

## **Scripture Reading**

### **Romans 12: 3 – 8**

3 For by the grace given me I say to every one 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. 4 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. 7 If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; 8 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.

## **True Thanksgiving**

In order to give thanks, first you have to receive something; like in the case of the pilgrims, a bountiful harvest. Now, did you ever notice how little children say thank you? First they get something from someone – and then we, as proper parents nudge them a little and say “now what do you say”? And then the little child half heartedly blurts out a monotone “Thank You” – and everyone feels good about themselves and they go about their way. We're taught from early on to say thank you without really feeling gratitude. Thank you has become something you should say – not something you actually feel.

Now God has given us so many gifts both great and small, I'd like to take a look at some of the big ones:

First: God has given you and I the greatest gift anyone could receive – his Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ - given undeservedly to forgive our sins. God tells us throughout the Bible, not to sin, but unfortunately we do anyway. And still, He sacrificed His only Son as a means to forgive our sins – our whole life long. Your sins are forgiven – before you even commit them.

Next: Jesus promised us eternal life if we believe in Him. Eternal life!  
That's a big gift.

Then there's: All the love you feel from family and friends – that's a gift from God.

How about: Your talents which in turn earn you a living – that's a gift from God.

And then there's: Your knowledge and understanding that help you to maneuver through life – that's a gift from God.

All these gifts – gifts that our words can't even begin to describe - and how do we respond – all too often with a monotone “Thank you God”. Did you ever hear the phrase “actions speak louder than words”? Well, that's what God wants from us – actions of thanksgiving – not just words.

There's a story I once heard about a baby camel and his mother. The baby camel says to his mother, “Mom, why do we have such big feet?” His mother says, “So we can walk across the desert without sinking into the sand.” Then the baby asks, “why do we have such long eye lashes?” and his mother says, “So when we walk through the desert, we won't get sand in our eyes.” The baby then asks, “Why do we have these big humps on our backs?” And the mother replies, “So we can store up water in them for long walks across the desert.” Finally the baby thinks a little and then asks, “Mom, then why do we live in the zoo?”

This story illustrates the gifts God has given us. Just like God designed the camel for desert travel, he designed us to do great things in His name in the world – are we using them for what he designed us for – to give him glory – or are we wasting them sitting in the zoo.

As Christians, if we really want to be true Christians, we need to use our gifts, our talents, to glorify God – not just on Sunday, but every day of our lives.

About 8 ½ years ago my life changed. Sandy and I were expecting our son Mitchel when Sandy developed toxemia. Because of the complications, there was a point in the delivery room when I wasn't sure if I'd be adding to my family or completely losing my family – it was that serious for both mom and baby for about 20 minutes – the most frightening 20 minutes of my entire life.

Obviously, everything turned out great – thanks to God. But, I realized through that ordeal, that it was completely out of my hands – and totally in God’s.

God cared so much for me and my family that day that it finally clicked in my head – My words were not enough, I needed to live my life differently – I needed my actions to speak for me. I stand before you 8 years later, simply chipping away at the tip of the iceberg. It’s been a slow journey and I still have a long way to go. I still manage to come up with a few poor excuses why I cannot do more. Here are some excuses that I’ve actually used – see if you can relate:

1. **I have too many things on my plate right now** – certainly a valid point in some cases, but showing loving kindness doesn’t take any more of your time – just a conscious effort to do it. You know my dentist told me every time I visited that I needed to floss every day. He listed all the reasons why I needed to - every single time I went. Finally, I decided that I would make a conscious effort to floss more. Do you know what I discovered? It only takes me 45 seconds a day to floss. There’s more than 86,000 seconds in a day and I was worried about wasting 45. Being kind to everyone every day is like flossing – it takes very little time and it’s healthy for you. You and I do not know how much time we have on this earth – don’t spend all of that time on yourself or you’ll never reach the potential God has planned for you.
2. **I served my time – let someone else do something** – or you could lead by example for someone who just needs a little nudge – if it were not for great leaders, I would not have realized my own talents.
3. **I’ll do that later when things settle down a little for me** – Ah, the procrastinators – Well, think about this, the person who needs your help today may not be there when you’re ready.
4. **I have no talent that is useful to the church** – If you really believe this, I invite you to come to a HFH blitz build and claim you have no useful talent, by the end of the day, you’ll feel differently. Even a heart felt prayer for those who need it can and does make a difference.

Simply praying more often for God's guidance will do wonders for the church.

And, here's one of my all time poorest excuses – I'm embarrassed that I've actually said this:

**I believe in God – I don't need to go to church or anything else to prove that.** Simply believing in God does not make you a Christian, your faith and your love in action does. Jesus says in Matthew 5:14-16 “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill that cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

You know we sometimes hide under a bowl and it's called the church. We come to church to praise God but we put the lamp out as we walk out the door. Jesus wants us to show the world how great God is every moment of every day. Yes, he wants us to praise God on Sunday, but he wants us to show the rest of the world how great God is every day.

Nothing else is as important as your relationship with Jesus Christ - Nothing in this entire world. Not your job, not you're your favorite sports team, not your favorite hobby, nothing. And nothing shows how much that relationship means to us than when we put our love into action.

Unselfish service to others is love in action. If you look at our Scripture reading, Paul is explaining how we together make up one body, the church. Each of us is needed to contribute to that body – that's what God designed us for. It doesn't matter what gifts we have – serving, teaching, encouraging, contributing, leading – as long as we use them to help each other – as long as we use them to the glory of God – that's love in action.

Love is not just a word to throw around loosely, it is an action. If I tell my wife and kids that I love them every day but never put that love into action, it means nothing.

Likewise, if I claim to love Jesus – but I refuse to show loving kindness to all people, it means nothing as well. Notice that I said all – not some. It's easy to show loving kindness to some people – some people are easier to love than

others. But showing loving kindness to everyone every day – now there’s a harder thing to do.

How do you treat your co-workers, your loved ones, your friends, or even complete strangers? Not just on your good days, but on your worst days. Do you show loving kindness everyday? If you’re like me – you fall short. But I can tell you that I make a conscious effort to do that every day – sure I break down on some days, but we have to make a conscious effort to. That’s what Jesus taught.

Jesus’ brother James tells us in James 2:26 “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”

Think about that - just as the body dies without the spirit, our faith dies without good deeds towards others. What James is telling us, is that it is not enough to just proclaim our faith in God – we must show it through our actions too – our love in action. Love in action shows the world how great God is. When people see how great God is – they want to be a part of that. My mission, our mission is to show the world how great God is by showing selfless love for all people. These are not my words; they are the words of Jesus Christ Himself. I know that’s not easy, I struggle every day to do it – yet it’s so simple.

Right now St. Peter’s United Church of Christ is a body under stress – we have hands and elbows, but no forearm to put them together. Without each one of us contributing our talents – that body cannot be complete. And without a complete body, we can only do a portion of what we’re capable of. We’re selling short on Christ’s church – that’s a serious concern to me.

I’ve heard, over the course of the past couple of years, things like: I don’t agree with what the national church is doing, or I don’t like the changes we’re going through – I know this because I’ve said this myself. But, here’s a reality check: There’s no I in church either. We’ve become concerned so much about how we feel about issues in the church rather than dealing with what we’re supposed to be doing as a church – building disciples out of ordinary people – bringing everyone in closer relationship with God. We do that by putting out love into action.

Now the question is: How will you use the gifts – those gifts that God has given you – how will you use them. You can choose to use them to promote yourself – people will look at you and say – now there’s a successful man. Or, she’s really done well for herself – or, I wonder how much money he makes to afford a house or a car like that.

Or you can choose to use those gifts to promote God – people will look at you and say – now there’s a man who loves God – that women is always so loving and cheerful – and they will want the same thing for themselves. They will see God in you – and they will want the same thing for themselves. I hope that when people look at me, they see a man that God made – not a man the world made.

Please don’t mis-understand me. Now, I’m not suggesting that you give up your job, sell all your possessions, and begin preaching from the street corner. I’m not saying you can’t earn money and have nice things.

In fact, God wants us to have a great life – a great career – a great family. In the time of Moses, God didn’t lead his people to the desert; he led them through the desert – to the Promised Land – the land of milk and honey – to live a great life to His glory. If we make Christ the corner stone of our lives, all those other things will fall into place somehow – trust me – just try it and see.

If we do that, we will reveal to everyone how we got there – how we got to the Promised Land – Out in the world showing everyone our love for God - letting everyone know how great God is – by how we live our lives – by our faith and by our love in action – that is the truest form of gratitude we can show God – and that is true thanksgiving.