

**“Getting Stronger”**  
**Romans 1:11-12; 12:3-8**

Freestyle... God wants you to get stronger. Wherever you are, he has more for you...

But this strength, not only comes directly from his gracious hand, it also flows from his hand through others...

As we continue our “Same God” series today,

**The Point: Use your spiritual gifts to strengthen others.**

After opening with a majestic word of greeting in vv. 1-7, Paul thanks God for the faith of these Roman followers of Jesus. He then highlights his constant prayers for them, specifically “asking that somehow by God’s will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.”

Why did Paul want to see them?

**Romans 1:11-12 (text displayed)**

**1. Encourage others through your spiritual gifts. (1:11-12)**

<sup>11</sup>For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift

We should attempt to feel what Paul feels.

- Have you ever wanted something so bad that you thought about it constantly?
- Have you ever felt an internal pull so deep that it made your soul ache?
- The word “long” here means to “deeply desire.” It could be translated, “crave” or “yearn.”
- Paul *really, really* wanted to spend time with these believers in Rome.

Why? “That I may impart to you some spiritual gift.”

- When Paul says “spiritual gift” here, what does he mean? Paul uses two words together here: *pneumatikon* (that which is “spiritual” or “belonging to the Spirit”) and *charisma* (referring to a gracious gift, freely given).
- What might he be referring to?
  - While Paul could be speaking of a general spiritual blessing (cf. Romans 6:23), he seems to be referring to the same gifts of the Spirit we will see in Romans 12 (as well as 1 Corinthians 12-14 & Ephesians 4),
  - We know Paul was gifted by God to preach the gospel, another spiritual gift not technically mentioned in the gift lists, but highlighted in verses 13-15 & Ephesians 3:7-8 .
  - Paul was a gifted apostle, leader, and teacher. He had other gifts like faith and healing.
- He likely says “*some* spiritual gift” to leave it open ended, as he could not be sure of the ways God would use him there.

He says this will happen through “imparting” it to them. Does Paul mean that he is going to give them a spiritual gift for them to exercise? While all gifts of *the Spirit* are given ultimately by God, there may be times when God chooses to distribute a gift during a time of prayer or prophetic affirmation. Paul talks about Timothy receiving a gift when he and the council of elders laid their hands on him and prayed for him (cf. 1 Tim 4:14 & 2 Tim 1:6).

That said, that does not seem to be what Paul refers to here. A better translation would be “share.” That seems pretty clear because he talks about mutual sharing in verse 12.

In any case, we discover his ultimate goal at the end of verse 11 and into verse 12.

“to strengthen you— that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.”

Recognizing our weakness is actually a place of freedom. It’s okay to be weak. It’s okay to feel like you don’t have what it takes (Moms).

- God knows we are weak. That’s why he wants to give us his strength. That’s why he wants us to strengthen one another. Life is hard. Ministry is hard. These Romans Christians were under persecution. They needed encouragement!
- To encourage someone is to come along side them, to speak words of life, to embody Christ in such a way that experienced a strengthening in their souls. Encouragement actually pours courage and confidence into us.
- That’s what spiritual gifts do! They strengthen and encourage people.

But I love how Paul says, “this is a mutual thing.” You’re going to be encouraged, but I’m also going to be encouraged! Look at the end of verse 12. He emphasizes *their* faith, listing it first: “that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, *both YOURS and mine.*”

Consider Paul’s attitude and expectation.

- His attitude: I’m coming to give. I’m coming to bless somebody. I’m coming to offer help and strength.
  - We all tempted to constantly put ourselves first. You’ve experienced our culture’s consumeristic mindset creeping into our faith journey.
  - What would happen if we all showed up on Sunday, at Groups, around lunch tables and in the workplace saying: “I’m coming to give!”?
  - God gave you gifts to share them, liberally and frequently!
  - That was his attitude. What was..
- His expectation: You’ve got something for me! I need to be strengthened by you! Encouragement will be a two-way street. If this does not highlight the truth that God can and wants to use anyone in the life of anyone, I don’t know what does?!
  - Paul knew these everyday followers of Jesus were going to bring him spiritual strength and spiritual benefit through their faith and their gifts.
  - He is saying the work of the Spirit is equally present in these Roman Christians.
  - Think of the person whose walk with God you respect the most. If you were to spend time with them, your faith and gifts hold the potential to strengthen them!
  - This is the beauty of the church. There is a reciprocity, a mutuality, a constant, ever-flowing exchange of strength as we spend time together, centered around a common faith, in a common Lord.

I love how George Knight puts it: “We need to see the church not in terms of greater or lesser members but as a mutual-enhancement society in which every person is servant and teacher to each of the others.”

Consider how you’re serving others!

We keep each other going! So many people, including pastors are disconnecting, even dropping out of the race... We have to strengthen one another.

## **Romans 12:3-8 (text displayed)**

### **2. Serve others with humility through God’s grace. (12:3-8)**

Paul was always talking about grace. Everything in our lives is a result of God’s grace!

He moves immediately to what grace looks like as they serve together. First...

1) We serve with humility.

- He says we should think about ourselves with “sober judgment, not more highly than we ought to think.”
- An accurate view of the person in the mirror is delivered not by looking in the mirror but by looking up to God!
  - God is the giver of our salvation (Romans 1-11).
  - God is the giver of every spiritual gift.
  - God is even the giver of our faith to exercise those gifts. That’s the end of verse 3: “each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”
- This brings us to the second truth I want you to see...

2) Everything act of service is an act of faith.

- After Paul speaks of the measure of faith God assigns, he immediately talks about how God has gifted us differently.
- That’s why I believe verse 3 addresses how we serve. We serve in faith!
- When we serve depending on God to work in the moment of opportunity! We all have different levels of faith, but all of our faith is a gift from God. Even the same person will experience different varying measures of faith on different days.
- This dispels the myth, as Pastor Reddy pointed out last week, that spiritual gifts are static, always operating with the same level of intensity and strength. God’s work in us and through us is dynamic! That’s why we seek to continually be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18)

As we recognize God’s grace, the goal is that we would step out in faith and use our gifts! Like Peter in 1 Peter 4:10-11, Paul is saying, “Don’t let your gifts get dusty!! Serve with everything you’ve got! Watch your faith get stronger! Watch the exercise of your gifts become more effective!”

Paul then goes on to name some of the ways God gifts his people in verses 6-8.

Remember, this not an exhaustive list. These are just some of the ways God gifts his people to strengthen others. Just as we looked at APEST gifts and speaking and serving gifts, we are going to look at even more gifts in the coming weeks. Today, I want to make sure we understand prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, and mercy.

**Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:6-8)**

- **Prophecy: speaking a message given spontaneously from God**
  - Prophets speak words of life God gives on the spot.
  - Sometimes these are words relevant to that precise moment. Sometimes they are words that address the future. At all times, they are expressions of God’s knowledge of us and HIS LOVE FOR US!
  - Often times, prophetic words come during or in the form of prayer. Many times in the past, on Sundays or in small groups, people have sensed things, heard things, seen things from the Lord that spoke directly and so specifically to a person that they walked away and said: “I know that’s from God!” I heard another testimony like this from one of our Community Groups last week!
  - Paul says, when we prophesy we should do so in “proportion to our faith,” by which I think the means, in proportion to the confidence and assurance that what we say is truly from God. (Storms, 284) That’s why it’s often helpful for prophets to preface their words with, “I believe God wants me to share this with you...”
  - In any case, the person or group of people who receive it, must weigh it and prayerfully discern if it is accurate and how God wants to strengthen them through it. 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21 says, “Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good.”

- **Service: giving time and energy to meet the needs others**
  - When you see people sacrifice their time with joy...
  - When you see people move quickly to meet needs around them..
  - When you see people show up, break a sweat, but not desire an ounce of credit...
  - YOU MIGHT BE WATCHING someone with the gift of service.
  - Our church is loaded with servants, people like our Venue Team Director Tim Tran, who embodies the words of Jesus, "The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve!"
  - If you love to give of your time and energy to meet the needs of others, you might have the gift of service.
  
- **Teaching: explaining God's truth with clarity and relevance**
  - Teachers take words, concepts, and lessons and communicate them in a way people understand.
  - Teachers also help people see why it matters.
  - They reflect Jesus as he explained the words of Scripture and told parables, "The kingdom of heaven is like... the kingdom of God is like..."
  - I think about Emma Lombard, one of our members who pursued theological education so that she could grow in her walk with God and serve more effectively in the life of our church. Every summer she leads a Women's Bible Study and teaches with excellence (there's another one starting in a few weeks!). But it's not just there... she loves to teach in one on one settings and bring her insights into Community Group. Thank you, Emma, and many women and men like you! (It's not just the pastors who teach!)
  
- **Exhortation: urging people toward God's path**
  - Those with the gift of exhortation are great encouragers. In fact, some translations translate this word as "encouragement." But exhortation is encouragement with a sense of urgency.
  - They passionately urge people to live what they know to be true.
  - Pastor Steve Agboola, who we sent to Springfield to start a new church, has the gift of encouragement or exhortation. It's hard to think of a time you're around Steve when he's not lovingly urging people to follow God's path for their lives!
  
- **Giving: sharing material resources to meet needs**
  - This can certainly include money, but it's not limited to financial resources.
  - Givers share money and whatever they have, as Paul says, "with generosity."
  - Those with the gift of giving would gladly give you the shirt off their back.
  - They willingly make sacrifices so that others have what they need!
  - I'm not going to name names, but I can think of two different people in our church with the gift of giving. It chokes me up because one is quite wealthy and one lives on the other end of the economic spectrum, but God's heart is equally thrilled when he sees them do what they do!
  
- **Leadership: influencing others toward a common vision**
  - Leaders see a preferred path ahead. They not only have a sense of where people need to go but the passion to communicate that vision in a compelling way.
  - Leaders love to include others. They know how to build teams, invite people in, build confidence in the strategic mission God has given us.
  - I think about Jesus empowering the 72 in Luke 10, not only giving them a vision of the kingdom, not only speaking words of confidence into their hearts, but then affirming them and giving them an even bigger vision when they returned about the kingdom advance (Satan falling like lightning) but even more that this was all about growing closer with God (Nevertheless, do not rejoice that the demons are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.)
  
- **Mercy: offering compassionate help to those suffering**

- Last week, we commissioned our foster care team who care for children in need. I'm sure many of them have the gift of mercy.
- Like the Good Samaritan, people with the gift of mercy feel such a deep level of compassion that it moves them to action. It moves them to go the extra mile. It moves them to speak up for others in need.
- I think about many in our church, who speak up for the unborn. They understand every life, from the moment of conception to our dying breath, is a gift from God.
- There are many others in our church working in the ministries of food insecurity and racial justice. They are people who care for refugees, the homeless, and those battling addiction.

Do you see how important it is to be a church FULL OF EMPOWERED PEOPLE GIFTED BY GOD FOR THE GOOD OF OTHERS?

We need prophets and servants and teachers and exhorters, and givers, and leaders, and people loaded with compassion to not only meet needs but also set an example to the rest of us. Why? We all have the opportunity to speak words of life and give and encourage and show mercy!

I'm so thankful for the ways my mother poured these qualities into me. I'm so thankful for how Marsha and the mothers of our church teach, lead, encourage, give, and extend mercy.

Somebody look at a MOM and say, "You got ALL seven!"

Ok, that is likely untrue!

### **Tool: "Three Answers & Actions for Discovering Your Gifts"**

This simple tool flows from the conviction that gifts are best discovered by serving in community over time. While "Spiritual Gifts Tests" can help people consider their gifts through a series of questions, we believe serving in community over time is an essential and more helpful approach.

#### **Answer Three Questions**

When you serve...

1. ... How are you particularly effective? (Fruitfulness)
2. ... What are you passionate about? (Fulfillment)
3. ... When do others recognize and point out God's grace in you? (Affirmation)

#### **Take Three Actions (and Journal them for Reflective Learning)**

1. Pray: Ask God to reveal how he has gifted you. Ask him to empower you the gifts you already recognize. What gift(s) do you desire? Ask!
  - Journal through this: write out prayers (short or long). Record how God is speaking to you by his Spirit throughout the week
2. Serve: We will not know if we possess specific gifts, if we do not consistently step out and serve in those ways. Experience through trial and error often provides great clues.
  - Record at least three ways you served others in the home, church, and city. Use the three questions as a framework for reflection: (When you served...) Were you effective in building up the body of Christ? Did it flow from a place of passion? Did you experience any affirmation (verbal or nonverbal)?
3. Live in Community: Pray, serve, discuss, reflect, and discern with others (DG, CG, etc), especially those demonstrating godly wisdom and counsel in this area.
  - Ask others: How have you discovered gifts? Are there particular gifts you believe I might possess? What might it look like to explore the ways God has gifted us together?

- As you share your journey with others, record insights.

*Conclusion:*

What motivates our serving? It's not tradition (because it's what we've always done; even because momma said so). It's not reason (even common grace shows us the logic of good deeds). It's not guilt (we don't serve because we have to)... NO... Look at...

Romans 12:1

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."

"Urge..." Appeals to their hearts.

"In View of God's mercy..." in the gospel - Jesus came and served, even to the point of sacrificing his life for us.

"To Offer..." this is a voluntary act of devotion...

It is our "True and proper worship."

This morning, as we respond to God's grace and truth, I want to invite our Prayer Team down...

- Perhaps you want to pray with someone to discover the gifts God has given you.
- Perhaps you want to experience more power as you step out to serve.

They are here for you...

- Maybe there is a mom who needs prayer. Maybe there is a mother you want to pray for.
- You can receive prayer about anything as we sing a new song... God is the "Same God." He is still moving in power!

Pray....