

# Main Street

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



## **Romans 12:1-8** **“Together We Know And Do God’s Will”**

October 26, 2014  
(20<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost)

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## **“Following Christ From City Center!”**

**ROMANS 12:1-8 "TOGETHER WE KNOW AND DO GOD'S WILL"**

Grace Structures A New Life Under Christ, Paranesis = Gospel → Life

**1) vv.1-2 MAKING A GOOD BEGINNING: SURRENDERED BODY, NEW MIND.**

We Live In The Tense Overlap Of Two Contrary Ages

**a) v.1 Holy And Living And Acceptable to God.**

7 Keys To God's Will Together In The Church:

We Work Out Together What God Has First Worked In

1 I appeal to you **(exhort you)** therefore, brethren (and sisteren!), Solemn Shift From 1:1-11:36 To 12:1-15:13  
 by the **compassion** of God, God History & Present Divine Enablement//6:12-14  
 Right Sacrifice to present your bodies (pl.) as a living sacrifice, Sacrifice 6:13, **1st Key = Surrender (Say Yes!)**  
 holy and **acceptable** (pleasing) to God God SELF AS BODILY EXISTENCE  
 which is your spiritual (*logicos* = rational) worship. Worship 1 Pt. 2:2, Heb. 13:15, Speech Offering  
Life As Doxology, Living Sacrifice = Conflicting Metaphor

**b) v.2a Negative Command (Passive Voice).**

Battle Is For Your Mind/Heart/ World View

Right Enemy This World = Present, Evil Age; The Pull Of Distorted Values  
 2 Do not *be* conformed to this world, p.v. = *by the culture* **2nd Key = Resist World's Pressure (Just Say No!)**  
Self Caught Between Two Large Powers: Sin/Evil & God/New Age

**b') v.2b Positive Command (Passive Voice).**

Only The Free In Christ Can Obey This Command

Right Challenge Eph. 4:23, Col. 3:10, Not Anti-Intellectual, SELF AS NEW MIND  
 but *be* transformed by the renewal of your mind, p.v. = *by God*, 1:21 **3rd Key = Reshaped (Study! Pray!)**  
Renewed/God-filled Mind: Eph. 4:23, 1 Pt. 1:14, 2:5, Col. 3:10, 2 Cor. 3:18

**a') v.2c Acceptable and Perfect And Good.**

3 Qualifiers//v.1b, Body/Mind Integration

Right Goal Right Worship = Proper Behavior In Church/Society  
 that you (pl.) may prove (discern) what is the will of God, A Transformed Mind Can Discern God's Will  
 what is good and **acceptable** and perfect (complete). Church Is To Be A Liturgy Of Righteous Living: All Of Life!  
The Offer Of The New Self Is The Greatest Sacrifice  
Together With The Spirit We Discern The Particulars Of God's Will Within Scripture  
Live As One Body, How A Renewed Mind Functions (vv.3-8)

**2) 12:3-8 FINDING YOUR PLACE IN THE MULTI-GIFTED BODY OF CHRIST.**

Density Of Mental Language: *Rational, Mind, Think*

**a) v.3 Grace and Faith: Proper Self-Evaluation Of God's Gifts To Each And All.**

Antidote To Pride About Giftings

Right Thinking Paul's Gift Of Apostle, Teaching  
 3 1 For by the **grace** (*charis*) given to me I bid every one of you Also *Not Less Than!*  
 2 not to think of himself (herself) more highly that he (she) ought to think, **4th Key = Honest Self Evaluation**  
 2' but to think with sober judgment,  
 1' each according to the measure (trust/responsibility) of **faith** which God has assigned to him (her).  
What Has God Entrusted To Me? What Power Tools?

**b) vv.4-5 The Church As One Differentiated Body Of Christ.**

Gifted Unity

Right Community Grace = Source, Gift = Community Impact  
 4 For as in one body we have many members, **5th Key = Individuality (Me) & Community (We)**  
 and all the members do not have the same function, Look In The Mirror!  
 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ Unity Is Not Uniformity, Multiform Grace  
 and individually members one of another. Radically Interdependent Reality  
One Body, Many Gifts: 1 Cor. 12:14-26, Eph. 4:11-17, 1 Pt. 4:10

**a') vv.6-8 Grace and Faith: Seven Spiritual Gifts/ Functions.**

All Gifts Matter

Right Function All Receive Gifts, I Cor. 12:12-13, At Conversion  
 6 Having gifts (*charis-ma-ta*) that differ according to the **grace** (*charis*) given us, Functions, Rainbow Colors  
 let us use them: 1 Pt. 4:10, "Use them" As Tools **6th Key = Use Your Gifts For The Good Of Others**  
Not Offices, Mandate For The Common Good

Word	Deed	7 Gifts (Totality): Spirit's Power In Us	Function Or Fruit: Virtue/Character	Not Exhaustive List
✓		if prophecy (revealed communication),	in proportion to our <b>faith</b> ;	//1 Cor. 12:4-11, Eph. 4:1-11
7	✓	if service (enabling others),	in our serving;	1 Cor. 12:10, 1 Thess. 5:19-20
	✓	he (she) who teaches (truth offered),	in his (her) teaching;	Acts 6:2, 1 Pt. 4:10
8	✓	he (she) who <b>exhorts</b> (truth applied),	in his (her) exhortation;	1 Cor. 12:28, James 3:1, Heb. 5:12
	✓	he (she) who contributes (generosity)	in liberality (wholeheartedly);	1 Thess. 4:18; 5:11, 14
	✓	he (she) who gives aid (presides/leads),	with zeal (diligence);	Eph. 4:28, Acts 2:45; 4:34-37
	✓	he (she) who does acts of <b>mercy</b> (kindness),with cheerfulness ( <i>hilarotes</i> = hilarity!)		1 Thess. 5:12, 1 Tim. 5:15, 17
				Tob. 1:3, 4:7, 9:6

**Gift Are Not Optional Accessories But Necessities To Be Living Extensions Of Christ, **7th = Receive Gifts/Service Of Others****

## TOGETHER WE KNOW AND DO GOD’S WILL

*“Do not be conformed to this world,  
but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.”*

The only way to successfully resist the world’s conforming pressures.

### R O M A N S 1 2 : 2 a

A court jester was once summoned to brighten the last hours of a dying king with his wit and zany antics. His best routines did not evoke even a smile from the monarch. “Why are you so sad, Sire?” said the jester.

“Because I am about to leave on a journey,” was his reply.

“Is the journey a long one?”

“It is the longest I’ve ever made,” said the king.

The jester looked around the room, “But if you are going on such a long journey, why are you not prepared? I see no suitcase, no clothes, no horses.”

“That’s the problem,” the king replied. “I’ve been so preoccupied with other things I didn’t find time to prepare for the journey, and now I must face it alone.”

“Here,” said the jester, taking off his cap and bells, “you take these because I seen now that you are an even bigger fool than I am. You are going on a long journey unprepared and all you can do is bring me here to amuse you.”<sup>1</sup> The jester was an evangelist.

For all their sometimes abuse, and for all their possibilities for emotional manipulation, that is the purpose of an altar call after a sermon. It is a legacy from our 19th century American revivalistic heritage. At the end of his message the preacher calls for a public commitment to Christ or to some new level of spiritual

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<sup>1</sup> James A. Feehan, *Story Power* (San Jose, CA: Resource Publications, Inc., 1994), 114.

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**Romans 12:1-8 ..... 4**

surrender. He’s made a case, and now it’s decision time. My soul is in the spotlight, and my life is on the line.

“I had just one desire,” writes Theophane the Monk, “to give myself completely to God. So I headed for the monastery. An old monk asked me, “What is it you want?”

I said, “I just want to give myself to God.”

I expected him to be gentle, even fatherly, but he shouted at me, “NOW!”

I was stunned.

He shouted again, “NOW!” Then he reached for a club and came after me. I turned and ran. He kept coming after me, brandishing his club and shouting, “NOW, NOW!”

“That was several years ago,” he concludes, “He still follows me, wherever I go. Always the stick, always that ‘NOW!’”<sup>2</sup> The old monk was an evangelist..

**TURNING TO THE TEXT**

**The First Key: Surrender (v.1)**

After eleven chapters of presenting his understanding of the Christian message, the Apostle Paul issued an altar call in verse 1

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is the worship you owe as rational beings.”<sup>3</sup>

It begins with surrender, with waving a white flag before God. Paul settled it one day on the road to Damascus.<sup>4</sup> Have you?? Have you surrendered body and mind, will and emotions, past and future and present, sins and skills and gifts, hopes

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<sup>2</sup> Theophane the Monk, *Tales of a Magic Monastery* (New York, Crossroad, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> Translation dependent on Brendan Byrne, *Romans* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 363.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 9:1-31.

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**Romans 12:1-8 ..... 5**

and dreams to Jesus Christ, the whole of you, all that you are and all you are not? Has the mercy and compassion of God softened and broken your heart? Have you said, “I’m yours, Lord, take me and use me.” You’ve sung the hymns. We all have: “Just as I am without one plea.” “All to Jesus I surrender.” “Take my life and let it be, consecrated Lord to thee.” Have you, as Paul appealed, presented your flesh and blood and mind and heart with all their frailties and wonderful powers to God as a lifelong offering because it’s what you logically owe God?

It’s hard to look people in the eyes and to call them from the diversions of their life to serious spiritual commitment. We preachers are always tempted to take the edge off, to make it easy, but there is no easy way to call people to the same depth of surrender as Paul did. I did it over lunch one day. I hadn’t planned on it, but the Holy Spirit nudged me. I looked him in the eye, and with all the compassion I could muster put it on the bottom line:

“You can either continue to manage your own little trivial life, or you can say Yes to Christ and have him open up his will to you. What kind of life do you want? You choose. Present your body as a living sacrifice and be baptized. Jesus is a good deal, but you have to die to running your own show.”

There was no hymn to take the edge off; it wasn’t a *church* setting; just eyeball to eyeball over a sandwich. It was not easy for him; it was not easy for me. Those kind of conversations are rare. But then, that’s my job, isn’t it? To often ask the questions no one else asks, the ones we never get around to. I often tell people, “My job in your life is to be a faithful -and sometimes disturbing - minority report.”

Many people want to know God’s will first and then decide whether or not to do it as if God offered them a veto and the change to parlay for better terms. Doesn’t work that way. First we say Yes; only then are we shown, and then only a small step at a time, the new way. God is not in the business of checking his plans with us for pre-approval. We are called to walk by faith, not by sight. Only after the control issue is decided is there a possibility of knowing and cooperating with God’s purpose for our lives. God has already shown his mercy to us in Jesus Christ. What more proof can there be that God is utterly committed to us? The goal of life is to know and do the will of God; it can be revealed to us, and it- says Paul- begins I surrender.

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**Romans 12:1-8 ..... 6**

The question is: Who’s running your life? If you are alone, then you cannot know God’s will, and you will end up like the old king, dying with a dunce hat because you never prepared for the journey. Pastoring people who’ve never said a deep but only a shallow and conditional Yes to Jesus Christ is a tough job. You always have to treat them with kid gloves; they are easily offended; they remain spiritually under-developed because the most important issue has never been decided. Religious people scare me; people who are alive in Christ attract me. Religious people like the trappings of respectability and the feeling of church; spiritual people are hungry for God whatever the packaging. Religiosity is transformed into faith when people surrender their bodies as a living sacrifice; when they put themselves on the altar and stay there awaiting the next assignment.

The Apostle Paul’s choice of the metaphor *living sacrifice* is a deliberate contradiction, an oxymoron, like *United Methodist* or *deficit savings*. A sacrifice in the ancient world was something killed on an altar; in a sacrifice something dies in a bloody, moaning heap. But a *living sacrifice*, what is that?

There are 58,156 names on the polished, black granite walls of the Vietnam memorial in Washington. I was there the weekend it opened years ago and listened as the names were read one-by-one in the National Cathedral. Some visitors walk its length slowly, reverently, and without pause. Others stop before certain names, remembering a son, a sweetheart or fellow soldier, wiping away tears, tracing the names with their fingers. But for three veterans- Robert Bedker, William Craig, and Darrall Lausch- a visit to the wall is especially poignant. They walk up and find their own names carved in stone, each of them incorrectly listed as missing in action.<sup>5</sup>

Treated as dead, but alive, a *living sacrifice*, a contradiction in terms that describes what it means for God to give your life back with a new agenda after you’ve offered it up. Paul’s says that it’s what we owe God as rational creatures, as persons capable of careful thought and trust. God has poured out his truth and mercy in Jesus; we respond by offering ourselves back to God for whatever he has for us. So if you come to me for spiritual guidance, with a question like, “How can I know God’s will for my life?” this is where we start, Romans 12:1, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, *to present your bodies as a living sacrifice.*” Until

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<sup>5</sup> “To Illustrate: Christian Life,” *Leadership*, Summer 1990, 48-49.

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**Romans 12:1-8** ..... 7

that’s settled, we have nothing to build on. God wants your life so he can fill it with life and give you a share in the work of Christ and his people. I like what Dr. Kent Hemphill once wrote about the effect of this on churches:

“A proper understanding of this principle of living sacrifice would solve the problems we confront in the church today from lack of commitment. A living sacrifice no longer has claim over time, money, and so forth. Once we have given ourselves bodily to God, we no longer have to struggle with uncommitted areas of our lives. Many Christians want to pick and choose their areas of sacrifice: I’ll do this but I won’t do that. Living sacrifice means total commitment that responds, ‘Speak Lord, for Thy servant hears.’”<sup>6</sup>

Main Street Church does not have a commitment problem. I hear lots of complaints about how uncommitted people are. I don’t believe it. It’s the wrong diagnosis. What we have is a surrender problem. A little time, a little offering, but no deep offering of the self: your body, my body, *living sacrifices*. Someone said, only half jokingly, that the problem with living sacrifices is that they keep crawling off the altar! People are committed to many things. How you use time and money is a record of your commitments. The question is: Are we surrendered to Christ as living sacrifices? That is not the end but the starting point.

**The Second Key: Resist And Reprogram (v.2)**

There’s a question I love to ask folk when they’re stuck: “How do you think Jesus sees your situation?” Blinders come off; new possibilities open up. “Do not be conformed to this world,” wrote Paul,” but be transformed *by the renewal of your mind*, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and a perfect.” Say No to the toxic mind set of the fallen world; learn to think God’s thoughts. This is the second key to knowing the will of God. You must swim against the strong currents of the culture and open mind and heart to God’s revelation.

It was danced on rice plantations in Georgetown, South Carolina a hundred and sixty years ago. It is known as the *ring shout* and was once the heart of African

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<sup>6</sup> Kenneth S. Hemphill, *Spiritual Gifts* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1988), 135.

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**Romans 12:1-8 . . . . . 8**

American worship in the south. Used at sacred times, but especially in connection with revivals and funerals, the shout involved call and response singing while rhythmically moving in a counterclockwise direction, in opposition to the movement of the sun. In its African theological background, each rising and setting of the sun painfully reminded the slaves of their new world of bondage. The dance, moving counterclockwise against the sun, symbolized their resistance to a slavish existence.<sup>7</sup> The world and its oppressive powers moved in one direction, but they, in their liturgy of underground freedom, moved in symbolic opposition, resisting the world till they could finally march and sing *We Shall Overcome*.

We must find, as the slaves did, ways to remind people that *this world*, its thought forms, priorities, and habits are under the judgment of the coming kingdom of God. A new world is going to replace this world that has lived in rebellion against its Maker for far too long. We are called as Christians to resist conformity to the dominant values of the culture around us. Sex, money, and power are the three great false deities that run our culture and its perceptions of the good life. Surrender yourself to popular American culture, and it will take you far away from God. Watch an afternoon of talk shows some time. It will rot your brain, corrode your soul and turn your spine to mush.

We need to swim against the tide of American culture in at least four critical areas: 1) our understanding of God’s design for sex, 2) our use of time, 3) our attitude towards money and the poor, and 4) our practice of community. It’s a struggle; you can’t do it alone. Only together as a community can we forge a new lifestyle. We are to be a profoundly counter-cultural people. Walter Rauschenbush, the great theologian of the social gospel wrote, “The church must either condemn the world and seek to change it, or tolerate the world and conform to it.”<sup>8</sup>

Douglas Taylor-Weiss, pastor of a church in Dayton, Ohio, proposed a new set of Ten Commandments based on his observations of the obsessions of our culture:

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<sup>7</sup> C. Douglas Weaver, *A Cloud of Witnesses* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1993), 108.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

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1. Have a good day.
2. Shop.
3. Eliminate pain.
4. Be up-to-date.
5. Relax.
6. Express yourself.
7. Have a happy family.
8. Be entertaining.
9. Be entertained.
10. Buy entertainment."

There is one more he forgot, "No. 11. Follow your feelings as the truth."<sup>9</sup>

When I go off on a spiritual retreat or mission trip, it's almost with the sense that I need to be detoxified and purged of mental and spiritual poisons. My mind and heart have been subtly polluted by the pressures of this world to conform and fit into its agenda. It is insidious, and we are called to resist it with the new mind that comes from Christ. I pray, "Remind me, Lord, I have again forgotten what we're supposed to be about."

In the United Methodist baptismal service we do just what the early church did. We first ask people to say a firm *No* to spiritual and moral evil at three different levels: the cosmic *up there*, the cultural *out there* and the personal *in here*. "On behalf of the whole church, I ask you: Do you *renounce* the spiritual forces of wickedness, *reject* the evil powers of this world, and *repent* of your sin."<sup>10</sup> Three actions, three R's: *renounce, reject, repent*. The invisible world of spiritual evil, the visible world of fallen culture, and finally the darkness of your own heart. Three interrelated levels of opposition to God. Do you say a firm *No* to these? "I do," they answer naively. And the rest of their Christian life is a pitched battle spent discovering what it means not to be pressed into the world's mold. Life in Christ is a subversive life, a life of faithful rebellion against the way things are now organized. You cannot do it alone; we can only do it together.

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Marty in *Context* (Feb. 1, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 34.

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**Romans 12:1-8 . . . . . 10**

Nothing is more exciting to me as a pastor than for people to begin to develop a mind that is hungry for God. When they surrender their hearts to Christ, a light goes on in their brain. They sign up for Bible study. Their lives get cleaned up as they come under the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Truths they had heard before now explode with power in their heads. The Book is now addressed to them.

Stuart Briscoe recalls an experience when he was doing some work on an airplane, with an open Bible in front of him. A stewardess came up and said, ‘You know, four years ago the Bible was a dead book to me. Then something happened, and I can’t explain it, but I can’t get enough of it. I devour it.’

“I know that happened.” Briscoe replied. “Have you ever read a book that was boring, then one day you met the author? Afterwards you picked up the same book and said, ‘I know who wrote this,’ and it became the most exciting book in the world to you.”

“Yes,” she said, “that’s what happened to me. I met the author.”

Briscoe comments, “When you meet the author of the Word of God, He begins to write it in your heart instead of hitting you over the head with it. You begin to desire it instead of resenting it.”<sup>11</sup> That is why Paul puts the call to surrender before the call to resist the world and reprogram the mind. We study the Scriptures in the context of a relationship. Our interest is not merely academic, though that kind of study is amazingly helpful. In the Bible we are reading a love letter from our Creator, and in the reading we risk learning the very thoughts of Jesus Christ. Our minds are reprogrammed. And with that new mind we discern, we come to know at a deep level, what God’s will is in the here and now. And we can only do it together.

**The Third Key: Self-Examination (v.3)**

Rare is the person who knows themselves well. Neither too high an estimation (pride) nor too low (self-loathing). Frankly I wobble a lot, like a tire that’s either over or under-inflated. Paul agreed with Socrates, “The unexamined life is not worth living,” only with a twist. No one can know themselves accurately unless they see themselves in light of the grace of God. This is why much therapy and counseling misses the mark. It leaves the person alone with only their own resources. And while human

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<sup>11</sup> “To Illustrate: Bible- why we love it,” *Preaching*, March-April 1992, 68.

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**Romans 12:1-8 . . . . . 11**

responsibility is important, it is never the whole truth. God has not left us alone, and God’s grace is always there, waiting to be accessed as a fountain of healing, energy, support and direction. So a third key to knowing God’s will is some serious and regular time spent in silence with one’s own inner life. Verse 3, “For by the grace given me I bid every one of you not to *think* of herself more highly than she ought to *think*, but to *think* with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned to her.” Notice Paul’s emphasis on thinking with a renewed mind. Without it we might end up like the woman who came to Pastor Douglas Webster:

“Not long ago a woman shared with me the reason for her eighteen year old daughter’s rejection of Christianity. Painfully she described their conversations. Her daughter claimed that she could have nothing to do with Christ because of the superficiality of her mother. Her mother had no depth. Her life was trivial, her faith sentimental, her interest frivolous. There conversations rarely went beyond small talk. She held her mother responsible for a conspiracy of silence on a host of issues she was now confronting head-on at college. She may as well have walked on campus from the desert as from middle-class suburbia.

Her mother sobbed, ‘My daughter is right! I am superficial. I am still a child. I was raised in a church that only thought about numbers and slogans, and I’ve never been beyond that. For all these years I’ve never grown up, never thought about what was important.’ As I listened to her, I marveled at her honesty and thanked God for the work of the Holy Spirit in helping her realize her need to grow.”<sup>12</sup>

Are you where you were a year ago? Is there a dynamic spiral of spiritual and intellectual growth in your life? Is God speaking to you through Scripture about who you are and why you are still allowed to draw breath? Take some time for assessment. Think with sober judgment. Get alone. Get quiet. Open the book of God. Read and pray and think and study and cry and dream and pray.

Proper self-esteem for Christians is more solid than the psycho-babble slogan of *feeling good about myself*. I must disengage from the world’s images: what my

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<sup>12</sup> Douglas Webster, *Finding Spiritual Direction* (Downer’s Grove, ILL: Inter-Varsity, 1991), 25.

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**Romans 12:1-8 ..... 12**

parents think, what my spouse thinks, what my boss thinks, what my friends think, even what I think, and learn what God thinks. He made me. He showed mercy to me in Christ. He accepts my surrender. He floods me with grace. He gave me the Book, and now he wants us together to come to a realistic and hopeful understanding of just who I am in Christ and among his people.

If it wasn't so sad I would laugh at loud at what I hear adults say things like, "I just want to be happy," or, "But I'm basically a good person," or, "You don't have to come to church to be a good Christian," or, "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere." So shallow, so utterly trivial.

How do you respond to such statements without appearing rude? Easier to whine than repent. Easier to stay busy than to sit still and look within. Easier to live on the polarized opinions of talk radio than to see what God's Word says about me and my life and the world we live in. Self-examination is for everyone; we are commanded to do it, verse 3: "For by the grace given to me I bid *everyone of you* not to *think* of himself more highly than he ought to *think*, but to *think* with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned to him."

It's not a matter of intelligence or education. Whatever your abilities, whatever your training, the path the living God wants to lead you on includes a dose of self-exploration. Journey to the center of the self. Sure it's scary; what if God peels the onion and there's nothing there? But grace is with us, and at the center we find Christ waiting for us.

**The Fourth Key: The Church (vv.4-5)**

We all know about *dependence*; it's how we were as children. We needed others to meet our needs. My life is about *You* and what you can do for me. The big issue here is learning to trust.

We also all know something about *independence*; it's what happened to us during adolescence when we started looking in the mirror and asking, Who am I? It's where we learned to say *Me* and to have some sense of personal boundaries. The big issue here is confidence and competence. I can make it; my decisions count.



**Romans 12:1-8 ..... 13**

But there is a third level of maturity beyond independence, beyond adolescent self-absorption, beyond willfulness, and that is *interdependence*, where we learn to say *We*. The issue here is community and cooperation, synergy and enrichment.<sup>13</sup>

Adults who get stuck in dependence are always blaming others. The church is never good enough. Someone is always disappointing them. Adults who never move beyond independence are isolated and unable to connect with any intimacy or fidelity. They float like perpetual adolescents going after what they want no matter who it effects. But adults who can say a strong *Me* followed by a strong *We* are the kind of people ready to be used by God. Real individuality and real community are not in competition. God is not after clones but characters. The church is not a vegetable blender but a real salad with hunks of different things working together. Stand naked before a mirror, says Paul, and learn about the church, how the different parts make a whole, verse 4: “For as in one body we have many members (unity in diversity), and all the members do not have the same function (real individuality), so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members one of another (real community).”

Bottom line: you cannot know God’s will apart from depth involvement in Christian community. That’s the fourth key. God is not in the business of revealing his will to those who abandon the church or think themselves superior to the church. It’s OK to be honest about the faults of the church and its pastors, including this one; it’s not OK to turn your back on other Christians, because when you do that God will put you in the spiritual deep freeze, and you will stay there frozen until you are ready to be a living, humble member of Christ’s body. I see it all the time. People leave the church and their spiritual growth comes to a halt. They may sustain a low level of life, but they are disconnected and withering like a cut flower.

**The Fifth Key: Spiritual Gifts (vv. 6-8)**

One Friday I made a phone call to someone struggling with a loss. It’s what pastors spend a lot of time doing. Following hunches and offering encouragement. Then the oddest thing happened. In the middle of the conversation I became aware that I was

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<sup>13</sup> See Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 48-52 on the three levels of maturity.

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**Romans 12:1-8** ..... 14

speaking out of a depth that was not mine. I felt a heightened sense of awareness that is often the signal of a spiritual gift. It was as if I was an observer to my own conversation. It was not a generic word of Scriptural guidance but a very personal word. I may be mistaken, but I think it was prophetic word, not a prediction but a personal promise from God. God gave me a note, and like the mailmen I delivered it. It connected deeply with a need on the other end of the phone. They were encouraged, and so was I! It was a spiritual gift, one of the many effects of God’s marvelous grace.

The grace of God that comes *to us* is also meant to come *through us* with certain effects, like light striking a prism and then refracting into the colors of the rainbow. Those effects are known as spiritual gifts. They are the tools we use to work God’s garden. David Hubbard puts it this way:

“(Spiritual gifts) are not decorative figurines on the kitchen shelf adding a touch of beauty; they are the stove heating food to feed a hungry family. They are not the tuxedo what makes the cellist look elegant; they are the instruments through which heavenly music is produced.”<sup>14</sup>

Gifts of the Spirit are not meant to be admired but used, “having gifts that differ according to the grace given us,” wrote Pau, “*let us use them....*” They are the spark that jumps when something God has given me connects with a need you have and vice versa. They are what happens when my deep joy connects with the world’s deep need. It’s the way interdependence works in the church. God has designed the church so that each person has a direct connection to God, but we are also connected to one another in such a way that most of what God wants to give us comes through the spiritual gifts of other people.

There is work to be done, kingdom work, and it not to be done merely with human energy but in and with and by the power of God’s grace flowing to and through his people. What would the church be if each person had a realistic assessment of who they were in Christ and what God had called them to do? The fifth key to knowing God’s will is to use the gifts God has given me and to appreciate the gifts of others. Paul lists seven here in verses 6 through 8, and each of them

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<sup>14</sup> David Hubbard, *Unwrapping Your Spiritual Gifts* (Waco, TX: Word, 1985), 44.

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**Romans 12:1-8 ..... 15**

builds up the church. Your heart will sing for joy when you sense God using you to touch the world one person at a time. It's what we were made for. The will of God is not some exotic, far-off thing. It is surrendered people, *in* but not *of* the world, searching the Word, resisting the world, living in community, and sharing their gifts that Jesus Christ might have a place to dwell among his people.

**CONCLUSION**

I'm told there's a wind at Wrigley Field in Chicago that blows out from home plate to centerfield. And that when the wind blows, hits that normally would have been caught by the center fielder are carried into the stands for home runs. Whenever we step up to the plate we ought to be praying for that wind, the wind of God's Spirit, to blow and carry our pitiful little pop-ups out of the park.

It's not easy or simple, but it's all here in Romans 12, verses 1 through 8. Knowing God's will is a process. Say Yes in surrender and No in resistance. Let the Word of God reprogram your mind. Take regular time for self-assessment. Be who you are in living community. Use your gifts and welcome the gifts of others. Then pray for the wind to blow.

