

Rev. Anne J. Scalfaro  
4 August 2024

10:30 a.m. MT Worship  
Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

Calvary Baptist Church  
Denver, Colorado

## ***“Together, We Serve: Guided by the Deacon Ministry Advisory Board”***

Third sermon in *Part III: Together, We Serve*  
of the summer series: *Together, We are Community*

### ***Romans 12:3-13***

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

*NOTE: A sermon is a spoken word event. This manuscript served as a guide but is not exact to what was preached in the moment.*

If Jesus was the ‘fun uncle’ who came for a quick visit (3 years-ish) and showed us all the amazing things about loving the vulnerable and being present with sinners and how to find meaning in a mustard seed, how to build the kin-dom of God, how to turn water into wine, and how to make blind men see...then you could consider Paul like ‘the long-term parent’ (or 2-3 decades!) who had to help all these new Christians figure out how to integrate what they had learned from Jesus into their lives *for the rest of their lives*. Creating functional, sustainable community is hard work. And, it was Paul’s job; part church planter, part church consultant...he guided communities via long-form letter from afar!

Because of how didactic Paul’s ministry was to these early churches (having to spell out every detail for them), portions of his letters read like “Dear

Abby” columns, offering advice to questions that may or may not have been asked by the people in Rome or Philippi or Ephesus, but that Paul clearly felt like he needed to address nonetheless. (If you are too young to know what “Dear Abby” is, it’s kind of like Reddit, but without crowdsourced answers, just one person writing in response to one person’s question.)

In Romans 12, Paul is writing to these early Christians with advice on how to shape their lives around Jesus in a way that involves everyone doing their part. They are (perhaps for the first time in their lives) no longer singular, separate individuals; they are part of a greater whole, and in turn, a greater mission.

I love how the late pastor and writer, Eugene Peterson, paraphrases the first two verses of Romans 12, which sets the stage for our text today:

*So here's what I want you to do, [with God's help]: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for [God]...fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what [God] wants from you, and quickly respond to it... (Romans 12:1-2, The Message)*

And how do we recognize what God wants from us and respond? By using the gifts and skills God's given us. Because, as Paul points out, if one of us isn't functioning or if one of us is missing, we aren't at full capacity. We aren't just parts of the whole; we are *all* The Whole, each doing our part. That's the difference in being part of a community, versus being a person of faith out in the world on our own. We believe something good and important, a kind of synergy or harmony happens, when ALL of us work together that is more than the effect of our separate gifts just functioning out in the world. Think of it like this: dark chocolate is good. Red wine is good. But when you pair the

two together...delicious, right! Something greater than they would be on their own!

To convey this synergy of our gifts working together, Paul uses the human body as a metaphor to drive this point home.

If you've ever broken an arm, then you know that feeling the first time you get home and realize how *every single thing* takes longer. Whether it's brushing your teeth with the opposite hand, or having to put a plastic bag over your cast to take a shower, or only having one arm to grab the groceries and the door and your phone, or realizing the majority of the long sleeve shirts in your closet don't fit over your cast, etc etc...ugh! It's not that you can't make things work, you do, but – it does take a lot longer, doesn't it? To some extent, you adapt and perhaps other parts of your body get stronger (like your non-broken arm), but then as soon as you get the cast off and you start functioning with both arms again you're like – oh my gosh! It's amazing how much easier everything is, and you swear you'll never take for granted having two functioning arms again. But of course, eventually you do.

To take the metaphor from the physical body to the Church body, we get so used to operating however we are that sometimes we don't know if the Body we are working with is fully healthy or if we've just adapted to some broken bones and strained muscles, overworking and stressing other muscles and joints in the process to compensate, so much so that we don't even know we're using those muscles more, it's just what we've had to do to adapt.

Organizations, like the physical body, are highly skilled at adapting to whatever 'member' is giving the most effort or doing the most, and so we'll start to favor that limb or that system or that strength because it's getting the job done, without really stopping to say, "Wait, are we doing this in a healthy way or the healthiest, most balanced, equitable way that is using everyone's gifts? Are we giving all our muscles a chance to pull their weight? Are we letting our triceps shine a bit, letting them do their thing, or are we letting our biceps take over and lift the weight they should be lifting?"

Or, here's another example. After three surgeries, my right shoulder joint does not function properly. But it's not because the original torn tendons have not healed. They healed, but in the process, the other muscles that took over when there was an injury, they re-wired my brain telling my shoulder how to function in a way it could get by while injured, and now 15 years post surgeries, that re-wiring is *still so very hard* to overcome and re-teach. The individual tears in the tendon have healed, but the joint still sits out of place, because the muscles that took over while I was injured have never really let the new tendons back in to do their thing.

Why do I mention this? Well, because sometimes we read passages like this one in Scripture that sound so lovely like "every person in the church works together, each offering their skill, and when we do that we'll be this amazing healthy body, with all of our parts working together so well that we can land a Yurchenko double pike vault like Simone Biles!"<sup>1</sup> Well...the reality is, every member and part of our

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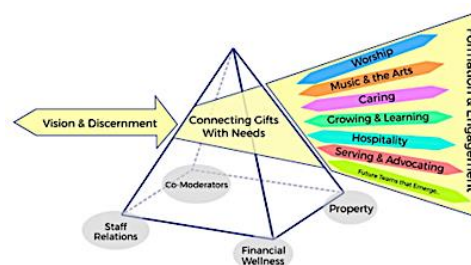
<sup>1</sup> This sermon was preached during the 2024 Summer Olympic Games in Paris, France.

Body can be doing our part to the best of our ability, AND we can still be operating in old wiring and trying to re-teach our systems new or different ways of being as we work together. It's not just about each person doing their part and offering their unique gifts and skills, although that is key. It's also about balance and how those gifts and skills work together, and how we discern together what we may not be seeing while we are in the midst of doing, and perhaps what muscles or parts are over-working while others lay dormant waiting their turn. Or perhaps everything is working great and we simply need to be aware of that and grateful and not take our health for granted! Even that takes an outside perspective sometimes.

Sometimes we need to step outside of ourselves and have a physical therapist or a yoga instructor say, "you know your right shoulder joint is rotating really far forward, concentrate on pulling your shoulder blade down your back while externally rotating your bicep and lengthening your neck muscles. Cool. Sure, I can do that."

The hope of our Ministry Advisory Board—which is composed of 14 deacons, or *leading servants* as we defined last week, two in each of the four grey areas and two in each of the big yellow areas in the prism diagram in your Order of Worship—is that this group will collectively guide our mission and vision and ministries at Calvary.

The image we chose for this guiding body of deacons is a prism. (Hold up prism)



The yellow parts represent the Light that streams through the prism; the very image and presence of God (*imago dei*) that is within each one of us and among all of us and that is in the world and our community too.

For example, we realize there are re-wirings that need to happen, that only **Vision & Discernment** will help us have the perspective to see. Sometimes that vision will come from within, sometimes from the community or other sources.

Often it will come through listening and synthesizing, evaluating and encouraging, beta testing and being honest about what is working and what isn't. What ministries are no longer helping us effectively meet a need, and what needs are around us that God is inviting us to meet? What hip might need to be replaced? What eye might need just a bit of Lasik?

Likewise we trust that **Connecting Gifts with Needs** will help us ensure that each one of us is able to offer a gift or skill that we have in order to fulfill the needs of our church and community in effective and meaningful ways. This connection is the light that passes through the center of the prism because truly when we are connecting Gifts with Needs we are in synergy or harmony, we are functioning at our healthiest as a Body of Christ. We are these particles of light, and yes I'm mixing metaphors here, but they are both important.

And, in turn, we trust that **Formation & Engagement** (the rainbow stripes) will be able to show us what ministries we are heavily favoring (just as when you lift weights you can tell which side you are stronger in),

and which ones might need more strength or focus. Here we'll learn how we can strengthen weaknesses and rest in some areas that have been maxed out; a majority of the gift of our community will be evident in these rainbow stripes, not just within Calvary but shining out with gospel hope and love to the world!

All these **yellow parts, the light and love and *imago dei*** (image of God) **only becomes a rainbow of impact in the world** (an impact of spiritual formation, advocacy, justice, serving, caring, and the like) **when it passes through the prism base**, which contains the structure that allows us to function as an organization and entity: **our property, our finances, our staff, the leadership of our Co-Moderators**, or Co-Conveners of this Community. Much like the human body, this prism has structure, or a base, *and* there is fluidity and movement shining through.

So now to the gifts that Paul writes about to the Romans, and how we might begin to identify ourselves within them. This passage is not meant to describe the gifts of the 14 deacons on the Ministry Advisory Board

(MAB); rather, it points to the gifts of ALL of us in this community, that the MAB is attune to, as well as some of the values we wish to cultivate. They will be helping ask questions like, “Where is our health? How can we be healthier and function at our best? And when do we need to rest?”

I’m going to go through the gifts listed in this passage, perhaps giving you a new way to think about them. When we look at these words in the Greek,<sup>2</sup> we see how they can mean many more things than what we might assume at face value.

As I go through these gifts, I want you to answer these three questions:

*Which gifts are your natural strengths?*

*Which gifts would you like to grow, develop, strengthen, and lean into in new ways? Or, which gifts are you curious about, perhaps want to learn more about?*

*Which of these gifts do you absolutely know, “this is not my cup of tea, this is definitely not*

*mine to do, but more power to you, whoever in this community does it!”*

Jot those three categories down, and as I go through the gift and descriptors Paul lists for the Romans, you’ll have a starting place to see how you might fit within the whole of Calvary. It is relieving to know that we don’t all have the same function or gift, as Paul says in verse 4, we just each need to play our part. So those three categories again are:

1. Your Natural Strengths, Gifts; those things for which you can say, “I’ve got this!”
2. The Gifts you want to develop, strengthen, or explore with curiosity
3. Gifts that are definitely not your thing, at least not in this season

So first, Prophecy, in Proportion (or relation to) Faith. This is perhaps best defined first by what it is NOT. It’s not looking through a crystal ball or predicting the future. It is someone who is able to listen to and discern the leading of God,

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<sup>2</sup> All Greek definitions and understandings of the words in this sermon are found through Strong’s Concordance as researched through <https://www.blueletterbible.org/>.

especially as it relates to pointing out when we are doing things not aligned with the gospel, or by revealing things that may be hidden from us in plain sight. Discernment is all about revealing what is hidden; it's less about discovering secrets, and more about peeling back layers, staying curious, listening, observing.

In proportion to faith, *pistos* in the Greek, simply means trust, confidence, faithfulness.

So I would say someone with the gift of prophecy in proportion to faith, is someone who is trustworthy, who is faithful, who listens, almost like a confidant, and who can reveal things that perhaps others cannot see easily on their own. Good therapists or coaches come to mind! Other aspects of this gift include people who say the thing out loud that everyone else is thinking but no one else had the guts to say. Or the person who is willing to say the thing that people don't want to hear, but need to hear. Or perhaps the person who is able to synthesize the mood of a room and put into words something that no one else has yet articulated. This kind of prophecy could also be described as people who are

quietly perceptive on the one hand, but then also who have the courage to share what they have perceived with others. It is possible, I think, to be stronger in one half of this gift than the other.

Second gift. Ministry, in ministering. Thanks Paul, that's super helpful. Actually though, the Greek is more nuanced. Ministry is the word *diakonos*! I hope that sounds familiar by now, especially after last week. One who goes "through the dust" (gets their hands/feet dirty doing the work of the church); a servant leader, or perhaps a *leading servant* as we discussed last week.

Then we have *diakonia*, which is the ministerING part. This emphasizes the role of serving, and is often related to hospitality or serving food in the context in which Paul is writing. It is also referencing the Acts passage I mentioned last week, Acts 7, which is related to ensuring the widows were fed, and so refers to not just the service of those who prepare and present food but also the collecting of resources to be shared or distributed to others. Think generosity.

So for this gift or skill, think about whether you have the gift of hospitality – food related or otherwise. Are you one who sees the person who is sitting by themselves? Are you the one who notices what needs to be done and does it? Are you a team player, working to ensure all have what they need? Are you the one who fills all the glasses at the table when you sit down and there's a pitcher of the water in the middle?

This gift could also be quite literally those who serve by cooking or baking or waiting tables or creating hospitable or welcoming spaces. It could also refer to those who ensure that all have what they need in terms of economic equity or housing and food sharing. And yes, it also has the connotation of raising funds in order to share them, so if you are philanthropic or are a good steward or enjoy generosity, this is your gift as well, Ministry in Ministering. ☺ Love how many things that captures.

Third, the teacher in teaching. *Didasko in didaskalia*. Think of the word didactic. In the Greek, this is not just teaching in the traditional sense, although it certainly is that – if you have the gift of book learning and

book teaching, but it's also one who imparts instruction to another or one who is a really good explainer or who can expound on things to make them make sense.

So if you have the gift of taking a difficult concept and explaining it with a story or an image or just in a way that is everyday language – this is your gift. Also, if you are able to share what you've learned in life, perhaps as you sit with someone who is going through the same treatment that you went through for your cancer, or can share knowledge about when they were in the same parenting stage as you, this is your gift. Or if you are someone who has been through grief and feels able to sit with someone else in grief, or if you're someone who enjoys teaching others how to set things up or run our livestream, or ensure they know how to fill the little communion cups with the squeezie squirt thing...this is THAT skill. The gift of teaching, in words and in big thoughts, and also teaching through example and everyday metaphor and language and tasks. If you are a parent, you probably have this gift at some level. You do it every day.



And – just a note...the teacher *in teaching* simply means you are a person who uses the gift of teaching with people who *want to learn*! You aren't just teaching or lecturing for the sake of spewing or sharing knowledge, there is actually an audience there (of one or many) who are ready and willing to learn. So it's a distinction between pontificating or showing off knowledge, versus truly passing along knowledge in accessible ways.

Fourth, the encourager in encouragement. *Parakaleo*, meaning the exhorter or consoler, one who brings one to one's side, who summons, who comforts. Also, the gift of encouragement itself is the exhortation (or inspiring words) that one speaks to admonish or warn, to instruct, to stir action or refine. Sometimes encouragement is positive, with comforting words like "*You're doing a great job, you've got this!*" Other times, the encouragement is a "calling in" (versus a calling out), saying "perhaps consider how that wording might sound to this or that person..."

The encouragement is not just a blanket cheerleading "you're awesome" but moreso a "I

believe in you and respect you so I want you to be at your best and do better" kind of thing. The noun part of encourager could be the one who is able to call you to their side in comfort or solace, providing refreshment.

So for this pairing, I think it refers to several types of folks. If you are one of those people who other people just gravitate to because you put a smile on their face or because you light up a room or bring a great energy, this is you. If you encourage through writing notes of gratitude or thanks or pointing out one's gifts or skills this is you. This is also you if you are able to sit in silence with someone and be present, offering solace through shared space. This is also you if you've been told you're a good storyteller or an inspiring speaker. Do you give pep talks on the field or at work or with your best friend on the phone? Are you the silver lining, glass is half full type? This is probably you.

Fifth, the giver in sincerity. Giver, or *metadidōmi* in the Greek, means to give or impart. So it's not just finances, it's also time and knowledge, skills. This is emphasized by the second

word, *haplotes*, which means simplicity or bountifulness or with singleness of purpose. Our translation uses the word sincerity. It's basically trying to convey one who imparts what they have or who shares what they have (money, knowledge, skills) without pretense or hypocrisy, someone who is not self-seeking but has an openness of self, a generosity of "what's mine is yours."

These are the folks you know that are always pointing away from themselves to others. They are examples. I think of these folks as mentors through and through. Sharing generously of their knowledge with others, imparting skills. And yes, those people who give of finances and resources with humility and a sense of abundance and generosity. If you have any skill that you offer and give without hesitation, this is you. And it's not always in all areas, but just a few. Like, you'll give all day when it comes to editing and proofreading because that's your thing. Or you'll give all kinds of time to those experiencing homelessness because they are your passion. Or you'll give of your money without thinking twice when it comes to "such and such cause" because it just tugs at your

heart. This type of giver is less about generic generosity and more about purposeful giving or sharing or mentoring in one or more areas.

Sixth, the leader in diligence. Leader is *proistēmi*, which means guardian or one who is set over, a protector, or one who gives attention to (sometimes aid to). Diligence is *spoudē* in the Greek, meaning earnest or careful, especially as it relates to business.

This gift relates to our folks who are committee chairs or co-leads of groups. Those who engage with human resources or enjoy creating policies and procedures, and ensuring they are followed. People who have an eye for bylaws and articles of incorporation and endowments and trusts and all the 'business' type stuff of the church. People who care about safety and security and liability.

These can also be people who see themselves as guardians or caretakers, either of our property – in terms of gardeners and maintenance folks and trash picker-uppers and worship resource room organizers, as well as those who see themselves as guardians of our congregation (the people) in

terms of watching out for the vulnerable and ensuring we are *Open to All, Closed to None*, and (as we said earlier) it can also relate to those who are guardians of our official documents that make us a 501c3.

And, one more category, in a third or fourth definition down in the Greek. One who gives aid to another. This could be our first responders, or our nurses and doctors, or our mental health first aid folks, therapists, or anyone who has that tug at their heart when they see someone in need to help and they stop to actually help.

Seventh, the compassionate in cheerfulness. Everyone probably hopes they have this gift, right! *Eleeō*, compassionate, means one who has mercy on others, who helps the afflicted, who brings help to those accused of harm/sin. This changes things, huh?

This is a very specific kind of compassion that is related to a deep understanding of God's grace, and an understanding that *all people* are deserving of it. This would be the folks who work for justice through policy and systemic change, those who advocate for the voice and rights

of people who are vulnerable and marginalized – the immigrant, the ones who have been charged with committing crimes, the imprisoned, the houseless, the poor, the hungry, those in distress. If you have a heart for our Blessings ministry or Family Promise, this is you. If you care about LGBTQIA+ advocacy and inclusion or speak up for racial justice and work on creating more anti-racist systems, this is you.

The cheerfulness part of this duo is the word *hilarotēs*, which literally means 'readiness of mind.' This is not one who is happy because their life is going great and they want to spread that cheer around. This is a kind of centering and readiness of mind, where a person is offering grace and mercy from their own place of having received grace and mercy, their mind is steadied and centered, focused. They are leading and living from their truest Christ-like heart and place.

We all know people who have an unwavering heart for justice and missions, this is that. The cheerfulness comes through being completely grounded in one's understanding and beliefs in their mind about what God says about the poor and

oppressed, which results in uncompromised compassion, which is the action that follows that conviction.

So those seven are the official gifts Paul lists. But I'd like us to consider the values and attributes that he lists in verses 9-13 as gifts too. Perhaps ones that we all need to work toward in some way (in other words, we don't get to opt out of these), but I do think there are those of us whose strength in these areas can lead us all and strengthen us all as the Body of Christ.

Verse 9: "*Let love be genuine. Hate what is evil. Hold fast to what is good.*" The love in this verse is *agape*, which is a selfless, unconditional love that is often referred to as universal love or the love of God because it can apply to everyone and everything. It is a sacrificial love that seeks the good of the other person without expecting reciprocation, even in hard times.

Genuine in this verse means without dissimulation or without hypocrisy. So in essence, let the *agape* love of God, the most pure love, be the most authentic thing in your life. This is your gift if you are someone that people say is spiritually centered

or truly exudes the love of Christ. We all know these people, and would rarely name ourselves as one. But we can all do a good job of saying when we see this in others, and I encourage you to do that!

Hating, in the Greek is *abhor*, so it is super strong. Hate what is evil or what prevents justice. And actively work against it. This would be those who are all about social justice in word and action, and they connect it to God's love. We have folks in our church with this gift and it's inspiring; they are North Stars for me, for sure.

Hold fast means "to cleave or attach oneself to" to what is good. These are the folks that help us see the bright side of things and hold on to hope even in the midst of all that is going wrong in the world. If you are one of these people, if you have the gift for hope and finding joy – the world really needs you right now! Shine brightly.

Verse 10: "*Love one another with mutual affection.*" The first love in this verse is *philostorgos*, which expresses a family kind of love, and is most commonly referred to as the familial bond, the love that is shared within families or

between a parent and a child. And the mutual affection term here is a translation of a different word for love, *philadelphia*, which is a kind of affection between siblings and shared among humans. It can also be the love you feel for a best friend or for your home city or anything you care for deeply.

So essentially this verse refers to those folks who are able to love all humans as if they are their literal family members, their kids, their partners, their parents. Which doesn't mean they always get along, but it does mean they rarely disown them or speak with hatred about them. We hold space for family members across philosophical, religious, political divides that we often don't hold for others. So if you know people who can do this, those who are bridge builders – this is their gift.

The second part of that verse is “*outdo one another in showing honor.*” This simply means show deference or reverence for others. Lead the way for others by preferring to put others before yourself. If you're the person who is always opening the door for others, or saying in the potluck line, you go first, this might be your gift. If you wait to ensure all have been

served before you serve yourself, this is most likely your gift. This is also your gift if you are able to see the best in folks, the *imago dei*, image of God, in everyday people. That's what it means to hold people in reverence. To have a holiness about how you see people. This is a cool gift to experience when you are around it. It usually makes you feel pretty good...so if you know people that make you feel seen and heard and valued...then they have this gift.

Verse 11: “*Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.*”

In short, this means do not be sluggish or slothful in the diligence or business of the things that matter most. If you know people who are great with prioritizing and keeping a strong focus or to-do list, this is their gift. Being ardent in spirit, means “to boil with heat” in the “pneuma” the breath or wind of God. Sounds very Pentecost-y, doesn't it? These are people who are so full of the Spirit that it just bubbles over from them, God's Spirit flowing in and through them with ease and consistency. These folks are super centered and truly tapped into God's breath in their very being. I often feel like yoga

instructors have this gift, but also those who lead in the areas of centering prayer or lectio divina or other spiritual practices. Also artists and creators and musicians. They all have this gift I think.

And “*serve the Lord*” pretty much means what it says. It’s the only phrase of Paul’s in this passage that is fairly easy to take at face value! It means follow, or be a good follower to, the *kyrios*, the Lord, that is, the one who holds all things together, the one who has control and holding power. I think folks who do this well are great at prayer, and trusting things to God...so if you are prayer person, this might be your gift.

Just a few more and these go quickly.

“*Rejoice in hope.*” This kind of rejoicing refers to the gladness in salutations and greetings, so I think of our ushers and greeters! If you know how to greet people with hope and joy, this is your gift.

“*Be patient in affliction.*” Patient means able to remain, abide, endure. And affliction means anything that brings distress, anguish, burden, or

trouble. Those with this gift are able to sit and be with others (or themselves) in the midst of the worst of what life throws at us. This is a gift that those who have chronic illness or those who are in treatment can offer us. And it’s nothing that they have to do or say, it’s just their presence, them choosing to be present and be in our community, and say “I am here; I am hurting, but I am here.” – that is a powerful witness and testimony to us all. Not all gifts are things to be done; some gifts are simply embodied when you show up. Everyone has something to offer even when you think you’re too weak or tired to be of any good to anyone. Even as log-in online when you are ill or recovery...that is a gift. Your life is a gift; a testimony of endurance.

“*Persevere in prayer.*” Persevere means to be always continuing in, or be devoted in, to be in constant readiness. Prayer is “an address to God” or it can also refer to here “the place where one addresses God.” I love this nuance because that means this gift refers to those who are faithful and devoted to prayer as a practice (addressing God) AND those who are faithful and

devoted for caring for our house of prayer (that is, addressing the needs of the HOUSE of God), our church building and facility, those who care for our sacred spaces like the Foot of the Cross Courtyard and Sanctuary and Chapel. Many gifts fall within this, and all of them require persevering, as the needs are continual when we address God in prayer or when we address the maintenance needs of the prayer house of God.

Verse 13: “*Contribute to the needs of saints.*” Contribute means to be a partaker or a communicator or a distributor. It means to come into communion and fellowship with others, or to facilitate that fellowship or communion. Needs means any area of lack. And saints, as we discussed last week, is from the Greek *hagios*, which refers to those who are set apart, sacred, that is ALL the people of God who are to look for the God-ness in the world.

We can look at this gift literally, and say it refers to those who give money to help folks in the church through the Calvary Family Emergency Fund. We can also look at this area as a place for people with the gift of communication and dissemination of information

and those who have the gift of budgeting, as it is about ensuring all the information or material or resources that is needed gets shared out to the community.

And finally, “*pursue hospitality to strangers.*” Pursue is to follow after, to run toward, to press on toward, to seek eagerly. Hospitality is the word *philoxenia*, which means sharing love to strangers. So this last phrase, is a gift that describes those who are the extroverts among us, who love to go after those they don’t know, and share love or care or hospitality with them. Could be through an encouraging word or a meal or an act of service, but the essence is the continual pursuit of meeting new people and expanding one’s circle beyond what is familiar or everyday to them. Continually seeking out ‘strangers’ and expanding boundaries. These are the folks in our community who have the gift of broadening our horizons and getting us out of our comfort zones. And the folks who love to think about how we can welcome guests and be a welcoming presence for all in our community.

Paul has given us a hearty list, hasn’t he? I hope you have some

gifts listed down, especially in those first two categories. Begin holding those before God with open hands, asking God to help you know how to use or develop those gifts in the coming months. And for the gifts in your category three (the ones that are definitely not you!), hold those before God asking for God to be working in other people's lives in our community to step forward who have those gifts...so we are the healthiest we can be. And if prayer is not your gift, so to speak, then talk about this stuff with others, or journal about it. Or if you see someone with a gift, name it for them and encourage them! Sometimes, *often times*, others see things in us we can't see in ourselves.

While all of these words, phrases, and descriptors in Paul's letter do not speak to every job or task in the church, they do give us a clear picture of what is needed for the "good of the whole" and what is needed for a healthy and functioning body!

And lest you think that a gift or skill has to be perfect in order for you to use it, or if you're sitting there thinking, well I have this gift, but I know "so and so" is better at this than me

or more experienced, so I'll just sit on it and wait for someone to come ask me to use it or just wait until I have developed it more or understand it more, let me just say this:

Our gifts and skills do not have to be Olympic level. We do not have to be like LeBron James on the court, Sha'Carri Richardson on the track, Katie Ledecky in the pool, or Simone Biles twisting and flying through the air. We don't have to be the best of the best of the best at something to use a gift and make a difference. Sure, "the best of the best" "inspire us, but God only asks us to recognize that we have gifts and then to do our best to start using them without worrying about making mistakes or not knowing what we are doing 100% of the time. Our gifts are better used, than not used.

To that point, I'll leave you with this story that begins public philosopher, Princeton University Professor, and New York Times best selling author and Eddie S. Glaude Jr.'s latest book, *We are the Leaders We Have Been Looking For*, which is a reflection on Black politics and how ordinary people have the capacity to be the heroes that our democracy so desperately



requires. He hones in on how we are all more than the circumstances of our lives and what we do matters. It's a book that is "more about the people in the pew than the one in the pulpit," and it begins with this story, adapted from an account from Cliffert Ulmer, a sawmill hand born in Florida, who told this story to author Zora Neale Hurston.<sup>3</sup>

### *A Story*

Of the five black men who made it to Heaven, one decided that he was going to try out the wings the angel Gabriel had given him. The other men told him to sit down and wait as Gabriel instructed them to do. Seated in golden chairs, they had received their robes and wings too. Heaven was their home now. A life of toil had been left behind. No need to disrupt things; simply wait until they were told what to do next. But one man insisted the wings were his, and he was going to use them. *"Watch me skim around that tree of life without touching a leaf,"* he declared. *"Watch me shoot right cross the Sea of Glass and around the throne and right 'cross God's*

*nose without touching it. Just watch me."*

The others worried that he was going to knock over the delicate lamps and fine vases in Heaven as he darted back and forth. He did, eventually, and God didn't say a word. [God] just looked at him.

Gabriel returned, angry, snatched off the man's wings, and told him, *"Sit down until I tell you to move!"* The other men chastised him and said, *"Look, now everybody got wings but you."* The man smiled and said, *"I don't care. I sure was a flying fool when I had them."*<sup>4</sup>

Glaude reflects on this story and the black experience, specifically and the human experience more generally, writing, *"You must maximize your gifts no matter the costs. [Some things need to be knocked over and broken anyway!] The wings were his, after all, and even when they were taken away, this Black man relished the life lived even in death. He was a flying fool when he had them... Do not let people, and most of all don't let*

<sup>3</sup> Glaude's note: Zora Neale Hurston, *Every Tongue Got to Confess: Negro Folk-Tales from the Gulf States*, e-book (2001: New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 96-97.

<sup>4</sup> Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *We are the Leaders We Have Been Looking For* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2024) 1-2.

*yourself, crumple your  
feathers... ”<sup>5</sup>*

Just as wings are meant for  
flying, our gifts are meant to be  
used. May we stop sitting on our  
wings (our gifts) waiting for  
someone else to stop and tell us  
to use them. God’s given them  
to us for a reason...so let’s use  
them!

And, whether we look foolish or  
not, God loves to watch us  
try...and fly...

Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *We are the Leaders We Have  
Been Looking For* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University  
Press, 2024) 1-2.