

Please open your Bibles to Romans 12, if you have them. Good to be here with you guys. I'm going to try to, in our short time here, give you four quick things that will be helpful for you in terms of thinking of your place in the body of Christ. Not here to share something that is artistic or charismatic. I want to share something that I think is helpful, and I'm trying to think back to my time at your age and place. When I was a young person in college who wanted to serve the Lord and follow him and the types of things that would have been helpful maybe for me to hear then and think about then. There are four main passages in Scripture that give us some input in terms of our spiritual gifts and our place in the body of Christ. Whether sign gifts are for today, you can work out with your pastors and professors. I'm just going to go on to the practical things that I think we can all take from and learn from. Let me pray quickly, and then we'll look at this passage.

Heavenly Father, we commit this time to you, and we ask that you would give us eyes to see, ears to hear, and heart to understand your word. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

We're not going to be able to read all of these passages, but Romans 12:3-8 is one of the first passages. Paul says this, verse 3, "For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. As we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace given to us, let us use them." And he begins then to list a number of gifts.

So the first thing we see here, and that I just want to point out is, there's a difference between thinking of ourselves too highly and thinking of ourselves soberly. Sometimes we can think that not thinking of ourselves at all is the most spiritual thing. But Paul says there's a wrong way to think about yourself and a right way to think about yourself. The wrong way to think about yourself is to think of yourself too highly, and we all understand that. We don't like somebody who's braggard or imagines they are more than they are. But Paul doesn't say then to not think about yourself. He says, What we need to do is think about ourselves soberly. It wouldn't have been humble for Paul the apostle to say he wasn't an apostle. He was. In fact, he needed to think of himself that way. That was the gift and measure of grace God had given him. If he didn't recognize what God had given him, he wouldn't have known how to play the role he was supposed to play. I say that in maybe immediate context for you. One of the things you want to do as you serve God and find yourself in the body of Christ is to think of yourself soberly.

There was a guy named Harold St. John, lived in England, and he was actually in business, worked in the banking world, really wanted to serve God. Always stirred up by stories of missionaries. Very committed to the Lord, very disciplined, set up his life so that he could travel to Brazil and become a missionary then. Him and his family lived in pretty rough circumstances. He did that to go around and to share the gospel. He went to these various rural areas and he was sharing the gospel. There was very little fruit. Real guy filled with the spirit, loved God, sharing the true gospel, not much happening. But when they would find these little groups of Christians, they would gather together and he would teach the Scripture, and God always blessed it.

A few months in, he realized, God, I've always wanted to be this missionary evangelist, but that's apparently not what you call me to do. It's not blessed when I do that. But every time I sit down with a group of Christians or these pastors that didn't have much resource, he became a blessing to them. He had then, as he figured that out and he thought of himself soberly, a large itinerant Bible teaching ministry and became probably the man that they say knew the Bible best in his generation.

For you and I, as you serve God, you should think of yourself soberly. You might even have a great desire to serve God and jump in and serve somewhere. But if you see that's not really working, you don't have to press it. You could just acknowledge and say, Okay, Lord, maybe you have a different way for me to serve you. Maybe it looks like something else in my life. And I need to see myself soberly, where my gifts are, what type of measure of grace God has given me, and then use those gifts to serve him. Step out and put them into practice.

We are all, as Paul writes in here, different on purpose. My differences make me independent, individual, but also dependent and connected. I thank the people that I came up here and did worship because I have no gifts in that arena. I meet other people who are gifted in those arenas. I'm blessed by other people in the body of Christ that are different, that have a huge evangelistic zeal, that serve in certain ways, that administrate in various ways, to see those differing gifts. We need those things. They need to be embraced. I need to think of myself soberly in relation to where God has placed me. That will help you fit into your place in the body of Christ.

If you would then go to 1 Corinthians 12. Flip to the right a little bit. I'm going to make this really easy. All you got to do is flip right. 1 Corinthians 12 through 14, probably the most well-known section that talks about the body of Christ, the spiritual gifts. Again, I just want to make one point in this section with the time that we have, particularly from verse 26. Look at what it says there, "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it, or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it." God has put you in the body of Christ. Verses 7, verses 11, verses 18, say the Holy Spirit has chosen each of us, put us in the body of Christ, and it pleased him to make you who he made you. You might ask why you are the way you are or how God has made you. Whatever he made you is pleasing to him. You are an individual essential part of the body of Christ.

One of the lies out there is, other people can do stuff and You don't matter that much. Or maybe the pastor matters a lot, or a missionary, or the evangelist person, but the other things don't matter that much. Every member of the body of Christ matters, and we all, he says, suffer or are honored together. Very easily, he gives a picture of a human body. You have all types of things in your human body that are essential to you that you do not think of whatsoever on a regular basis. If your pituitary gland got messed up today, you would be having a bad day. You don't think about your pituitary gland. You don't think about the things that pump hormones and chemicals through your body. You don't think about most of your body. Maybe you think about your fingernails in terms of cosmetics, but if you lost a fingernail, you had that ripped off somewhere, you would say, Man, I wish I had that fingernail back. This is very sensitive here. The body of Christ and the way it works together, all of it will always respond together. As it should. My health matters to you and your health matters to me. I've done this long enough that I have seen that on a very real basis. It's not blowing smoke here.

There was a youth leader, when I was a young man in high school ministry who served, he was just a helper, eventually he went and planted a church. He ended up sending his kids to the school that I oversee and I'm part of at our church, and our youth ministry. So that guy, when he was a youth leader, didn't think the kid just sitting in a bunk at a retreat or something is going to be a kid that one day is ministering my family in important ways. But that's how it plays out. I have done youth ministry long enough that a couple of my younger siblings, spouses, ended up coming through our youth ministry. The people that they married were a part of it. I didn't think, as I'm ministering to people's kids, I'm ministering to a future family member.

You and your health in the body of Christ matters to me. People I love that I want to see saved might be connected to you somewhere. You might be their leader on a retreat. You might be their small group leader. People in our fellowship that aren't a part of your fellowship are going to have loved ones that work with you or are connected with you or sitting next to you somewhere. They're going to be praying that somebody ministers to them or points them to Christ. And your health matters. If you aren't healthy, all of us hurt. It's a lie to think your spiritual life doesn't matter. If one member is honored, we're all honored. If one member suffers, we all suffer. Like one part of the body affected, the whole body is affected. Don't think that your spiritual health doesn't matter. It does. It matters to all of us.

Ephesians 4, if you go to the right. Ephesians 4. Ephesians 4 is another one of those main sections. I have till 36, right? 11: 36? Yes. Okay, great. I got to get you out of here on time. Ephesians 4. Paul in Ephesians 4 says two things, one as we're probably familiar with in verse 4. He says, "There is one body and one spirit, just as you are called in one hope of your calling. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is above all and through all and in you all." There is one body of Christ. If you're a believer, you are the body of Christ. The body of Christ is unified, not because of what we do, but because of what he has done.

I think this is just a simple point. There's always talk of unity in the body of Christ, which is a lot of it is okay. Some of it is not. It is unity outside of the body of Christ, outside of the truth God or through another gospel or something like that. But if I'm really a believer, you guys probably come from all different church backgrounds here, all different scenarios. If you're born again and I'm born again, we are the body of Christ. I don't make the unity, I am called to recognize the unity. Does this make sense? I don't have to create connection within the body of Christ. God has already connected me to you through making us believers, brothers and sisters, for all eternity. Which means my job is not to create it. My job is to recognize the unity God has already created and to love you and treat you like that. We are the body of Christ. It's one body, one Lord, one Father of us all. So as I connect with the body of Christ, I need to recognize there should be a team spirit here. Not against you, not competing with you. I'm on your side. I need you to be your best, to follow the Lord the best you can. I'm connected with you in that purpose.

Even the correction that happens, Paul wrote plenty of corrective letters in the New Testament. It was because he was connected to those people. That's why he wanted to see them following the Lord truly and rightly. The people that are around you aren't just random people. You should think of them as your brothers and sisters in Christ. If I do that, then I will live in a way, as Paul begins to talk about here, where I seek to edify and build them up. I do that through, look at verse 7, "But to each one of us, grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift." Then he speaks then about how that plays out, and every joint, every ligament is supposed to provide a certain amount of help. I can't get into that, but the point I do want to make from this section is this. Whatever God has gifted you with, however he's built you to be a part of the body of Christ, however he has made you to edify others, it is a measure of Christ's gift of grace to you from verse 7.

What I mean by that is this. When Jesus Christ has a heart because he sees lost people for them to receive the gospel, he gives someone the gift of evangelism. It is his heart extended to them. When Jesus Christ sees his lost sheep in the world and has compassion on them, he gives them shepherds after his own heart. He gives the gift of pastor-teacher so that those people can be built up in him and edified in him. When Jesus Christ sees people who need mercy, he makes a merciful person by giving them his own grace. As he would have Have mercy, he wants you to have mercy. He gives people the gift of helps or administration. God wants his resources taken care of in the right way. He extends a gift of his own grace to that person. So I say that to say, if what God has given us is a gift of his own grace, number one, I should never complain about my spiritual gift. How could I complain about the character of Jesus Christ? It's like saying, I don't like how merciful Jesus is. I'd rather be like a different type of Jesus.

They're all gifts of his grace. Number two, I don't deserve any of them. None of us deserve any of the life of Christ. We're all sinners saved by grace. Number three, I shouldn't be jealous or envious of the other gifts I see displayed because it's the life of Christ being expressed, and I should just want more of the life of Christ being expressed. I should want to see more of him in the world. So whatever God has given you, it is very easy, particularly in our world with social media and whatnot, to feel like I need to be doing something more. I need to be doing something bigger. Or we see all these people that have pretty incredible gifts, and you just think, Man, I don't have a gift like that. That's okay. Don't feel pressured. Whatever you've been given is literally a measure of Christ's own grace extended to you. The fact that any of us get to live out any of that in our lives is a blessing. I don't choose. He chooses. He chooses what our place is. We're not all supposed to be Billy Grahams. We're not all going to be John Pipers or something like that.

We all have our spot in the body of Christ. He's made us all different on purpose, and we're all unique, and we all work together. We should never look down on a gift that God would give us, to think like, That gift's important, but mine... Administration, it's not as important as evangelism or this. It's like saying one part of Jesus is more important than another part of Jesus. No, I should recognize, Lord, this is your life in me, and I want to live it out the way that you've given me to live it.

Last place, if you would, 1 Peter 4. Flip to the right. Again, if you want to think of these a little bit more, you can. I'd encourage you to do that on your own. 1 Peter 4, look at verse 10. Peter will say this, "As

each one has received a gift, minister it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God, many-colored grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it with the ability God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the Dominion, forever and ever. Amen."

Peter here gives us another hint that I think is very important. He says, If we minister, our spiritual gifts are for each one has received the gift, notice, to minister it to one another. This is a very practical thing. If you're like, Okay, Mike, I get it. I want to find out what my spiritual gift or what my place in the body of Christ is. How do I do that? What does that look like? I don't know, really, what it looks like for me. Other people, maybe it's clear. But for me, I'm not really sure. Well, here's a little clue. Our spiritual gifts are not given to us for us. They help build us up. But my spiritual gifts have been given to minister to others. So if I isolate myself from the body of Christ, or I only connect with the body of Christ to minister to myself, I'm not around the body of with the intent to edify and minister to others, I will never find my spiritual gift. Because it's not for me, it's for others. I'm supposed to benefit others. Now, I'm blessed as I benefit others. Proverbs say, he who waters will himself be watered.

But I'm not going to find it if I just go and try to isolate from other people the body of Christ that my gift is meant to minister to, or only do the things that I think will make me happy.

I know this seems like a typical thing a preacher would say. But when I was growing up, I was not an outgoing person. I played sports, kept to myself. I never shared publicly or openly until I was a senior in high school where our youth leader was like, You've been here forever. You got to have something worth saying at this point. And I had me do a little devotional thing at a retreat. This was not a typical thing I would do. It wasn't until I was put in a position to try to minister to others that it started to maybe become clear. And it wasn't until that continued that it did become clear, All right, this is the way I serve the Lord. I did some other things that was pretty obvious. That's not how I serve the Lord. That's obviously not blessed as I do that thing. So if we focus ourselves, we're never going to find that.

I don't know. Sorry if I'm not going to professors academics here or something, but I don't know if any of you have ever done this thing. When I was in school, they had a spiritual gift test, and they would hand you a sheet of paper. On that sheet of paper, it was a bunch of questions about you, and you would fill out the answers. Then based off your answers, they would say, Here's your spiritual gifts. I don't know if it was because I was an independent person or something like that, But my sheet said that my spiritual gifts were celibacy, martyrdom. Yeah, I'm married with kids. I guess I could still be martyred, technically, and something else. That's not the way you find your spiritual gifts. You don't answer questions about yourself. That's not the way it works. The way it works is you go and serve people. You look to minister to others.

When I ran youth ministry, and our church still does this, we go and we do a camp. We call it Coatsville. We bring in some underprivileged kids, and our high schoolers are counselors for the younger kids for a week. One of the things we always say is, Look, we are not going to be loved. We are going to love. We are not going to be served. We are going to serve. We're not looking to receive ministry, we are going to give ministry. If you can't enter into the body of Christ and think, I am here not to receive love, but to love. I am not here necessarily to be minister. I'm here to minister. I'm not just here for me. I am here for others. You're going to have a really hard time finding out what your spiritual gift is. And there's a lot of people that struggle with this because of how self-focused they are. Peter says, If we've received, minister to one another. That's who your gift is for. You need to be plugged in at your church. You need to be serving a group of people. You need to go to an arena and not just think, What does their coffee shop or music or pastor do for me? You need to show up and say, How can I serve? Very practically. If you to find out what your spiritual gifts are, go to your pastors or ministry leaders and say, How can I serve?

I doubt there's a single church represented that doesn't need help somewhere. Often people would come to me and say, Hey, Mike, do you need help? You got a ministry going on. Is there something you really need? Sometimes there would be, but most of the time I would say, Why don't you serve and we'll find out? Because often people had gifts that I didn't even know would be something we

would need. They would come in and begin to serve and I'll say, Oh, man, that was a great idea, or, Way to go right here, or, I never thought about that. Their gifts became apparent in ways that I am not called to be. Nobody can do everything. God has designed it that we would be dependent upon one another. If you want to find out what your spiritual gifts are, you have to know how they work. The way they work is they minister to others. So go plug in with others with the intent to serve others, not just to be served. That's very important here that Peter wants us to see. I think it's an important question, am I the type of person that needs ministry or am I ready to give ministry?

It's not bad to need ministry. There are people that are just saved, just coming out of the world, going through really difficult things. There's often individuals in our church who we'll talk to and say, You know what? Why don't you just come and be ministered to for a bit. Maybe they're coming out of a cult or some crazy background, and they've been used to being pushed to serve in certain ways. We'll say, Just rest here for a bit. Just get ministered to. That's all right. There's places in our lives where we're at the place where we need ministry. At the point that needs to be the focus. Everybody needs it to a point, but there's places where that needs to be the focus. I need to grow. But then there comes a point where the person who's had spiritual life invested in them is ready to give, is ready now to pour back out, and their next stage of growth is going to come through their willingness to serve. You're a member of the body of Christ. You are an essential member of the body of Christ. You should look at yourself soberly. What gifts has God given you?

Where do you find the blessing? You could be a person who really wants to do one thing, and you might find that's not what God has called you to. Maybe you're like, Man, I just want to be a pastor. But really, God designed you for a professor-type arena. Man, Lord, I really want to serve in this way. But it can seem like God has given you some gift. It's maybe not as public. Maybe you're an intercessor. There's a pretty famous intercessor who was a missionary, and they called him Praying Hyde. Praying Hyde wanted to go be a missionary, got sick, got laid up, and because he couldn't do anything else, just started praying for the other missionaries in his arena, and God started blessing in incredible ways. He began to realize, Maybe this is what you call me to, Lord. When he began to pray, instead of go out with some of the other missionaries, a bunch of other missionaries began to get angry at him like he was doing nothing. But then God made it evident, Man, when this guy starts praying, things happen. It wasn't very public. In fact, that was even his heart.

For a while, he felt like, Am I doing the right thing? But he began to soberly think about his place in the body of Christ and to live that out. God's hand of blessing was on it, on both him and the people he was ministering to.

When you can soberly take that position, you are going to be an essential part of the body of Christ, and it will all work together. Just like a human body, all works together. If you woke up this morning and you were in the dark and you were walking and you slam your toe on a dresser, what does your toe and body do? Does your toe have a mouth? No, it does not. So what happens? Well, God willing, it does not. It's Halloween, maybe it does for the day or something. But your actual mouth says what your toe cannot not say. And hopefully your toe has a clean heart, so only clean things come out of your mouth, right? Your leg picks your toe up towards the rest of your body. Your fingers come down like, We're just going to be there with you, right? You It's all on your bed.

Your butt's like, I got you. The rest of your body all reacts. It needs to be healthy. It needs to work together. The whole thing is always going to work together. You are an essential part. If part of that body is hurting, the rest of the body reacts. That's how it always works. It's supposed to work that way because we're the body of Christ. We are all connected, whether we want to realize it or not. What I'm supposed to realize is that I don't need to create the unity in the body of Christ. I just need to recognize it, the unity God has already created eternally. I do that by embracing the gift that Christ has given to me. This is a measure of his own grace. Jesus wants to live his life When another Christian loves me, Christ is loving me through them. It's a blessing. I should never complain about it. If it's true, I never have to worry about anybody stopping it. We call them spiritual gifts, which means if it's spiritual, it's supernatural, not natural. Which means if it's supernatural, no natural man can stop it. Always be careful of a person who's complaining that their spiritual gifts have been hindered by man. Because if a human being can hinder my spiritual gift, it's not very spiritual. Who could stop Moses

from being Moses? Who could stop Peter from being Peter? What human being could stop John the Baptist from being John the Baptist? We're not going to let you preach in the synagogue. He's cool in the wilderness. If God is working through an individual, no human being can stop or limit that individual. God will use your gift. It's his, and he wants to work through you. We should never complain about that. We should never look down on it. I can't complain about the life of Christ in me. It's a gift.

The last thing is the manifold grace of God, as Peter says, the many-colored grace. It looks like so many different things in so many different lives. It is meant to minister to one another. Again, in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul says that gift of the spirit is given to profit with all, everyone else. The gift given to me is for the profit of everyone else. If I'm not with everyone else or seeking to bless everyone else, I'm going to have a really hard time trying to figure out what the gift God has given me is.

I'm going to take for granted that I think most of you here are the type of people that are like, Yeah, I do want to serve the Lord, whatever arena he's putting me into. I don't want to just be a pew potato. I want my life to matter to the body of Christ. Hopefully, some of these things are just practical ways that you can think through how that will work out in your life. Let me pray, and then you can head out of here.

Heavenly Father, I thank you for each of these, my brothers and sisters here. I pray that you would bless them today. I pray that they could go truly and sincerely, Lord, gladly and joyfully, stepping into the place that you've designed for each of them. Where, Lord Jesus, they need to learn what that looks like, I pray that you would teach them. You're the God of our salvation. You saved us, and you're going to finish the work that you've begun in each of us, and you're going to lead us and teach us your ways. I ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.