

Introduction to Romans. Chapters 12-16.

The Practical Section of Romans

Most of Paul's letters can be divided into two basic sections: a doctrinal part and a duty part. Or, a section giving us truth about what God has done for us, followed by a section on how we should respond by living our lives for God. Romans 1-8 is the doctrinal section of the letter. Romans 12-16 is the practical (duty) section of the letter. (Romans 9-11 is a kind of unusual 'parenthesis' dealing with the nation of Israel and their place in God's plan of salvation.)

As you study Romans 12-16 you will see Paul moving through different topics related to living the Christian life. The way we live our lives is our response to God's amazing grace toward us. Obedience is the "Thank You" card that we send to God every day of our lives.

A Living Sacrifice to God. Romans 12.

LAY YOUR LIFE ON THE ALTAR. ROMANS 12:1.

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.

This is a very important passage to open the practical section of Romans. It gives us, in the broadest sense, the idea of how we should respond to God's gift of salvation. Notice the phrase: "because of all He has done for you" in verse 1. We should present our entire lives as living sacrifices to Him because of all He has done for us. Why a living sacrifice? Because God has already provided for us a dying sacrifice – the death of Jesus His Son. So, He does not need us to die for Him; He invites us to LIVE for Him, to give our lives to be used for His purposes . . . all in *response* to His great love and sacrifice for us.

In another letter, Paul put it this way:

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body" (1Corinthians 6:19,20).

You will never make progress in living for God and becoming the kind of person He wants you to be until you make this critical decision about the altar.

The critical decision: Who really owns my life?

If it's God, if your life is laid out on the altar, if you are a living sacrifice, you will make good progress on all the little details. If it's YOU, if you are in charge, if you are lord and master of your own life, if you are not on the altar of total commitment, you will always be hindered in your obedience. You will never mature as a Christian, without the altar.

That's the one challenge about a LIVING SACRIFICE: a living sacrifice can always hop off the altar and run away. That's what a lot of Christians do; they run away from the altar.

Because, you see, with God, OBEDIENCE is not really the issue. SUBMISSION to HIS authority IS the issue. And until you get that right, until you can answer the question rightly – Who is

in charge? – you will never make good progress. If it's about YOU, you will always find a way to live to please yourself, and to avoid, or skirt His will, His asks, His initiatives. If it is about HIM, you will always find a way to live to please Him. The fundamental issue, then, is one of Lordship, not obedience. Who is the LORD of your life? If you are a Christian today, then we all know who your SAVIOR is; but who is LORD of your life?

It's an issue of SURRENDER. Have you fully surrendered your life to Jesus your Master? Or are you still running around deciding everything for yourself?

All true Christians have accepted Jesus as their Savior.

Few Christians truly submit to Jesus as their Lord.

I NEVER have a problem talking to an "on the altar" Christian about doing something for Jesus; or about changing something in their life; or about giving up something. It's so easy, because their HEART is in submission to the Lord. But I ALWAYS have a hard time talking to an un-submitted person about obedience issues, or life-change issues, or give up pornography issues, or Jesus needs some of your time, your talent, your treasure issues, or, you need to stay in your marriage and learn to love your wife well issues . . . it is ALWAYS like pulling teeth because the heart of that person is not yielded to Jesus.

Once Shirley and I made the LORDSHIP decision our senior year at University of Utah, everything else flowed naturally. No one had to talk us into decisions about our lives. We were willing to go anywhere, do anything, be anything. Because we were no longer in charge of our lives. We were living under the authority of Jesus our Master, not just Jesus our Savior. I lived with Jesus as my Savior for several years before I submitted to His Lordship.

So there are really two critical decisions every person needs to make.

1. Will I say "YES" to the man on the cross – the Savior question?
2. Will I say "YES" to me on the altar – the Lord question?

If you say YES to the first question, you become a child of God. You are saved.

If you say YES to the second question, you become a slave of God. You will serve.

With all of your life, all of your decisions, all of your resources, you will serve a new master – the Lord Jesus will be the King of your life from that moment forward.

Have you decided to climb up on the altar and yield your life fully to Jesus as your Lord? It is no small decision. It will be the second most important decision you ever make. It will impact everything you ever do, everything you ever become, everything you ever decide. It will impact all your money, all your mental resources, all your gifts and talents, all your days and hours from here to the finish line. It will impact your marriage, your family, your future generations. The altar is a huge fork in the road, *but it is the critical fork in the road if you every really want to live the life that GOD HAS FOR YOU.*

LET GOD TRANSFORM YOUR MIND. ROMANS 12:2.

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

One of the first things that will happen when you lay your life down as a living sacrifice is that God will ask permission to transform your MIND. The text in v.2 literally reads: "And do

not be conformed to this present world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind . . .” One modern paraphrase reads: *“Don’t let the world squeeze you into its mold.”*

Christians are to be “in the world, but not of the world.” In other words, Jesus left us here to be salt and light. But often the world has a greater influence on the Christian than the Christian has on the world! We are to watch our MINDS closely to make sure we are daily allowing God to *“transform us into new people by changing the way we think.”* God wants to squeeze us into a mold that looks more like Jesus.

What we do with our MINDS has a big impact on our spiritual growth. God wants to transform us by rearranging our minds. This means we need to spend some significant time allowing God’s Word to go deep into our heads. God uses His Word to change us and grow us. (For more discussion of the role the Bible plays in our spiritual transformation, you can consult that excellent, and hard to find book by Robert Shirock: *Transformed by the Renewing of Your Mind*. A very serious method of Bible Study not intended for the faint of heart!)

An interesting side-effect of letting God rearrange your MIND is this: you begin to discover, intuitively, “God will” for your life. It’s right there in verse 2 . . . *“Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.”*

The more God gets a hold of your mind, the more your life runs according to His will for you. The reason for this is simple: So much of God’s will, His values, His priorities, His examples, His warnings are contained in His Word.

On the altar, God asks for the keys to your MIND. He wants to transform your entire way of thinking and viewing both your life and your world. You’ll never discover God’s plan for your life, apart from the altar.

It was AFTER I had fully yielded to Jesus that I began devouring Romans 50 times. It was AFTER I decided that the only way to live life was to follow Him that I decided I needed to be a man of the Word. When you climb up on the altar, you will find a Bible lying right next to you. And you will find the Holy Spirit asking if He can transform your mind, day in and day out for the rest of your life. You will give God the key to your mind.

A second very significant thing will happen to someone whose life is ‘on the altar.’

LET GOD DEVELOP YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFT. ROMANS 12:3-5.

Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don’t think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us. Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ’s body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.

What does Paul mean in verse 3 when he admonishes us not to *“think you are better than you really are”*??? And in the next line, he says: *“measure yourselves by the faith God has given us.”* What is he talking about here?

This is a good example of why it is necessary to pay attention to the context, the surrounding paragraphs. As you read down through the next few verses, it is clear that Paul is talking about using our spiritual gifts in the body of Christ to advance God’s purposes. He will be listing several different “spiritual gifts” in the next few lines, and he is basically saying: IDENTIFY your spiritual gift ACCURATELY with a sense of HUMILITY. Measure your

proper role in the body of Christ according to “the faith (i.e. ‘spiritual gift’) that God has given to you.” The last part of verse 4 clears things up for us: *“Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ’s body. We are many parts of one body . . .”* This is the same language/imagery that Paul uses in 1Corinthians 12. Each Christian is part of a “body,” and we all have a special part to play in the proper functioning of the body.

So . . . the key to living for the glory of God is 1) finding out WHAT PART God intends for you to play in the body, and 2) fulfilling that God-given function with humility, instead of proudly claiming to be something that God didn’t intend for you to be. This is why Paul started this section with the warning against pride. *“Don’t think you are better than you really are.”* It has been a common issue in the body of Christ since the beginning. People see “the more important roles” and then want those roles (or gifts) for themselves. “I want to be a teacher.” “I want to be a worship leader.” “I want to speak in tongues.” “I want to be the leader.” “I want to be the one people come to for wisdom.” On and on the list goes of what people want for themselves in terms or roles in the body of Christ.

The problem with all of the above statements is this: Our gifting is NOT a matter of what WE WANT for ourselves. Our spiritual gifting is sovereignly bestowed upon us by the Holy Spirit, Who is the One directing the construction of the body of Christ. We are His servants and we must exercise the gifting He has placed within us.

Paul put it this way in 1Corinthians:

“To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good One and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills” (1Corinthians 12:7,11).

In Corinth there was a huge problem. People were coveting certain spiritual gifts, most notably the more ‘spectacular’ or ‘important’ gifts (as they measured importance). Paul wrote to them saying that ALL the gifts are necessary and important, especially those gifts that we feel are ‘less important.’ And, Paul said, it is the Holy Spirit, not us, Who determines which person gets which gift. Our job is to find our gift with humility and accuracy, and then use this gift for the glory of God and the building up of the body of Christ. And . . . in the body of Christ, we should NOT give special honor to those parts of the body which WE deem most important. We should give equal honor to ALL the parts, even those that SEEM like the least important.

Let’s see how Paul develops this idea in Romans 12 . . .

In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly (12:6-8).

At the moment you say “Yes” to Jesus as your Savior, the Holy Spirit comes to live inside of you, marking you out as God’s child. But He comes with some bags and in those bags are ‘spiritual gifts’ that He plants inside of you. Then He wants to work with you to develop and deploy those gifts for His purposes.

If your life is submitted to Jesus as Lord, you will be eager and persistent in discovering and deploying your God-given spiritual gifts in the service of your King for the sake of advancing His kingdom.

Paul only mentions a few “spiritual gifts” in this passage. (The other places in the New Testament dealing with gifts are: Ephesians 4, 1Peter 4 and 1Corinthians 12). The gifts he refers to here are just examples of using your gifts with passion for the glory of God:

The gift of prophesy: Speak out your God-given messages with confidence in Him.

The gift of serving: Serve other people well.

The gift of teaching: Work hard to teach others well.

The gift of encouragement: Encourage others well.

The gift of giving: Give well (generously).

The gift of leadership: Take this leadership responsibility seriously (with diligence).

The gift of kindness: Give away kindness with a glad heart.

Paul’s message? WHATEVER spiritual gift God has given to you, fulfill that gift by using it with passion and diligence. God will do this with you, if your life is submitted to Him on the altar. If not, your spiritual gifting will get rusty from lack of use!

Now this brings us to a very practical issue in the body of Christ. The fact is that MOST CHRISTIANS NEVER IDENTIFY OR DEPLOY THEIR SPIRITUAL GIFT inside or outside the church. A vast majority of spiritual gifts are sitting dormant in the pews week in and week out. This means that the “body of Christ” is functioning at only a small percentage of its actual capacity. I would guess that in the strongest of churches, perhaps 50% of “the body” is functioning. If I was the owner of a factory, and we were operating at only 50% of our capacity, I would say there is something wrong.

We need to encourage every believer to IDENTIFY and DEPLOY their spiritual gift for the advancement of God’s work in and through the body of Christ. Imagine the power and potential of any local church if the entire body was functioning properly and working together in harmony!

But the reason to develop your God-given gifts is also a personal issue: The more God develops your gifts, the more your life fulfills His purposes for you.

Guess what: A hammer will never be happy trying to be a saw! A drill will never be happy trying to be a socket wrench. YOU will never be truly happy and fulfilled trying to be ANYTHING OTHER THAN WHAT GOD HAS GIFTED YOU TO BE! If you are serious about finding God’s ‘best’ for your life, start identifying and developing your spiritual gifts.

Before I got on the altar, I was a no talk, no write, no lead, no people kind of person! Now, just about all I’ve been doing for the past 35 years is talking and writing and leading people! All CONTRARY to my natural personality and my natural abilities; but all blooming rather quickly and unexpectedly out of my spiritual gifting, which began to emerge once I climbed on the altar and let God have His way with my life.

Pre-altar I went through 3 majors trying to ‘find my life’ – Veterinary Doctor, Architect and Marketing. One deals with dogs. One deals with bricks. One deals with ads. None deal with talking, writing and leading people toward God. The altar has a strange way of bringing out the real you. How sad that most Christians avoid the altar because they think it will ruin their life . . . when, in fact, it is the only way to FIND your true life.

That’s why Jesus said those strange words:

***“Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me.*”**

If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it" (Mark 8:34,35).

The way to find your best life is to die to your own version of the good life. Get on your cross, which is really an altar, and let God define and unfold your true life.

**See further notes on Spiritual Gifts at the end of this section. These notes will help you understand many of the Spiritual Gifts listed in the New Testament, and perhaps to begin to identify the Spirit's unique gifting in your life.

A HEAD-TO-TOE DESCRIPTION OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER. ROMANS 12:9-21.

In the final part of chapter 12, Paul gives us an extended description of how a Christian should live. Similar lists are found in most of Paul's letters. These lists are helpful tools to evaluate how you are doing as a Christ-follower. God wants to grow us up to make us look more like Jesus Christ. Thus, our *character* is of utmost importance to God. How we live our lives, how we interact with other people, how we use our time, how we conduct our work . . . these are our 'living sermons' that we preach to the world. Take some time to ponder this list and evaluate your own life. Instead of presenting these verses in typical paragraph style, I have broken down Paul's description line by line so that you can see each particular part more clearly. Ask God to show you which character traits He wants to form in your more fully.

- ***Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them.***
- ***Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good.***
- ***Love each other with genuine affection . . . and . . .***
- ***take delight in honoring each other.***
- ***Never be lazy, but work hard . . . and . . .***
- ***serve the Lord enthusiastically.***
- ***Rejoice in our confident hope.***
- ***Be patient in trouble . . . and . . .***
- ***keep on praying.***
- ***When God's people are in need, be ready to help them.***
- ***Always be eager to practice hospitality.***
- ***Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them.***
- ***Be happy with those who are happy . . . and . . .***
- ***weep with those who weep.***
- ***Live in harmony with each other.***
- ***Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people.***
- ***And don't think you know it all!***
- ***Never pay back evil with more evil.***
- ***Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable.***

- **Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.**
- **Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the LORD.**
- **Instead, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads."**
- **Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.**

Now here's the deal with this list. God is NOT asking you to go out and try to look like this. He IS saying: If your life IS on the ALTAR, I get the ownership of your character, and I will start working you over to look like this.

You know, when you sign up at the gym, the trainer holds up a picture and says, this is what I intend to make you look like. If you sign up with me, I'm going to work you over to look like this.

God says, when you get on the altar, this is where we're headed. You're going look like this . . . over time. And you are signing up to give Me the authority to do whatever it takes to get there.

Want to know something interesting? I never spend much time reading, or memorizing, or fixating on the "to do" lists in Paul's letters. I rarely read the list, *and yet I am becoming the list?* How is that? Because the Holy Spirit made that list and the Holy Spirit lives in me and when I submit fully to Jesus the Holy Spirit gets the right to turn His list into my life. So daily I wake up and find that I am in the process of a head-to-toe makeover. My job is to stay on the altar. His job is to make me look like this.

The more God shapes your character, the more your life looks like His image in you.

Sometimes you may wonder why you are not changing; why you are not maturing; why you are not becoming more and more like Jesus; not gaining victory over habits. It's probably because somewhere along the way God brought you to the altar, and you said "No." And that decision has defined your life up to this day. Your mind is not transformed by Him. Your gifts are not developed by Him. Your character is not shaped by Him.

***I will offer one point of clarification on next to last lines of Romans 12. In the New Living Translation, they read: **"If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads."** The context just prior is telling us NOT to take revenge against people who hurt us. So, is Paul saying that by being kind to our enemies (feeding them, giving them a drink) we can "heap burning coals of shame on their heads?" That almost sounds like saying: The way to really get back at an enemy is to be nice to them. Yet, the whole point in the context is that we are NOT to attempt in ANY WAY to 'get back' at an enemy. We are to leave the revenge issue entirely in God's hands. So . . . what IS Paul saying here?

A careful look at a literal translation might help. The words "of shame" are not found in a literal translation. So, it reads: **"If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on their heads."**

Heaping burning coals on a neighbor's head *back then* was actually a kind gesture. Homes were heated by wood or coal fires. If your fire went out, you had to go to a neighbor and ask for some burning coals so that you could re-start your fire. But how does one transport

burning coals? Answer: In some kind of clay firepot. And where might one carry such a firepot when going next door for some live coals? Answer: On the head, just like you see in many ancient pictures. People would carry water pots, food pots, fire pots, etc. on their heads as they moved from market to home, from house to house. So, if your nasty neighbor showed up at your door and asked for some live coals to help restart his fire, you should 1) invite them in for some food, 2) give them a drink to quench their thirst, and 3) send them off with a heap of burning coals on their head. No, you would not be piling “shame” on their head; rather, you would be overwhelming them with the kindness, compassion and forgiveness of Christ.

SUMMARY. ROMANS 12.

The message of Romans 12 is really profound: The key to living for Jesus is NOT obedience; it is submission. It is the altar. Remember, this chapter started with the line: *because of what God did for you...* Because of what God did for us on the cross, He invites us to give our lives back to Him on the altar . . . as living sacrifices.

“Everything about the Christian life flows from the cross, to the altar.”

There is no salvation from Jesus apart from the cross.

There is no real following of Jesus apart from the altar.

You become a child of God there (cross).

You become a slave of Christ here (altar).

I ask you today, the simple question: Is your life on the altar as a living sacrifice? Is your heart fully submitted to the Lordship of Christ over you?

Have you ever said to Him, as the old hymn goes:

Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee. Take my moments and my days; let them flow in ceaseless praise. Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of Thy love. Take my feet, and let them be swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing always, only, for my King. Take my lips, and let them be filled with messages from Thee. Take my silver and my gold; not a mite would I withhold. Take my intellect, and use every power as Thou shalt choose.

Take my will, and make it Thine; it shall be no longer mine. Take my heart, it is Thine own; it shall be Thy royal throne. Take my love, my Lord, I pour at Thy feet its treasure store. Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for Thee.

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL ON SPIRITUAL GIFTS.

Special thanks to Debbie Brunk, our Spiritual Gifts 'guru' at OPC. Debbie not only developed an excellent manual on the topic of Spiritual Gifts, but she has also taught a class for many years, helping people find their unique, God-give SHAPE. Contact the OPC office for more information on Debbie's class.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS DEFINITIONS

Administration

An individual who has the gift of administration will be able to organize information and things to work efficiently in the Body of Christ. Traits that commonly accompany this gift include the ability to organize and systematize. Study the way that Jesus balanced relationships with people and tasks. *"...he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honor the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help. We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men."* 1 Corinthians 8:19-21

Discerning of Spirits

This gift is characterized by the ability to perceive whether a person ministering in God's name is really from God, Satan, or acting out of human power. An individual with this gift can quickly recognize if someone is authentic and honest. Detecting insincerity and bad motives in another person is part of a discerning nature. You need to understand the Biblical difference between judging to condemn and judging to correct with mercy and truth. *"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God; every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God."* 1 John 4:1-3

Evangelist

The gift of evangelism is the ability and drive to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ to those who are not believers. A person with the gift of evangelism has a deep concern for the eternal well-being of others and eternal issues. He has the potential to be bold and confident when talking to others about Christ. Philip, one of Christ's disciples, is an excellent example of an evangelist to study from Scripture. *"But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."* 2 Timothy 4:5

Exhortation

Comfort, encouragement, confrontation, and instruction are vital parts of the gift of exhortation. An exhorter has the ability to motivate people to grow by identifying their needs and guiding them in Biblical truths toward meaningful maturity. Study what the Bible says about the attributes of God and the nature of man, evil and pain - as well as the process of individual change and spiritual development. *"But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness."* Hebrews 3:13

Faith

The gift of faith is the ability to confidently believe God for changes and spiritual growth which will enhance the purposes of God. A person with this gift is quick to believe God for things they may never see. Common traits are optimism and perseverance as well as a tendency to be future and change-oriented. Study the topic of faith from the Scriptures and pray with others who have the gift of faith. Seek to understand the differences between intuition and presumption. *"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."* Hebrews 11:1

Giving

The gift of giving is the ability to determine the physical needs of people and provide physical resources to help meet those needs. The person with the gift of giving may not possess the resources to meet the need, but he or she is motivated to pray and to see that these needs are met. Study to understand what the Bible teaches about possessions, material resources, the poor and giving. *"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed..."* 2 Corinthians 9:8

Healing

The gift of healing displays the ability to call on God to heal the sick by supernatural means. An individual with this gift has the special function within the body as a means of demonstrating the power and glory of God. Study the healing ministries of Jesus and Paul to maximize your exercising of this gift. *"By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see."* Acts 3:16

Helps

An individual with the gift of helps has a remarkable ability to work alongside another and help that person complete the task God has given them. By not carrying the weight of decision making, he or she is set free to help others get the job done. Seek to serve God first. Epaphroditus is a good example from Scripture exercising the gift of helps. *"In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor."* Acts 9:36

Interpretation of Tongues

The gift of interpreting tongues is the ability to understand and communicate the meaning of an unknown language spoken by someone who has the gift of tongues. The best use of this gift is within the corporate worship. Study what the Bible says about the value and dangers of the gift of tongues. Be cautious that maturity rather than divisiveness is the result of the exercise of your gift in the body. *"But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what shall I profit you, unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching?"* 1 Corinthians 14:6

Word of Knowledge

The gift of knowledge is the ability to seek out, remember and make effective use of a variety of information on a number of diverse subjects. Those who have this gift commonly display analytical ability and objective thinking. They enjoy accumulating information, doing research and sharing information with others. It is important

that you have the information available that is relevant to your ministry interests and that you have exposure to decision makers who can use this knowledge. You need to understand both the limitations and benefits of acquiring knowledge. *"Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies."* 1 Corinthians 8:1

Mercy

Perceiving the hurts of people and consoling them without condemnation is the manifestation of the gift of mercy. An individual with this gift can offer comfort to those who are in pain, empathize with them and provide support. Traits that accompany this gift include being perceptive, consoling and non-judgmental. Understand the balance between God's mercy and justice from Scripture. Seek to be exposed to those with the gift of exhortation. *"Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!"* James 1:12-13

Miracles

The gift of miracles gives a person the ability to call on God to do supernatural acts. The best use of this gift is that of believing God for miracles which will bring glory to Him and cause others to consider God's will for their lives. It would be helpful to understand from Scripture God's purposes for performing or withholding miracles. *"I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done - by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ."* Romans 15:18-19

Pastor/Shepherd

Caring for the spiritual needs of a group of people and overseeing their growth in Christ is the gift of pastor/shepherd. An individual with this gift is particularly attuned to the needs of a group of people and able to effectively guide and care for them. Study how God dealt with groups of people and explore Biblical principles of group conflict resolution. (Note: Some consider this to be one gift, pastor-teacher. See Ephesians 4:11) *"...shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock."* Peter 5:2-4

Prophecy

This is the ability to recognize sinful behavior and a driving compulsion to confront individuals, groups and/or cultures. An individual with this gift also perceives the implications and consequences of current actions. He or she tends to recognize errors and to address them. Seek to understand the issue of moral absolutes and relatives from Scripture. It is important that you explore the role of faith in prophecy. Peter and Agabus are examples of this gift of prophecy in the Bible. *"But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort."* 1 Corinthians 14:3

Ruling/Leadership

Motivating others to do God's work while coordinating their efforts and overseeing the big picture is the gift of ruling/leadership. Someone with this gift generally serves others best by

leading them. He tends to be purposeful and to make wise use of the power that comes with his responsibility. He views leading as a way of serving others. God's perspective on leadership, power, submission and serving are areas that you should study from Scripture. It is important that you understand the limits of a spiritual leader's authority. Remember also that God holds you accountable for how you lead the body of Christ. *"Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account."* Hebrews 13:17

Serving

This gift is manifested in the desire to help meet the physical needs of others and a strong ability to identify those needs. An individual with this gift will display an eagerness to serve, an empathy toward those in need and the ability to perceive other's physical needs. It would be profitable to study when and how Jesus said "no" to meeting the physical needs around him. Understand when it is appropriate and necessary for you to receive from others as well as give. *"You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love."* Galatians 5:13

Teaching

The gift of teaching is characterized by the ability to understand and communicate the truth of God in a clear and relevant manner. Learning, researching, communicating and illustrating truth are qualities that an individual will manifest when exercising the gift of teaching. Expose yourself to other teachers and teaching methods. Do a systematic, personal study of Old and New Testaments. *Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly."* James 3:1

Tongues

The gift of tongues is defined as the ability to speak a language, known or unknown, without prior knowledge of that language. This gift is best used in private worship for personal edification. It is also effective when sharing Christ to non-Christians in a language they can understand. Avoid using the gift of tongues in public worship without interpretation. It is important to understand the Scriptural teaching on tongues and how it benefits or hinders the furtherance of the gospel. *"They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Jews? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?"* Acts 2:3-8

Word of Wisdom

The gift of wisdom is the ability to discern applicable principles from God's word for complex situations. Characteristic traits of the gift of wisdom include the ability to synthesize, the capacity to design and a love of studying. The broad study of Scripture in order to understand a Biblical worldview is imperative in developing this gift. You should have broad exposure to people and ideas. You also should cultivate relationships with decisions makers. Paul, as the writer of Romans, is a good example from Scripture of the gift of wisdom. *"But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere."* James 3:17

SPIRITUAL GIFTS IN ACTION

One advantage of understanding spiritual gifts is applying it to group dynamics. Since we often respond to situations out of our own giftedness, we can therefore assume that people will react uniquely to a given situation based on their different gifts. That is exactly what happens in ministry teams, meetings, committees, or basically whenever two or more people get together. Consider the following situation . . .

Imagine there is a bus full of Christians and it breaks down in the middle of nowhere. Assuming the passengers represent a variety of spiritual gifts, this is how they might respond to the given situation:

Administration: "Does anybody know where the insurance and maintenance manuals are?" (Motivation: to solve the problem using practical means)

Evangelism: "I'll share Christ with the bus driver." (Motivation: to share the gospel)

Exhortation: "What a chance to exercise patience!" (Motivation: to encourage others how this can be an opportunity for spiritual growth)

Giving: "Let's take up a collection to get the bus fixed." (Motivation: to meet financial needs)

Leadership: "Paul, John, and Frank, come and give me a hand with this transmission." (Motivation: to lead by example and to accomplish the goal)

Prophecy: "If somebody would have checked this bus thoroughly before we left, we would not be in this mess." (Motivation: to confront the problem and avoid a similar future mishap)

Mercy: "It's not the bus drivers fault that this bus broke down." (Motivation: to relieve embarrassment)

Miracles: "Let's pray for a plane." (Motivation: to believe in miracles)

Shepherding (Pastor/Teacher): "Don't worry, everything is going to be OK." (Motivation: to encourage the flock)

Teaching: "Three things that we can learn from this is" (Motivation: to look for practical lessons)

Discernment: "I should have known this was going to happen!" (Motivation: to intuitively sense the problem before it is evident to others)

Knowledge: "I once read you can overhaul a transmission with just a screwdriver." (Motivation: to apply knowledge learned through study)

Helps/Service: "I'll hand you a screwdriver." (Motivation: to meet practical needs) **Faith:** "I know you can fix this transmission with the screwdriver!"

(Motivation: to exercise faith in the impossible)

Wisdom: "In the future, we should get the bus serviced before we leave on our trip." (Motivation: to apply practical wisdom)

Reference: *BreakThru - A Spiritual Gifts Diagnostic Inventory*; LEAD Consulting, P.O. Box 32026, Raleigh, North Carolina 27622.