



# The Gift of Service

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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AM Assembly



## Introduction:<sup>i</sup>

We've learned that none of us has to carry the weight of the entire congregation. However, we each have our place. That leaves each of us with a big question. What's my place? **Romans 12:6-8** gives us some insight. Paul said God has given gifts to each of us. He has placed us in this body to use these gifts in order to glorify Him and serve one another (**I Peter 4:10**). Further, He expects us to use these gifts in order to build up the body (**Ephesians 4:15-16**).

I believe **Romans 12:6-8** tells us two things about these gifts. First, we all have different levels of giftedness in each of the areas listed. Since we have a level of giftedness in each one of these areas, we have a responsibility in each one. None of us can say, "I have no gift at being merciful, so I have no responsibility to be compassionate and merciful." If you were sitting in your pew and noticed the brother or sister next to you crying, you couldn't say, "Whoa! Hey, my greatest strength is teaching, not mercy. You're going to have to go find someone with a better gift of mercy than me and cry on their shoulder." No, you would need to use what ability you have and offer mercy. Second, the text does teach that each of us will have higher God-given giftedness in at least one of these areas. We all have an area we are strongest in and stronger than most others in. In that area, we have the most responsibility and opportunity in the kingdom and the local church.

So, that leads us back to our question. What's my place? How will I know? How do I fit in this puzzle? We're going to take the next seven lessons to examine these areas of strength and giftedness, help you see how you fit, to see how you can most be of help to motivate and encourage us to do the Lord's will. In this lesson, we'll study the gift of service.

## Discussion:

### I. Am I a server?

- A. As stated earlier, we all have responsibility to serve each other. As **Matthew 20:28** says, Jesus, our example, came to serve and not be served. So, in **Matthew 20:26**, it claims servant is the highest rank in the kingdom. In a sense, no matter which of the gifts in **Romans 12:6-8** we employ, we are to use them to serve others (**I Peter 4:10**). However, there are some that seem to have a natural knack for serving others. It seems to be the way they are wired. They are good at it and they find fulfillment in it. Is that you?
- B. You may be wondering, "Is that my place? Am I a server?" Allow me to share five characteristics of the gift of service by looking at a great server found in **Luke 4:38-39**, Peter's mother-in-law. To borrow a phrase from a popular movie of the late 80s, she had "been mostly dead all day." But as soon as she was healed, the text claims she got up and served Jesus and His disciples. Here is a natural servant. Serving was what came to her easily and even when she had every reason to lay off for a while, she immediately got up and started serving.
  1. *Servers easily recognize practical needs and are quick to meet them:* Peter's mother-in-law had been sick. She had been laid up in the bed with a high fever. For however long that had been going on, she had not been involved in the household tasks and chores of hospitality and service. Yet, as soon as she was healed, she recognized that some serving needed doing. She was attuned to these needs and immediately started working on it. Servers are quick to see these kinds of needs, while the rest of us are not as quick to see these needs. For instance, when it snows, I have to admit what I think about is getting my kids out and having a snowball fight, building a snowman, riding the sled with them. But a server immediately thinks about the widows and the elderly who may need their sidewalks and driveways shoveled.
  2. *Servers are more interested in the needs of others than in their own needs:* Peter's mother-in-law had been sick. She had needs. Yet, once she was healed she immediately began to think of others. She saw the needs the others had and began to serve them. Servers are quick to set aside their own needs. Servers are the last ones to sit down at the table during a meal, the last ones to get to the tv room for a family movie, the last ones to make it to the car when going anywhere because they feel the need to do something and meet needs rather than relax or get to their own needs.
  3. *Servers enjoy manual projects, jobs, and functions:* I'm sure that Peter's mother-in-law told others about her healing. But that wasn't the first thing she did. Unlike the myriad of others healed by Jesus who immediately went out and proclaimed their healing, she immediately started working on the manual task of serving Jesus and His disciples. That was what was most natural. Servers aren't into the gifts that are more verbal. They want to do something, usually with their hands. I'm thinking of a good friend of mine in Franklin, TN, named Kenny Wells, who is absolutely a server. While he is happy to teach on occasion and does a fine job when he

does, his most natural element is helping others with manual projects and jobs. It is no wonder that his occupation is handy-man and small construction. When hurricanes hit the Gulf of Alabama, Louisiana, or South East Texas, he was immediately setting up crews to go down and work on clean-up and repair, renting a truck to carry supplies and donations to those in need. When a tornado destroyed the house of one of the members in his congregation and a flood destroyed another's, he was the first one there to organize and help with the clean-up. That is his natural element.

4. *Servers show love for others in actions more than in words:* I have no doubt that Luke tells us Peter's mother-in-law immediately started serving to demonstrate how thorough her healing was. There was no lingering tiredness or aching that kept her down. However, I can't help but recognize that this was also her way of saying thank you. She didn't fall at Jesus' feet, repeating her gratitude verbally. Instead, she served. Servers show their love and gratitude through actions more than through words. They find helpful things they can do to show their appreciation. I don't know if Marita's greatest gift is serving, but I know she is higher on the scale of giftedness in service than I am. When I want to show love or offer gratitude, I'm more likely to say something, write something, send a note. Marita is more likely to take an action like cleaning my car, cutting the grass, or helping with some task. That's what servers do.
5. *Servers prefer doing the work rather than delegating it:* Remember that Jesus is in Peter's house. That means Peter's wife lives there, the daughter of Peter's mother-in-law. Did Peter's mother-in-law get up and start directing her daughter to take care of these men in their home? She would have every right. Everyone would understand if she did. But that is not what she did. She did the serving. She didn't delegate it. She did it herself. Servers prefer to do work themselves and have a hard time delegating work even when it is the best thing to do in the moment. They are not always thinking, "To get something done right I have to do it myself." Rather, they often simply see a job needs doing and feel the tug of responsibility to do it and do it now.

C. If these characteristics fit you, you have a place in the kingdom and this congregation. We need servers like you.

## II. The struggles of the server.

- A. As you can imagine, while there are strengths that go along with this natural giftedness, there are also some natural weaknesses. There are some struggles that servers have to face and overcome.
- B. Martha, of Mary and Martha fame, was a natural server. In **John 12:1-3**, after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He returned to their home. While Lazarus was reclining at the table, and Mary was demonstrating her gift of giving by anointing Jesus' feet with a pound of expensive ointment, Martha was serving. However, in **Luke 10:38-42**, we see a moment when her servant's heart got the better of her and she spiraled for a time in her weaknesses rather than her strengths. Notice five struggles demonstrated by Martha that every servant has to contend with.
  1. *Servers can be overly critical of others who are not as attuned to service:* As we saw in **John 12:1-3**, Mary seems to be naturally gifted as a giver (another of the gifts mentioned in **Romans 12:6-8**). She was not a natural servant as Martha was. When Jesus was in her home, all Martha could see was the serving that needed to be done. When Mary didn't see the serving in the same light as Martha did, Martha became highly critical. She even asked Jesus in front of everyone to rebuke her sister and command her to see the need to serve. Servers can't understand why everyone else doesn't see these serving needs in exactly the same light as the servers do. They accuse others of being lazy, procrastinators, undisciplined, irresponsible. While the rest of us sometimes are all of these things, the real issue is we just aren't wired to see it as easily as the server does. Servers need to understand that and cut us a little slack. If right now you're thinking, "Whatever, Edwin! You're just trying to get out of some work," you may just be demonstrating that you are a server.
  2. *Servers may become pushy and interfering in their eagerness to help:* I've always been amazed at how Martha spoke to Jesus in this instance. In front of everyone, she tells Jesus how to do His job. If He really cared about Martha and the serving, like Martha did, then He would rebuke Mary and command her to serve as well. I have no doubt Martha was only trying to help. She wasn't trying to rebel against Jesus or shame Him or put Him in His place. She just couldn't understand why no one was seeing this issue the way she did and began to be pushy and interfering. At the heart of the work of most servers is the desire to help. They want to meet the needs of others. However, because the others don't always place the same importance on the same things as the server does, the server can become pushy and interfering. Some of us might even see it as controlling and manipulative. They want us to see how wonderful their way is and they just keep inserting themselves in situations that aren't their business or constantly repeating advice that we don't want to hear almost like Chinese water torture on the brain.
  3. *Servers may lose sight of spiritual goals in the action of physical service:* Martha's problem in this text is not that she was a server. There is a time to serve. As we've already noted, each of us has responsibility in service. There may well have been a time when Mary, who doesn't seem to be a natural server, had to be truly rebuked for not being more involved in serving. However, in this case, it wasn't the right time to serve. It was

time to listen to the Master Teacher. Martha's God-given gift had her so attuned to the physical needs and manual projects that she was distracted away from the spiritual goal of growing at the feet of Jesus. Servers can be so involved in meeting the needs of people, doing, and working that they forget to take the time to grow spiritually. They neglect praying, Bible study, encouragement, teaching, and being exhorted by others. When it's time for the family study, they are so busy cleaning house that they see the study and prayer time as an interruption. They spend the whole time thinking it is taking up too much of their time. They need to get back to serving.

4. *Servers can get easily caught up in resentment:* Martha was angry. She was mad at Mary. Didn't Mary see how much serving had to be done? Didn't Mary know how much help Martha needed? Why wasn't she doing something about it? Further, why wasn't Jesus doing something about it? Why wouldn't He rebuke Mary for her laziness? Because Martha was distracted by what seemed most important to her and no one else felt the same way, she got caught up in resentment. She allowed that to govern her actions and reactions, so she blew up, not simply at Mary, but also at Jesus. Servers can easily get caught up in resentment. It may come out in an altercation like this one, or it may seethe under the surface coming out with passive-aggressive sniping.
  5. *Servers can be easily hurt when unappreciated:* When I consider this story of Mary and Martha in the light of my own experiences and the experiences of others who have shared with me, I see something behind the resentment. Martha is hurt. No one is noticing what she is doing. No one is expressing appreciation for all she is going through. Mary is just sitting there and Jesus is letting her. They don't get what Martha is accomplishing and doing it all for them. Often times, when servers get caught up in resentment, they don't actually resent doing the work. They love the work. They love being helpful. They don't really want someone else to do the work. They sometimes don't even want help. They don't want to be in the spotlight. They don't have to be up on the stage leading the show. But they do want to be noticed and appreciated. When that doesn't happen, they are hurt and wounded, which can lead to other issues like the resentment we've already mentioned.
- C. If these struggles sound all too familiar to you, your place in the kingdom and in this congregation may just be as a server. Don't be too upset with yourself about these weaknesses. Sure, they demonstrate that you have room to grow and areas to work on. But they also demonstrate that you have a place here. We need servers.

### III. Opportunities in the local church for the server to motivate and encourage.

- A. While some servers may also have giftedness in teaching and leading, many don't feel comfortable in these spotlight roles. Sadly, they have often been made to feel like second-class Christians because they don't jump at the chance to teach a class, offer the invitation, or give a talk before the Lord's Supper. Too often we have placed so much emphasis on these public roles that we have the idea that Christian maturity is determined by standing up on the stage in the auditorium. It isn't. If you are a server, there are plenty of ways you can be of use in the kingdom and in this local congregation.
- B. Some opportunities to serve the congregation as a whole.
 

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Deacons</li> <li>2. Facilities cleaning</li> <li>3. Grounds maintenance</li> <li>4. Secretarial and clerical help</li> <li>5. Writing and mailing letters</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Phone-calling</li> <li>7. Preparing communion</li> <li>8. Ushering</li> <li>9. Copying cds</li> </ol>
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- C. Some opportunities to serve other Christians.
 

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cleaning homes</li> <li>2. Yardwork</li> <li>3. Baby-sitting</li> <li>4. Preparing meals</li> <li>5. Hospitality</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Helping people move</li> <li>7. Repair work (cars, woodwork, plumbing)</li> <li>8. Sewing</li> <li>9. Rides to church</li> <li>10. Praying with</li> </ol>
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- D. Some opportunities to connect and evangelize
 

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Volunteering</li> <li>2. Homeless shelters</li> <li>3. Nursing home and hospital visitation</li> <li>4. Serving neighbors</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Praying with</li> <li>6. Prison visitation</li> <li>7. Serving in schools</li> </ol>
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### IV. Improving your serve (help for the non-server).

- A. As we've recognized, not all of us have our greatest gift in serving. Yet, we all have responsibility to serve. Don't beat yourself up for not being as great a server as Peter's mother-in-law, but don't think you can avoid serving because it isn't your greatest gift.

- B. So, let's wrap up with a little help for the rest of us. How can we improve our serve and through that serving motivate and encourage those around us?
1. *Become friends with a server:* Watch what they do. Observe how they react. Go along with them as they serve. Ask them to help you be a better server.
  2. *Walk slowly through the crowd:* Spend time opening your eyes and heart to those around you. Observe others with a view to be of service. Listen to what they are saying for opportunities to serve. Focus on the people.
  3. *Don't procrastinate:* Non-servers typically intend to be helpful, but we'll get to it in a moment. Don't wait, otherwise the natural server will jump up immediately and get the job done. If you see a need, start working on it right away.
  4. *Read to get ideas:* Obviously, start by reading the Bible. See what servers in the Bible did. But read other things too. Magazines that are geared toward men or women often have good ideas in them about how to be of help to each other. Inspirational and devotional books like Chicken Soup for the Soul tell stories of servers that can be of help.
  5. *Say thank you:* Learn to appreciate the work of servers. As we learn to value their work, we'll more naturally be involved in it ourselves. Not to mention, we'll improve our relations with the servers in our lives.
- C. On a scale of 1 to 10, if your giftedness in serving is only a 3, you'll probably never get to be an 8 or 9. That's okay. As **Romans 12:3-8**, we all have our different functions. But, if you work on these helpful hints, you will grow in your ability to serve. You will grow in your ability to encourage and motivate your brethren through service.

Conclusion:

We all have a place in the kingdom and this congregation. Is yours as a server? What will you do about it? Where will you serve? Don't be embarrassed if you can't do what someone else does. Don't be ashamed to hang behind the scenes. But make sure you are pursuing the gift God has given you. We need the encouragement, edifying, and building up you can offer through your serving. Like **Ephesians 4:15-16**, you may not preach as many of the sermons or teach as many of the classes, but you are a joint in this congregation. We need the gift God has given you.

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<sup>i</sup> This lesson and the series to follow was inspired by Discover Your God-given Gifts by Don and Katie Fortune, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1987.