and to show that His power is perfected through weakness. God’s glory is on greater display because God the Son took on humble human flesh.

Today, God calls His people, us, the Body of Christ. We are the physical manifestation of Jesus in this world. And as a church, this body is finite, and it’s feeble, and often, unlike Jesus, it’s even failing. But we are the body of Jesus. Think of that! We are His feet and we are His hands. We are the instrument that God has chosen to fulfill His mission. We’re given the same mission Jesus possessed when He walked this earth. It is to make disciples, to preach the Gospel. And every person who is a follower of Jesus is a member of that body, and is given this particular responsibility to be part of the whole in working toward the accomplishment of that specific mission. I believe it’s through the weakness of the body of Christ, the church, that God’s glory is on greater display. We see the glory of God working through weak people like you and me as He unites us with His Son so that we can perform even greater works through our relationship with Him and our relationship with each other.

The Gospel truth that is presented all through His Word is that God loves to use weak things to display His glory and His power! Praise God that He’s chosen us to be His people! We heard Becky sing earlier, “I will not boast in anything, no gifts, no power, no wisdom. But I will boast in Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection.” That’s where our enablement comes from. It comes from Jesus. It comes from the Gospel.

So, Romans chapter 12, especially the first 8 verses, teaches us that God gifts each member in His church with specific capacities to be involved in His work together so that

we might accomplish His mission. He calls us to stir up love in our church so that together, we would accomplish the ministry that He has given to us. If you are a follower of Jesus, then you necessarily, by virtue of being a follower of Jesus, are interested in the ministry of Jesus. And you are interested in your involvement in Christian ministry. And so, today we're going to be looking at five requirements for Christian ministry. The central idea that is presented is that God gives His church a mission to fulfill and then spiritually gifts each member of His church to serve in ministry together as a church for the sake of His Name, to advance His glory.

So when think about what does it take for us to be fruitfully involved in Christian ministry, we're not left without a word. God has given us a great word and I think we see five specific requirements that are necessary in order for us to embrace Christian ministry in a healthy way; to be satisfied in Christian ministry through the Gospel.

#1: Extreme Devotion to God. (12:1)

It's a consecration of one's life to Jesus. We read about this devotion in verse 1.

I 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.

In view of this Gospel that redeems us and rescues us of our sins through Jesus, through His death and burial and resurrection, I urge you, I appeal to you by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

All Christian ministry begins with a radical commitment to worship God. Nothing fruitful can happen in Christian ministry until we as a people consecrate ourselves wholly to the Lord in absolute surrender. We come to God and we say, "God, here is my body. This body is no longer mine. It is Yours. I am bought with a price. Take this body and do with it whatever You desire to do." When Christian ministry flows from any other source other than devotion to God, Christian ministry becomes like Cain's offering of the fruit of the ground. God does not accept it, because it is corrupted. Our service to God honors Him only when it is driven by a heart of radical dedication to the Lord.

Now, there are some applications that flow from this regarding Christian ministry. I can think of three of them.

1. When we give ourselves radically to Jesus, we will give ourselves radically to Christian ministry through the church.

It's important that we not deceive ourselves when we think of our own personal devotion or commitment to God. Devotion to Jesus is not first expressed through emotive words or singing or mystical experiences or feelings. All of those are fine in themselves. But devotion to Jesus is first presented through a presentation of our bodies to God for Him to use any way He wants. We say, "This body is no longer mine." And such a devotion to

God, when we give Him our bodies, we know what He wants. We know what He will call us to do with those bodies. He'll call us to be engaged with the mission of the church together with other members of the body of Christ. That's true in every person's life in every place at all times.

2. Members relate to God's church through their devotion to and love for God. Members do not relate to God's church through an activity or service of the church.

It would be offensive to God if we committed to Jesus' church simply because we enjoyed a specific ministry or activity of the church. So a person may say, "I love the church because of the children's ministry. Boy, I love the children's ministry! That's why I love the church." Or, "I love the church because I love the preaching of that church." Or, "I love the church because I love the music of the church." Or, "I love the church because of a woman's Bible Study in that church." Or, "I love the church because of the coffee that they serve before the church." Fill in the blank with whatever ministry, whatever activity. We have it backwards if that's what we say.

We first say, "I love God and because I love God, I love His church. And because I love His church, I love the activities of the church." You see, God is the constant. If we love God, we will always love the church. And if we love the church, we will always love the ministries of the church as they're being presented to the glory of God. If we try to flip that and turn it upside down instead and say, "I love the activities of the church," that's the reason why I love the church and ultimately, that's the reason why I love God. Guess what changes throughout times and places? The activities and ministries of the church will always change. And sometimes they'll change not according to our own pleasure. And then we'll say, "I don't like that activity. They changed that on me. And as a result of that, I don't like that church anymore, and I don't ultimately want to worship God in that place." Do you see how the church becomes, rather than a servant of God and a servant of Christ, pursuing His glory...When we flip that and begin to place our love in the activities and ministries of the church, it becomes a place where we love ourselves. It becomes anti-worship.

Let me use an illustration. 25 years ago, when I came to Peoria, I found out that there was an opportunity to play basketball with some guys at River City over lunch time. And for about 15 years, two to three times every week from about 11:45 to about 1:00, I would play basketball on either Monday, Wednesday or Friday. I loved it! I joined River City. And if you had asked me, "What do you think of River City Health Club?" I would have said, "I love River City! It's a great place!" "Why do you love River City?" Because I get to play basketball there at noons on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. This is fantastic! Within about 15 or 16 years, my body wasn't the same as it was when I was 29 and I lost the ability to play basketball. My knee and my neck, and some things happened, and I wasn't able to play basketball. Guess what I did? I stopped being a member of River City. Now, "Do you love River City?" It's a fine place, but I don't love it. "Why not?" Because there's not any activities there that I love anymore.

When we begin to think of the church in the way we think rightly of a health club or other human organizations, we've missed the entire Gospel message. We've missed the entire supernatural work of God in our own soul and in His church, and in His mission that He has for us to accomplish together. Our love for God and for each other is central. Activities are always peripheral. Our commitment to our local church must not be defined by our involvement with or enjoyment of any activity in our local church, but by our love for God.

I I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice...to God.

That's where Christian ministry begins.

3. Christian ministry is a means to express worship to the God who rescued us out of darkness. Christian ministry is not a means by which we find fulfillment in ourselves and for ourselves.

That would be self-worship. Now to be sure, we receive joy and meaning when we lose our lives for the sake of Christ. It's through losing our lives that we find them in Jesus. But when we give ourselves to Christian ministry for the purpose of boosting our own self identity, we are engaging in that which is contrary to worship. God designs ministry to move upward in adoration of Himself, and not inward in satisfaction with ourselves.

Now, this is a great danger! It's to be involved in Christian ministry for the sake of self-fulfillment. And we have to test and examine our own hearts to see if that might be true of us who are involved in Christian ministry. And so we're right to ask the question: How can I tell if I am pursuing ministry for personal fulfillment, or if I really am pursuing it for God's glory, for the praise of His Name? And again, this is not an easy evaluation. It's difficult. But we must examine our hearts in this. We have to seek the Lord because the answer will determine whether we serve Christ and His church for years and years and have great reward, or have no reward. So Jesus warned us about doing things in ministry in His church, among His people, without the heart of worship. And he says if that's the reason why you're laboring among God's people, then you've already received all the reward you'll ever receive. It's just the temporal approval of man. But He calls us to seek first His kingdom so that we would lay up treasures for ourselves in heaven. Listen to what 1 Corinthians says about this truth. Paul writes

1 Corinthians 3:11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is at the root and ground of all Christian ministry of the Christian life. It's His death, burial and resurrection, His ascension, His promise to return again that drives us forward. And He is our foundation. It's this devotion to Him that becomes the foundation of everything we do. If anyone gets involved in activities that seek to build up this living temple unto the Lord, he goes on to say

1 Corinthians 3:12-13 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.

The motivations, the foundation, the eternal value of each person's work will be made known. When we stand before Jesus, then we'll find out whether or not all the labors we've done for Christ has any eternal significance, or whether it was just all temporal, simply for the approval of man. The wood, hay and stubble will go through that fire and be burned up, and there will be nothing that comes out on the eternal end. The gold, silver and precious stones, that quality which begins here in Romans 12:1 with a commitment of one's whole body to Christ for His worship, that work will pass through the fire and we'll be able to enjoy it on the other end as part of our reward. That's the idea.

So if it's so significant that we not labor for self-fulfillment, but that we do labor for God's glory, how do I evaluate my heart in this way? I want to offer five questions that we would take time and say, "Lord, would You examine my heart, because I really do desire to be involved in Christian ministry for the sake of Your Name, and not for the sake of my own name. I know how easy it is for me to be deceived about that."

1. How do I prepare for Christian ministry? Do I rely upon human talents or do I really rely upon the Lord to accomplish any fruit? Do I pray before, during and after Christian ministry that God would take our feeble efforts and that He would multiply them in supernatural ways? Do I prepare myself by consciously offering my body as a living sacrifice to God, as I serve Him? Do I rely upon His Gospel and its power to accomplish supernatural work? So how do I prepare for ministry?

2. How do I evaluate success? Do I look to the Father for approval, or am I looking around and seeing who gives me a "thumbs up"?

3. How do I respond when people don't recognize my considerable efforts? I'm laboring and laboring and it seems like nobody is watching. No one is observing. No one even notices. Do I love the work anyway because I know the Father sees it and the Father is pleased and the Father is honored, or do I feel like quitting? "Nobody appreciates me! I'm out of here!"

4. How do I respond when I am asked to step down from one ministry and begin a new one for the glory of Christ? Do I get all offended? Do I lash out in anger? Do I disconnect myself from love in the church? Or do I recognize that this is part of God's sovereign plan whether I understand or not, and I can pursue His ministry joyfully, for His glory?

5. How do I respond when people do not receive the ministry I offer them? Do I get grumpy and frustrated when people don't respond the way I hoped they would? Or do I love them in patience and gentleness, believing that God is doing a greater work?

It's important for us to examine our lives and our service before the Lord so that we might rejoice eternally.

#2: Radical Renunciation of the world. (12:2)

2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

God asks us to make a decision about what is ultimately satisfying or essential to our lives. And we have to make a decision between being satisfied with the temporal kingdom of this world or being satisfied by the eternal kingdom of God. Jesus Himself presses us to make this decision because Jesus says we can't love both God and this world at the same time. (Matthew 6:24) We have to make a decision! Jesus says that because the world is constantly squeezing us into conformity so that we would value the temporal things of this world more than we value the eternal treasures of Christ Jesus. And in the midst of that squeeze, we often are going to have to make very practical decisions. Am I going to conform to this world and say, "Yup! I'm going to exert my energies, my time, my life toward temporal things." Or I'm going to renounce that and am I going to move in radical ways toward a commitment to eternal treasures, to eternal satisfaction in God?

Now I'm going to use an illustration here that I want us to understand and not distort. I know that we have to be careful not to make laws out of applications of Scripture. So please do not let this illustration communicate more than it's intended to communicate. I'm going to give you a few other warnings even, or cautions about this because it's so easy to take this illustration and move it in a direction that it's not intended.

When I was growing up, in 7th and 8th grade, the baseball team that I played on began to have some games on Sunday mornings. It was a first culturally, because prior generations, at least my older brothers, never had to deal with that. They just didn't have any games on Sunday. Now I know that sounds strange today because our culture has moved so quickly in the other direction. But at that time, it was a first. And when I heard my coach say, "We're going to have a game two weeks from now on Sunday morning," I didn't even go home and talk to my parents about it. I didn't even ask them because I knew exactly what their commitments were and what they would say. They would have said, "Ritch, we love the Lord. We love His church. Sunday morning is set aside entirely to worship Him, and not to play a baseball game."

Now, let me assure you that this is not an illustration of Eric Liddell. I was not that great of a baseball player. Out of ten guys, I often sat the bench. You do the math. This was not Eric Liddell giving up an opportunity to run the 100 Yard Dash for his country in the Olympics because they chose to have that race on Sunday. That's what Eric Liddell did. This is not a story of that nature. But that story impacted my life. It pressed against me the preciousness of Jesus' church and the loveliness of Christ.

Now again, I am not arguing for a new law for the church about this application. My point is that this refusal to miss worshipping God with God's people was a seriously considered application of Romans 12:1-2 by my parents, which they wanted to pass on to me. They wanted for me to realize that God always is first priority before people. And it follows that Christ's church is first priority before human organizations.

We have to be very careful of legalism. Legalism is a danger to any church, to any home, to any individual person. I do not believe that it is always a sin to work at a job on a Sunday or it's always a sin to participate in sports on a Sunday. We have some people and families here in our church who, I believe, have navigated well their working on Sundays and participating in sports on Sundays. Yet, we are right to affirm that God teaches that we should expect our world to pull us away from a sincere and simple devotion to God and His church. Our world is not a friend to God, to help us worship Him. If we are to worship Him, we will have to swim upstream against a strong current. We will have to be ready to fight against the priorities that the world would have us embrace, and be ready to renounce the world wherever God would call us and wherever His conscience and His Word would take us, whatever demands He would make of us. We are called to pursue a good conscience before God, testifying, "God, You are the most important Person in all the world and I want my life and my love to reflect that. I would rather neglect any other person before I neglect You. And God, Your work is the most important work in all the world. And I want my life and my time to reflect that priority as well. I would rather neglect any other work before I neglect Your work." That's what Romans 12:1-2 calls us toward.

This is what people who believe in Christ have always done. "Abraham, get out of your home town, leave your father and mother and all that's comfortable, and go to a land that I will show you." "Peter and Andrew, come follow Me and I will make you fishers of men." And they dropped their nets. Now again, this is not an argument that every Christian should leave their secular occupation. No! God uses His people to worship Him in every kind of job for His pleasure and for His glory. But this is a message in which we recognize that the call of Jesus to follow Him is radical. It means something! And that we are ready and willing to leave anything and everything behind if He calls us to serve Him. It's a radical thing!

So here's the application. Evaluate the squeeze of this world upon your life. Ask yourselves: In what ways does this world pressure me to use my time and energy in temporal pursuits to the neglect of eternal pursuits? And then take some time this day to realign your commitments so that you are happy and cheerful in laying up treasures in heaven; in valuing that which you know is eternally valuable.

The third requirement for Christian ministry builds from devotion to God, to renunciation of the world. But then a

#3: Sober Judgment towards one's self. (12:3)

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.

That word “think” is used 3 times in that one verse. So we are encouraged not merely to experience life with God as it happens to us, but to think and make decisions and commitments based upon our thinking of the Gospel in our lives. Let me use an illustration.

Imagine a high school teacher gives a whole week of lectures to her students about the dangers of texting while driving. And throughout the week, that teacher gives statistics, both national statistics as well as local statistics, of what happens to teenagers when they text and drive. That teacher also gives pictorial illustrations of cars that have just been crushed as a result of texting while driving. Those pictures show faces of teenagers who have died as a result. That teacher even brings in a teenager who texts and drives and had this terrible accident, and all that followed as a result of that.

At the end of the week, the teacher asks, “How many of you believe, truly believe, that it is dangerous to text and drive?” And everybody in the class by then says, “You’ve convinced us. It is dangerous to text and drive.” That weekend, one of those students is in a terrible car accident because they were texting and driving. The teacher visits that student in the hospital and says, “I’m so glad that you survived this crash. But I have to ask you... We just had a week of talking about these things. And I remember that you raised your hand. You believed it was dangerous. What happened?” And the student says, “I don’t know. I guess I just wasn’t thinking.” And that’s right!

Romans 12:3 says, “Think, Christian! Think!” Here’s eleven chapters of the Gospel, of how deadly sin is and how glorious God is and how wonderful the love of Christ is and how God has placed us in a mission in this world to bring hope and life to a world that is dark and broken. And now he says, “Christian, think!” You need to think about your own life. Think soberly! Think wisely! Think with an estimation of what you know to be true and then align your decisions, align your life to that. Oftentimes, we simply live our lives without thinking about the truth we affirm. And he says if it’s true that you believe that God is worthy of your worship, that the Gospel is powerful to bring salvation to everyone who believes it, won’t you place your life inside that stream of the church bringing the Gospel to this world?

Paul makes the application directly to Christian ministry then in verses 4-6. So this thinking with sober judgment, he’s saying here’s the application.

4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith;

Think of yourself in relationship to this truth. We're interrelated. We're connected together to be the body of Christ, the physical manifestation of His presence, doing His work. God has given every member a different gift. Let's use them.

In verse 3, Paul says don't let pride take over your thinking. Pride is just simply independence. So don't just start to begin thinking independently of the truth of the Gospel. What happens when we think more highly, independently, pridefully of ourselves? Two things!

1. The Christian who thinks too highly of himself engages with Christian ministry, but in a way that doesn't strengthen the body of Christ.

So they say, "I want this position. I want to do that." And they're really not gifted for it. And so that hinders their participation. He says think soberly, think rightly about all of this regarding the church, the Gospel, but also your own gifting.

2. The Christian who thinks too highly of himself does not engage with Christian ministry because he or she thinks too lowly of the gifts God has given, or too lowly of the work that God has established.

It is a remarkable thing that before this world began, God set aside some specific works for Ritch Boerckel to accomplish in the church, so that we as a church together might fulfill the mission of Christ. What is true of Ritch Boerckel is true of every one of you who are children of God through faith. How do I know that? Because the Bible says that in Ephesians 2:10.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Faith in God believes that God's design for my time, my energy, my life, is eternally significant and satisfying. If I connect to His design, His mission, then I will experience an eternally significant and satisfying life. Faith in God believes that God's design for my life is more satisfying than my own design for my life. Did you catch that? And that's what it means to think with sober judgment. Think rightly! Think with wisdom. I will mess up my life and I will spend it on something that doesn't ultimately matter. And the Day is going to reveal it. That would be tremendously tragic. Think now about God, about His church, about His mission, about His gifting, about His calling upon each one of us, and chase after those works. Because God has ordained them for you and for your joy and for your satisfaction.

Here's the application. Take some time this week to think. Think about God and His calling upon your life. Think about His church and how precious it is. Think about the church where God has placed you. Ask, "How might I stir up love in my church through Christian ministry? Am I doing all that God has prepared beforehand for me to do?" Ask that question. It's a great question, a joyful question!

#4: High Esteem for Christ's church. (12:4-5)

We've read these verses, but we'll read them again.

4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

This analogy of the body reminds us that it is crazy for any one member to think that independently there is any purposeful functioning. It would be crazy, later in 1 Corinthians 12 he says, for an eye to say to the hand, I don't need you, for the foot to say to the hand, I don't need you. (1 Corinthians 12:12-26) That's crazy! The only way an eye has any significant, functioning meaning is its attachment to the body as a whole, and that that body as a whole then would have a purposeful mission or work to accomplish. And that's what God has given us. So let us think soberly and rightly and have a high esteem for Jesus' church.

One of my favorite stories that Daniel Bennett told when he was still here on our staff...He's now a senior pastor of a church that is planted in Washington and doing a very sweet work. But he told about a summer that he spent with his grandma who lives near a lake in Arkansas. He spent the whole summer with her. His grandma is a woman who has such a high esteem for the church and was very committed to the mission of the church and the working of the church. And so that summer, Daniel went to church quite a bit. He went to church on Sunday morning, Sunday night and Wednesday night. And there was an evening where Daniel came to his grandma and said, "Hey, Grandma! Do I have to go to church with you this evening?" And then he decided to put a spiritual spin on it. He said, "I love God, Grandma. And what I really want to do is go out to the lake with my Bible and just read the Bible and pray tonight instead of going to church."

And Daniel said his grandma just stood there and looked at him and tears just began rolling down her face. She didn't say anything. She just was crying. "Grandma, what's wrong?" And she said, "Oh Daniel. I just love Jesus' church so much and I want you to love His church too!" You see, she was a woman who presented her body to God. She was devoted to God and she renounced the world. And so, she was connected then in a right view of her life and what life is all about. She had this high esteem for the church. She traced through Romans chapter 12 in her life. And she wanted that to be part of her grandson's experience as well.

Daniel said, so I went to church with her that night, and it was a prayer meeting. There was a share time, and during the share time, Daniel's grandma stood up. She said, "I have something to share. I just have a praise! I love this church! This evening, before we came here, my grandson told me that he didn't want to go to church." So Daniel of course is slowly sinking underneath the seat. And she said, "My grandson needs to love the church of Jesus, too. I know how important that is in his life." Well Daniel said after the service he had about 200 people come up to encourage him. (Congregational Laughter!)

I love that story because while it was uncomfortable for Daniel, his grandma's right love for God and for His church was communicated in a way that he never forgot what God taught him that night. We would never have become a Christian without Jesus' church, and we will only grow in our faith and worship of God if we joyfully embrace the central place of the church in our lives.

So what's required for Christian ministry? Extreme devotion to God, radical renunciation of this world, sober judgment of our life of what's important, what's satisfying, what's eternally significant, and a high esteem for Jesus' church. The last requirement we're going to spend a whole message just talking about the next time we're together. But I want to read these verses.

#5: Cheerful Use of Spiritual Gifts (12:6-8)

6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

These are gifts that God gives to every member of the church. God is free in the way He distributes these gifts. They're given to every member. He says, "Let's use them." It indicates that it's possible for a believer not to use them. That's why there's an encouragement. Let us use them! A spiritual gift is a divinely given capacity for Christian ministry in the church that connects to Christ's mission so that the church can be the body of Jesus.

Here's the application. Let us pray over God's gifting in our life. Let us ask for the counsel of Godly people to discover ways we can build up the church. And let's begin serving in the church. It doesn't mean just always in the walls of this church, but it's in the church. There's a connection to both ministries inside the walls of the building of the church, but also a connection to the ministry that the church does outside in a lot of other places—schools and downtown missions and all kinds of places. And then finally, trust God with the results of your service.

It's such a blessing to be part of Jesus' family, to say that we are the body of Christ. It's a blessing to be included in a body which is enduring, a body which is set aside to do a work that will never ever lose its glory, lose its luster, lose its joy. And we are part of something which will forever be praised because Jesus is our Head. I want to close by reading a song that John Mark Hall wrote. He was a member of *Casting Crowns*. It's called *The Body of Christ*. It's both convicting and encouraging to me.

*It's crowded in worship today
As she slips in trying to fade into the faces
The girls teasing laughter is carrying farther than they know
Farther than they know*

So that verse speaks of a girl coming to a church. She doesn't know the church. It's her first time there. And she hears some others saying some things about her, pointing out that she maybe is new, maybe odd. The girls in church don't even know that she can hear them but she can, and she's hurt as she comes into the body of Christ. Next verse...

*A traveler is far away from home
He sheds his coat and quietly sinks into the back row
The weight of their judgmental glances
Tells him that his chances are better out on the road*

He's looking for some human connection where there's love. He comes to the church and thinks, "I had better chances at the bar down the street than I would have here." And then the song goes on.

*But if we are the body
Why aren't His arms reaching?
Why aren't His hands healing?
Why aren't His words teaching?
And if we are the body
Why aren't His feet going?
Why is His love not showing them there is a way?*

He ends on this word of hope when he says

There is a way, there is a way

And that's for each one of us to rejoice in being part of the body of Christ and exercising Christian ministry where we are. Not looking to the left or right to see whether others are doing their part. Just looking down and saying, "God, am I connecting to Your mission and to Your work in Christian ministry in my church for the glory of Your Name?" In that manner, there is a way. We are the body!