

## The Joy of Self Discovery

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A Church That Works Series

Romans 12:3-8

One of the continual preoccupations of people in the 90's is the attempt to figure themselves out. Whether we are talking about major corporations or two lovers or people attempting to place themselves vocationally, in America at least, we are positively driven by the need and desire to figure out who we are – what exact temperament do we have? What is our personality? What are our preferences? What are our strengths and weaknesses? I would bet that most of you have in the last 5-10 years taken a temperament test – a Myers-Briggs Test or a DISC Test, which tries to discern whether you are an extravert or an introvert; a thinker or a feeler. We have gotten so that we classify ourselves by these temperament tests.

“Well, I am an ENTJ and you are an ISFP.”

Some of the tests don't use letters or numbers, but animals. I remember listening to a Christian radio show in which this Christian teacher broke up all of the temperaments to four categories of animals – the lion, the otter, the beaver and a golden retriever. I went home after listening to the show and I said to Marlene, “Now I understand why we don't always communicate well. I am a lion-otter and you are a beaver-retriever.”

We are fascinated by personality tests. Do you like things done the right way; the safe way; the most exciting way? Do you think with your mouth or do you weigh each word carefully before you speak? Are you very independent? Or are you very cooperative? Are you very self-protective or are you easily taken advantage of? Are you type A or B? Do you like super fast paced work environments, high stress, lots of balls in the air, working on the New York Stock Exchange or being a chef at an incredibly busy restaurant? Or do you prefer a lower stress, much easier environment in which you are given one project to work on and to think about. You know the life a philosophy professor has.

I'll bet there is not a person in the room who would not appreciate more insight into themselves. There is a reason why the perennial best selling books are books like *What Color is Your Parachute?* It helps people determine their vocational preferences based on their passions, skills and gifts.

There is a reason why every woman's magazine has some kind of test on ranking how good a lover you are. How good a conversationalist your mate is. There is a reason why corporations pay big dollars to consultants to give personality tests to their management teams.

The fact is we want more insight into ourselves. What are our strengths and weaknesses? The people who often have enormous impact in our lives are those people who help us figure ourselves out. There are a few people who God gives insight to and by his grace enables them to speak into our lives things about ourselves that we were only dimly aware of. But they have the ability to call those things forth.

The reason why John Wimber, who was the head of the Association of Vineyard Churches until his death just two weeks ago, in part that he had so much impact into my

own life was he had the unusual ability of looking into me and helping me to figure myself out. I think that is one of the roles of a parent. A good dad or mom should help their children sort out who they are.

Now, today we are going to look at a biblical text that assists us in our sorting process. A text that deals with the question of our self-understanding. I have called today's talk "The Joy of Self-Discovery." Let's pray.

Turn with me to Romans 12. A few weeks ago we dealt with verses 1-2 concerning how it is that we are to serve God. And we discovered that we serve God by giving God our bodies and by giving God our minds. And then Paul turns to the subject of the Christian in relationship to themselves and to others in the church. Picking up in verse 3, the apostle Paul says, "For by the grace given me I say to everyone of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."

Now, there are at least two opposite ways that people can approach themselves. The apostle Paul tells us to think of ourselves with sober judgment. There are some people who refuse to think about themselves at all. They are involved in no self-evaluation, no self-reflection, and no self-analysis whatever. They seem to just skate along on the surface of life, never pausing to take a depth measurement at all. They are the shallow, superficial people of the world. These folks might weigh themselves and check themselves out in the mirror – check their hair, the make-up, but their life involves no more analysis than what they are going to purchase in the latest sale, what's in fashion, how they are going to do their nails, what other people look like, what TV show they are going to watch, what concert they will attend, who People magazine voted as the 20 sexiest entertainers. Like one of those flat bottom boats that skims over the surface of the waters in the Everglades, these people just skim over the surface of life. There is no time taken to really think about the meaning of events, to reflect on the state of their own souls, to figure anything out about their own wiring, their own reaction, their own choices. They are superficial people who don't understand themselves as spiritual beings made in the image of God, with a spiritual destiny, having the capacity to love and be loved.

The apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 tells us to examine ourselves and judge ourselves to see whether we are really Christians or not. There are some folks who haven't even taken the time to evaluate where exactly they are in terms of their relationship with God. Their lives are so filled with activity and stimulation, television and magazine articles that they never take the time to think about those questions that matter the most. Questions like who am I? What am I here on earth to do? What is my purpose in life? And in this moment, what exactly is the nature of my relationship with God, my creator? Are you a true Christian? Are you living like a Christian?

Well, you know, there are people who fall exactly on the other side of the road. They are constantly taking their emotional and spiritual temperature. They are constantly feeling their spiritual pulse. They are continually preoccupied with how they are doing and who they are. Contrary to the first group, who never thinks about themselves at all, this group thinks about themselves too much. They spend all day long picking apart their motives. Why am I relating this way? How is that person responding to me? What was the meaning of them walking by me and not saying "hello"? Were they rejecting me? Are they upset because the last time when I walked by, I didn't say

“hello,” perhaps this is a subtle put down. Perhaps I need to write them a letter and tell them how I felt. But how do I feel? Why am I not more upset? Is there something wrong with my capacity to get upset? Perhaps it was my father. He never showed upset very well.

There are some folks who rarely turn their attention away from themselves. And folks like this frequently suffer from bouts of chronic depression and rage. I read a recent psychological study of depressed people and the study indicated that there isn't an enormous correlation between trauma suffered and depression. Some people have gone through terrible traumas and are not depressed. And some others who have had relatively comfortable lives are chronically depressed. What the authors did find by way of correlation is the amount of time people spend thinking about themselves and suggest that there is a high degree of correlation between a strong self-focus and depression and rage.

So, thinking about ourselves, like many other truths in the Bible, is a tightrope. We need to spend some time in self-discovery and self-analysis, self-reflection, plunging below the surface of events in our lives. At the same time, we must guard ourselves from self-absorption and what I have heard Danny describe as the disease of introspection.

How should we approach ourselves? Well, it is interesting that in verse 3 the apostle Paul uses the word “think” four times. He literally says, “Do not have high thinking about yourself, beyond what you must think but think with sober thinking.” How should you approach yourself? Paul is saying the way to approach yourself is think, think, think, think. How do most of us approach ourselves? Feel, feel, feel, feel. It never ceases to amaze me how most people determine who they are or what they are able to do based on how they feel in the moment, as if their feelings give them trustworthy or accurate information about themselves.

I just don't feel like I could ever serve so important role in the church.

I just don't feel like I could actually pray for someone and see them get better.

I don't feel like I could reconcile with this other person.

The truth is feelings can change and fluctuate a dozen times in a minute. Our feelings are often dependent upon things we have no control over whatsoever. Whether your glands are working properly, whether the sun is shining, whether you got enough sleep or not, how much you ate. It is the silliest thing in the world to try to evaluate yourself based on your feelings. Four times in verse 3 the apostle Paul says “think.” Think, think, think, think.

Let me be real clear, I am not trying to rule feelings out altogether as if feelings are wrong or there is something dangerous about feelings. I am not saying that. I am saying that feelings shouldn't be the basis of your self-evaluation. We must approach ourselves by thinking.

But the apostle Paul says be careful in your thinking that you don't think more highly of yourself than you ought. Now, I want to underline that phrase for you, do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, because it is in stunning opposition to virtually all the psychology and all the therapy of the last 30 years in America. The singular repeated, screaming message of American psychology is that the root of everyone's problems is that people think too low of themselves. We need to bolster people's self esteem. That that is the issue.

But I challenge you to find one verse in the entire Bible which says that the problem you have with yourself is that you have thoughts that are too low about yourself. There is no such verse. But I can find a dozen places that tell you that you think of yourself too highly. You see, biblical psychology is completely and 180 degrees contrary to modern psychology. Modern psychology says that your problem is that you think too low of yourself. Biblical psychology says that your problem is that you think too highly of yourself.

Let me try to prove my case to you that the problem of people is not that they think too low of themselves, but that they think too high of themselves and constantly need this exhortation to not think more highly of yourself than you ought to. Well, certainly this would apply to the conceited, stuck up, arrogant person who is constantly boasting of their accomplishments and constantly are elevating themselves above the crowd. But you say, "Well, what about the person who genuinely feels bad about themselves?" The person who says, "I am not worth anything. I am so fat. I am stupid. I can't accomplish anything. I am just a failure." What about them? Surely they couldn't be full of pride and have too high thoughts about themselves.

Well, I would like to engage you in a bit of active imagination. Imagine after you or your friend or your spouse goes through their self-pitying routine about "I am so stupid," "I am so fat," or "I can't accomplish anything," if you put your arm around them and look them in the eye and said, "You know, you and I have disagreed about things in the past, but I have to tell you that I just completely agree with what you just said. You really are stupid and fat. And you really can't do anything at all. In fact, I don't know if I have ever met someone who is more useless than you."

I will tell you what, I would duck because they will probably slug you. People don't say those kinds of things because they want to be agreed with. People say those things so that you will disagree with them. Perhaps you will say, "Oh, no, no, no. You are really smart. You are beautiful." Even our self-destructive behavior has a secondary benefit of eliciting some response that we want.

You say, "Well, Rich, I regularly engage in a negative pattern of thinking about myself." Or, "I am counseling someone who is engaged in a negative pattern of thinking about themselves, a client, a spouse, a co-worker, a friend in one of our small groups, a child." If the answer for me is not to try to think of myself better, the answer for the person in counseling is not to come along and say, "No, no, no. You are really better than all of that." What is the answer? How can I break this negative pattern of thinking about myself? How can I help someone else break the negative pattern of thinking?

It is not by learning to think higher thoughts about yourself. The answer is learning to think higher thoughts about God. Self-esteem is not the answer. The answer is God-esteem.

Keith Plummer, a writer for Moody Magazine, a Christian magazine, made a wonderful point in talking about God's interaction with Moses in the Old Testament. For those of you taking notes, you might want to jot down Exodus 4:10. God told Moses to go to Pharaoh to speak to Pharaoh and order him in the name of the Lord to let the Jewish people go from Egypt. Go to Pharaoh and say, "Let my people go so that they might worship me." Moses objects. In Exodus 4:10 Moses said, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." God, I am not a good speaker. I really can't do this.

How would we counsel Moses? He is given this really difficult task. He looks at himself and judges himself negatively. I can't do it. I can't do it. How would we counsel Moses? We would say, "Come on, Moe, you really are a great speaker. I remember when one time that you spoke and it had an incredible effect. You need to repeat these positive affirmations in the mirror – I am good enough; I am smart enough; and doggone it, people like me."

God doesn't take that approach with Moses at all. Exodus 4:11 the Lord said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; and I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."

You see, the root of Moses' insecurity was not his lack of self-esteem. The root of Moses' insecurity was his lack of esteem of God. Our problem is never that we think too poorly of ourselves. Our problem is always that we think too poorly and lowly of God. We have too low a concept of the scope of God's provision. We have too low a concept of his sufficiency, his strength, his greatness, his goodness. The issue is not, "Come on and think more positively about yourself." The issue is to think more positively about your God. Do you have any idea how great and how good God is? That's the message of the Bible – not realizing how great and good you are. Peaceful, happy, contented lives are built on trust in the greatness and goodness of God.

Thirty five years ago Pastor A.W. Tozer wrote, "The heaviest obligation lying on the Christian church today is to purify and elevate her concepts of God until it is more worthy of him." Arthur Pink wrote, "The great mistake made by most of the Lord's people is hoping to discover in themselves what is found in Christ alone." See, most of the self-esteem therapy is based on telling bigger and bigger lies to yourself. So the apostle Paul writes, "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."

In other words, don't evaluate yourself based on how you feel about yourself. Don't evaluate yourself based on how you think about yourself. Don't evaluate yourself based on what other people think or feel about you. Start esteeming God more highly and believing what God says about you and you will enter into the joy of self-discovery.

Picture yourself standing in front of a mirror. The way we look at ourselves in a mirror is we see all of our flaws. We stand to the side and examine our stomachs. We see what the years are doing to our faces. You might look at yourself with gray hair or thinning hair, if you are a man. If you are a teenager, you might see the pimples on your face, the flaws that you have been aware of for years. Don't close your eyes and say, "I really am better looking than Tom Cruise or Cameron Diaz."

Paul says I want you to go back in front of a mirror and look at yourself through faith-filled eyes. Discover yourself in a new way through the eyes of faith, laying hold of what God says about you. God says that his grace is sufficient for you. God is not like us; he never lies. You can trust what he says to you. You look at yourself in the mirror and this time you say, "God says I am made in his image. God says that in myself there is nothing good, that apart from him I can do no good thing." I am looking into the mirror and I see someone made in the image of God. I also see someone who is fatally flawed, broken and weak. God says that I have access to his power and his presence and to his person. That this flawed person that I see in the mirror has complete access

to God and to all of his provision and all of his love. God says he loves that person. God says, regarding this person that I see in the mirror, that he has an extraordinary plan and purpose for him. That God purposes to do good in my life. That he delights in doing good and he wants to fulfill me by capturing me into his plan.

How do we think about ourselves correctly? The only way is by starting with God. We start by honoring God and worshipping God and esteeming God. And then by faith we begin to lay hold of what God says about us. We understand ourselves by exercising our faith in God.

Discovering ourselves involves our faith in God. Discovering ourselves also involves our relationship with the church. Verses 4-5, "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each belongs to all the others."

We don't discover ourselves in isolation. By sitting in a room alone and staring at our belly buttons. We discover ourselves, first of all, by staring at God and listening to what God says. And we also discover ourselves by relating to other people in the church, if we are a Christian. The church, of course, is not a building in the New Testament with a steeple on top and a cemetery out back. The church is not an institution with a bunch of committees. Or a place where we all get together and judge everyone who is not coming here.

The church is called Christ's body. And again, using my mirror analogy, if you want to understand the church, stare in the mirror. And what you are going to see looking back at you is not a building, a steeple or a bunch of committees, but a body with a head, trunk, arms, legs, toes, fingers. The church in the New Testament is compared with your body. It is alive. It is organic. The church lives and breathes. It moves.

How do we discover who we are? Paul says first of all, we are unique. "As each of us has one body with many members, these members do not all have the same function." We are unique. Each one of us doesn't operate the same way. That means that you and I don't have to be exactly alike to be good Christians. Conformity is always the mark of a cult, where everyone has to think alike and talk alike and dress alike. Where everyone looks like they are pressed out of a cookie cutter. They use the same phrasing. There are some churches the moment I meet someone I know they come from that church. There is such a strong conformist element in the church. Well, that church doesn't free people to discover who they are. The Bible says that we are unique.

The apostle Paul goes on and says, "Be unique without being independent." Verse 5, "So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." Be unique without being independent. It is so often the case that when people lay hold of their uniqueness, they push it to the extreme and say, "Well, I am just different. It is too bad if you don't like it. It is just the way I am." The apostle Paul says, "It is fine that you are different. But don't try to be a Lone Ranger or judge the rest of the church because they are not like you. Be a team player." We still need to remember that we are not an unattached finger or an unattached toe, a kidney, a gall bladder lying in the road. We are part of a body.

I am glad that you feel called to intercessory prayer. Or that you feel a particularly strong burden about working with prisoners. Or being in foreign missions. But don't ever see your uniqueness as a cause for separating yourself from the church. Your

self-discovery and self-understanding must always be tied to the overall mission and understanding of the whole church. In fact, you never really can understand yourself at all unless you fall in love with and support the mission of the whole church. It is as we are in relationship to all the other members that we find our proper place and orientation and purpose and life.

Discovering ourselves involves exercising our faith in God. It involves a loving relationship to the church. And discovering ourselves involves our understanding of our spiritual gifts. The apostle Paul says we have different gifts according to the grace given us. Why should we want to understand our spiritual gifts? I think understanding your spiritual gifts can help you understand why you may conflict with another member of the church. Very often what we have are gift clashes. A teacher meets a mercy extender and the teacher looks at the mercy extender and says, "You know, all that person cares about doing is making that other individual feel good. They are just people pleasers. They never can communicate truth. They never can draw the line. They never are willing to communicate the truths of the Bible."

The mercy extender might look at the teacher and say, "You know, this person just cares about the letter of the law and doesn't really love people for whom Christ died. He is not willing to go the extra mile. This person has no heart. They are all brain. They have no feelings, no empathy."

Very often, understanding our spiritual gifts can assist us in understanding why we conflict with certain people.

When we discover our spiritual gifts we can also discover our own blind spots. And that helps us again to see our need for the rest of the body. To use my example of the mercy extender and the teacher, the mercy extender instead of pushing the teacher away can say, "You know, you are really right. I get so caught up with other people's feelings that I lose the truths of the Bible. I lose any boundaries or lines. I need the balance you bring, teacher." The teacher might say, "I get so caught up with the truth that I forget how to relate the truth to people. There has to be room for people who have fallen to be restored. I need the balance you bring, mercy extender." We begin to realize our need for each other. To learn from each other.

One of the reasons I appreciate our pastoral staff so much is that I feel like we round each other out. God wants a team of people who compliment each other, who check each other's blind spots.

And finally, we want to discover our spiritual gifts because we can discover where we will be most joyful and effective. None of us are going to be strong in every area, but once we understand our gifting we can say to the Lord, "Lord, give me an opportunity to exercise this gifting in this kinship group or at work or when I get together with my friend." For example someone with the gift of service might say, "Lord, tonight make me sensitive to the practical needs of people in this group. Show me by your spirit what I can do for them."

The encourager might say, "Lord, give me real wisdom concerning how I can encourage this couple whose marriage is on the rocks to move forward in their relationship."

How do we discover our spiritual gifts? You know, the word "gift" is the same as the word "grace." When it says here in verse 6 that we have different gifts according to the grace given us, literally Paul was saying that we have different graces or gifts of grace,

gifts coming from grace. One of the ways to think about your spiritual gifts is that they are graces. And because they are graces, they make us graceful.

I don't know how many of you have seen the old movies with Fred Astaire dancing. But Fred Astaire was so graceful, so smooth, so seemingly effortless. He made dancing seem so natural, so beautiful. I remember watching him in an old movie dancing with a coat stand. It was so eloquent. You actually watched this man dance with a coat stand and it looked like he was dancing with another perfect dancer.

Now that is what it is like when God's graces are operating in our lives. They make us like Fred Astaire and give us an ability in an area to do something so naturally, so smoothly, so effortlessly, so beautifully that other people take note and say, "That is really attractive." You know you are gifted when a certain area is not a strain to you, when you are not having to grit your teeth and having to push with all your might. There is this effortless, a smoothness, a naturalness.

Of course, that grows over time. Teaching becomes more effortless the longer you do it if there is a grace there. Giving becomes more natural, more smooth, more beautiful if there is a grace there. But I think one of the ways that you discover your spiritual gifts is to say, "Is there an area in my life that I just do without much sweat and strain?" Is there something that is just really easy for me? Something that I also delight in? Because God's graces are going to make us grateful and full of joy.

How do you discover your spiritual gifts? What do you enjoy? Where are your blind spots? Whom do you conflict with? Where are you graceful? Let me suggest another thing. What do people come to you for? When people come to you what are they looking for? Are they looking for answers to perplexing questions in life? Is that why they come to you? Do they come to you for service, because they need help and they know you are a good server? Do people come to you for counsel, for advice, because they know you are a good listener and that you will be patient with them and merciful? What do other people see in you?

This Discovering Your Ministry class is also designed to help you discover your spiritual gifts. Our last class for the autumn is next Saturday morning. Let me give two strong words of encouragement here. Many of you have already signed up for the class next Saturday morning. I want to strongly encourage you to fulfill your commitment. Don't just sign up and blow it off. If you signed up for the class, go to it. And if you haven't signed up, this is the last class this fall. Sign up today, especially if you are a kinship leader, women's group leader, men's group leader. You especially need to take the class because our whole system depends on our leaders understanding how to counsel individuals in their groups concerning the forms they filled out in the classes. If you leaders don't take the class, you will not be able to assist people in your groups. We need to work together here. If you want the church to be involved in service, you leaders need to take the class.

Real quick: Why does God give these spiritual gifts? Paul says in verse 7 "If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully."

Why does God give these gifts? Well, I think there are a number of reasons he does it, but I think one reason God gives gifts is because when these gifts are maturely operating in the Christian church, the various strongholds of Satan, the places that



Satan erects in the church and in the world get pulled down. All the destructive things that the enemy does to people get pulled down when these seven spiritual gifts are operating.

For example, the gift of prophecy confronts people in their sin. Serving touches people in their need for help. Teaching deals with people in their ignorance. Encouragement supports people in their weakness. Giving assists people in their poverty. Leadership provides people with direction in their lostness. Mercy cares for people in their misery.

So, these gifts defeat the strategy of Satan to get us lost or miserable or ignorant or impoverished. And I think these gifts demonstrate or model to us in the body the way these important things are done. What it looks like when something is done with the gracefulness of God on it. The fact is, friend, every Christian is, according to the New Testament, required to do all seven of the things Paul mentions here. These aren't for the spiritual elite. Every one of us who is a believer is commanded to do each of the seven things listed here. We are commanded to earnestly desire to prophesy, to serve each other, to teach one another, to exhort one another daily, to give. We are not allowed according to the New Testament to say, "I am a teacher, it is not my responsibility to serve inconvenience. Someone else is a servant. I get to be selfish now."

"I am a prophet. I don't have to give generously and extravagantly. I just share inspired words from God."

God says, "I didn't give these gifts so that these gifts would be the exclusive province of a certain segment of the church. I gave these gifts to model how this area of life is done when my grace is on it."

We scratch our heads and say, "How am I supposed to serve? I am a selfish person. I like to take my time on myself and for myself. But I have been hearing you talk about serving and that we are called to serve. There are a lot of New Testament passages that talk about serving. What does service look like?"

And then God shows the way that service can operate in the church. He provides people to model for us by giving the gift of servanthood. And you watch someone quietly going about the business of helping the church or someone else. They don't call a lot of attention to themselves. They don't demand the limelight. They don't advertise what they are doing. But they are busily stacking chairs. Or cleaning here at the church building. Or helping a single mom with their kids, or roofing someone's home who might not have enough money to put a roof on, or helping to clean the house of an elderly person. They don't call attention to it. You say, "Ah, that is what service looks like."

And it shows you that it really is possible to do it. That flesh and blood people can actually serve and you say, "Yeah. I want to be like that, God. Help me to imitate that graceful gift that I see in that other individual."

Spiritual gifts pull down the strongholds of the enemy. And spiritual gifts show us how these areas should operate. Real quickly...

Prophecy. Paul says, "If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith." Prophecy concerns receiving immediate inspiration from God concerning what God's mind is and then delivering it in the words of men and women. The reason why we are to prophesy in proportion to our faith is because a prophet can only speak so long as they are sure of their inspiration. If I am not sure that it is God speaking,

then I need to restrict what I am saying. I frankly think that it is much more appropriate for the vast majority of us, the vast majority of the time, to use phraseology like “I think that the Lord might be indicating this” or “I feel like this might be going on in this audience or in your life” rather than “Thus sayeth the Lord...” I know it doesn’t have the same power packed introduction, but an inspired word packaged humbly will have just as much effect if it is truly from God as the “Thus sayeth the Lord” delivered in King James’ English. And just putting a lot of God talk around your particular prophecy does not make it any more inspired or any more effective.

And then we meet the one who serves. Paul says if it is serving, let him serve. I can name some of you here in the congregation, right now, who have the gift of service. People who don’t have to have the limelight. You are willing to work behind the scenes to help other people accomplish their highest calls. The true server doesn’t shun a job because it is too small or because they won’t get a lot of recognition. The thing that I see most often about someone with this gift is that they serve in inconvenience. They are not the kind of people who when you call them for help would say, “I am sorry, it is not convenient.” Or “I am sorry I have a headache.” “I am sorry, this is not easy for me.” Servers are people who serve even when it doesn’t fit into their schedules. They serve at inconvenience. They make time for service. They are just as busy as everyone else.

And then there is the teacher. The teacher is someone who enjoys studying. They spend hours in God’s Word just for the sheer joy of digging out new truths, fitting passages together with other passages in fresh ways. They often have systematic minds and are accurate in their speech. But the teacher is someone who tackles difficult issues in God’s Word and makes them understandable. People come away from the teacher and say, “Ah, that is what that means. I never understood that. I never knew how to fit those things together, now I understand.”

And then there is the encourager. The person who is full of practical wisdom and counsel. The encourager, or exhorter, is not afraid of confronting people, but they often have practical ways that people can change. I think they are different than the teacher in that the teacher usually starts with the Bible and then applies it to people. The encourager or exhorter usually starts with people and then backs their way into the Bible. The encourager/exhorter is also different than the mercy extender in the way they view pain. The mercy extender wants to help people get out of pain. The encourager/exhorter often is not bothered by pain at all. They say, “Oh, well pain is a good way to change.”

And then there is the giver. When Marlene and I were in college we met a giver. There was a fellow who had two cars, a Volkswagen and an old junky Ford. One day this guy came over and he gave us the key to his new VW. He did the way the Bible describes. It says, “Let the giver give with simplicity.” That is literally what it says in verse 8, not just generously, but with simplicity. No pomp. No show. Do it quietly. Typically, do it anonymously. True, graceful givers don’t seek recognition. The thing that you see about the giver is that they are almost completely free from anxiety about their money. It is not that they just give a lot. They do give a lot, but they are free from worry about “What is going to happen to me if I give?” The man who gave us his car was not possessed by his possessions. He and his wife were missionaries in Jordan for a number of years. And their attitude has always been God will provide. Givers have

faith in God's ability to provide for them. And they give for no ulterior motive other than God is gracing them in life to just give. They are not looking for something out of it.

And then we meet the leader. A leader is someone who knows where things are going. They have received vision from God and are able to motivate a group of others toward that vision. People naturally follow the leader. It feels good, it feels right when the leader is in control. It is okay. Everything is fitting together now. Now I know where we are going. Now I know how to get there. Now I know how to do this particular task. You feel comfortable with them in charge. I like the fact that Paul tells those who lead to do it diligently. In other words, he says if you are going to stand out front, if you are going to lead, [that is literally what the Greek word means – stand out front], Paul says they just don't wing it. The greatest mistake of a leader in a church is not to recognize their responsibility before God. If you are a small group leader or worship leader – if you have some leadership in Christ's body, then you have been given a trust and then you need to lead with diligence. Don't just wing it.

Finally, Paul speaks of the mercy extender. When I think of the mercy extender of course I think of Mother Teresa. It is a person who touches people in their pain and misery. They don't have to work at trying to identify with the poor. It is not some political thing or some idealism or fantasy. Everyone runs away from people in pain. The mercy extender runs toward people in pain. They sympathize. They exude compassion. And what is so significant about this gift, what makes it a spiritual gift is that they do it with cheerfulness. The word is literally that they do it hilariously. See, when others see folks in pain, a lot of time they feel overwhelmed or they despair. They say, "Look at all these people with their problems. Nothing can be done. If I got involved I would be so overwhelmed. Their needs would burden me. It would be like a tidal wave over the top of me." The mercy extender says, "I just want to help. I am not saying I can solve all their problems or all the problems of the world. But I can do something." And when the mercy extender is filled with the gracefulness of God, they exude the oil of joy. That is what I always saw in Mother Teresa. If you ever saw photos of her, she just radiated joy. She was like what I think of when I think of Jesus. She was smiling even in difficult situations. She always seemed to be alive with joy. It is interesting that Paul pulls those two concepts together. Those who extend mercy do it joyfully, not grimly, not as your miserable duty, but radiating the spirit and gracefulness of Christ.

There is great joy in discovering who you are – where you are most effective, where you have blind spots.