

Wired

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[0 : 00] Our text today is from the Apostle Paul's letter to the church at Rome, chapter 12, verses 1 through 8. If you are able, I invite you to stand for the reading of the Word.

I urge you, therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

For through the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you, not to think more highly of yourself than you ought to think, but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allowed to each a measure of faith.

For just as we have many members in one body, and all the members do not have the same function, so we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another.

[1 : 21] And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly. Spirit of the living God, we believe that dearly 2,000 years ago now, you inspired the Apostle Paul to write down these words.

And I pray that in your mercy and in your grace, you would now take these words off the page, cause them to come alive in us as never before. For we pray it in Jesus' name and for His glory. Amen. Amen. You may be seated. I submit to you that if you will hear me out this morning on what I'm going to develop from this text we just read, you will experience new freedom and joy as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Now, I have never begun a sermon like that in my 20-plus years of preaching, and I may never do so again. So let me say it once more.

I submit to you that if you will hear me out this morning, if you will choose to buy into and then act upon what I'm going to develop from this text in Romans 12, you will experience new joy and new freedom as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

[3 : 13] New joy and freedom in your ministry, new joy and freedom in your vocation, new joy and freedom in your relationships, and new joy and freedom in your relationship with the living God.

I submit to you that if you will hear me out, if you will come to own and implement what I'm going to develop out of the Spirit-given insight to Paul in this text about the dynamics of life in Christ, this church, Glendale Presbyterian Church, will enter into a new level of joy and freedom.

Now here's the fundamental truth this text is teaching. This text is teaching us that Jesus Christ has wired each of us who are in Him to function in Him in unique ways.

Not only in ministry, but in life generally. This text is not just about ministry, it's about life generally. Jesus Christ, by whom and for whom we were created, Jesus Christ, by whom and for whom we are redeemed, has uniquely wired each of us to make a unique contribution with Him in the world. When we get in touch with that unique wiring, when we then live consistent with that unique wiring, we begin to experience new freedom and joy.

[4 : 53] We find ourselves not only wanting to serve in His name, we find ourselves being able to serve with greater passion and power. Wired.

Each of us as members of the body of Christ is wired by the Holy Spirit to continue the work of Jesus Christ in the world. Now the more usual word for this is gifted.

And the actual literal New Testament word for this is charismatized. Charismatized comes from the Greek word charismata. Charismata means gifts of grace.

This text is teaching us that every member of the body of Christ has been gifted. Every member of the body of Christ has been charismatized. Every member of the body of Christ has been graciously endowed by the Holy Spirit to perform a unique function in the church and in the world.

Now, that gifting, that charismatizing goes so deep in us that I find myself using this word wired.

[6 : 07] The gifting of the Holy Spirit is not just something that comes upon the disciples of Jesus Christ. The gifting of the Holy Spirit is something constitutive of our being.

It is who we are. I have been wired deep inside my soul to function in a unique way. You have been wired deep inside your soul to function in a unique way.

All do not have the same function, says Paul in verse 4. We have gifts that differ, says Paul in verse 6. The head of the church, the Savior of the world, has uniquely wired each of us disciples to function as disciples in unique ways.

When we embrace this fact, when we recognize and then release this Spirit-given variety of uniqueness, Christ's ministry among us happens, and it happens with freedom and with joy.

No one burns out. The great tragedy of the church in our time is that people burn out in church work. It ought never happen.

[7 : 22] Burnout in life and in ministry is due to not honoring our unique wiring. Burnout in life and ministry comes from thinking too highly of ourselves, says Paul.

It comes from thinking that we are wired to be and do anything anyone asks us to be and do. Bruce Bugbee is the founder of a church consulting business called Network Ministry International.

And he tells a little parable that I think gets at the heart of what Paul is getting at in Romans 12.

Bugbee begins, It wasn't too long after creation that the animals got together to form a school.

They wanted the best school possible, offering their students a well-rounded curriculum of swimming, running, climbing, and flying. A well-rounded curriculum of swimming, running, climbing, and flying.

Now, in order to graduate from this school, all the animals had to take all the courses. Bugbee continues, The duck was excellent at swimming.

[8 : 41] In fact, the duck was better than his instructor. But he was only making passing grades at climbing and was getting a very poor grade in running. The duck was so slow in running that he had to stay after school every day to practice.

There was little improvement because his webbed feet got so badly worn from having to run. With such worn feet, he was only able to get an average grade in swimming.

But average was quite acceptable to everyone. No one worried about that much, except the duck. Who knew he wasn't average? That's swimming.

The rabbit was at the top of her class in running. But after a while, she developed a twitch in her leg from all the time she spent in the water trying to improve her swimming.

The squirrel was a peak performer in climbing, but was constantly frustrated in flying class. The squirrel's body became so bruised from all of his hard landings that he even didn't do any well in climbing anymore and ended up being pretty poor in running.

[9 : 50] The eagle was a continual problem student. She was severely disciplined for being a nonconformist. For example, in climbing class, the eagle would always beat everyone to the top of the tree, but insisted on using her own way to get there.

Now, Bruce Bugbee then writes, by now you're getting the point of the story. Each of these animals had a particular expertise. When they did what they were designed to do, that's the key word, when they did what they were designed to do, they excelled.

When they tried to operate outside their area of expertise, they were not as effective. Now, think about it for a moment. Can ducks run? Sure they can. Is that what they're best at?

No. Then Bugbee drives the point home. Listen to this. Many churches and organizations are full of running ducks and swimming eagles.

People who are trying to do their best, but who are in positions they are not gifted to do. What if we were to get the ducks in the water, the squirrels in the trees, the eagles in the air?

[11 : 06] Would it make any difference? Definitely it would. Everyone would become peak performers in their area of expertise. Peak performers. That's what Paul is after in this Romans 12 text.

He's wanting to see people set free to go with their unique spirit-given expertise. Each of us in Christ has been uniquely wired.

And if we are set free to go with that wiring, we begin to perform at peak levels of efficiency and creativity. And the ministry of Christ gets done in the church and, more importantly, in the world.

Now, in Romans 12, verses 6 to 8, the Apostle Paul identifies seven major wirings. Seven.

Why seven? Could it be that, as in the book of Revelation, seven is the number of completeness, seven is the number of essence, and that these seven wirings somehow embody the completeness and the essence of Christ's wiring of the church?

[12:18] The seven wirings are prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, and mercy. Now, I agree with those who argue that what Paul is describing in Romans 12, in Romans 12, are motivations.

Deeply ingrained motivations for ministry and life. And I agree with those who argue that in 1 Corinthians 12, the other place where he speaks of the gifts of the Spirit, Paul is describing various ways in which those various motivations might be manifested.

1 Corinthians 12 speaks of gifts that do come upon us at particular times for a particular need. But that what Paul is talking about in Romans 12 is motivations that then get expressed in different ways in 1 Corinthians 12.

That is, a number of persons might be involved in the same ministry, teaching Sunday school or being elders or deacons or whatever else. A number of persons might be involved in the very same ministry, but they are coming at that ministry out of different motivations.

Take, for example, the healing ministry. Imagine three disciples who are gathering together to pray for healing with someone. Each of those disciples is going to be coming to that ministry out of a different motivational wiring.

[13:51] The prophecy person will be coming out of a passion for truth that heals. The exhortation person will be coming out of a conviction that healing takes place in relationships. The mercy person is going to be coming out of the context, out of the place where unconditional love is where we're healed.

Or take another example. Take the music ministry. Take, for example, this morning. You have a variety of disciples who are up here leading in music, but each of them comes to this ministry out of a different motivation.

The teaching person is leading the singing hoping that people are going to understand God better. The service person is leading the singing hoping that God is going to touch people's deep needs. The giving person is leading the singing hoping that God out of the riches of wholeness in Christ is going to give some of those riches during the singing. You see? They're doing the same ministry but a different motivation.

And it's that different motivation that puts a spin on the very same ministry by different people. Each and every one of us who is in Christ has been wired by the Holy Spirit to participate with Christ in the world, in His ministry, out of unique motivations.

[15:03] And I submit to you that when we honor those unique motivations, when we release them and when we live consistent with them, we find joy and freedom in ministry. The seven spirit ingrained motivations then are prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, and mercy.

Now before I try to teach on each of these motivations, let me try to illustrate them for you. And what I'm going to do is tell a story that I told two years ago when I preached on this passage, a story based on an illustration by Bill Gothard.

I want you to imagine that I'm carrying this big box of cookies up here on the stage. And that as I do, I trip across one of these cords that use, there are a lot of cords up here.

I trip across the cords, I fall, the box hits the ground, all the cookies come out and they're all broken and all the broken pieces are scattered over this stage. Okay? Now, seven of you people, seven of you different disciples witnessed this event.

Each of you is going to see all of this brokenness from the perspective of your wiring. Each of you is going to see all of this from the perspective of your spirit-given motivation.

[16:21] Ready? The mercy person says to me, that's okay, Darrell, that could happen to anyone. And the mercy person recognizes that the thing I'm struggling with the most at this moment is embarrassment and so comes and puts an arm around me.

The leader person among us says, Cameron, would you get the broom and dustpan? Christine, would you get some tape and tape down these cords? Tim, would you run over to 7-Eleven and buy some new cookies?

And Ralph, will you call a meeting of the worship commission to deal with the problem of cords on the stage? Am I describing anybody in the room yet?

Now the giving person among us says, wait, I'll buy the cookies. And here, here's some money to purchase a better sound system so that you never have to have these cords up here. And while we're at it, here's some money to buy a better lighting system. No wonder Darrell trips over the cords. He's looking at these spotlights in his eyes all the time. He can't see where he's walking. Hint, hint.

[17 : 38] It's being dealt with. Because a giving person saw that, and one person who wants to remain anonymous has paid to relight the building.

The exhortation person says, next time Darrell, you ought to be more careful.

Walk around the cord and not over it. And the exhortation person says, you know what, you need to be more upfront about your feelings Darrell, you don't like these cords up here, do you? Why don't you just say so? The teaching person says, the reason this happened is twofold.

First, microphone cords should never be laid across the stage, and second, when you have a box of cookies, you need to make sure that it is securely wrapped. The service person among us says, here, I'll clean up the mess.

And the prophecy person says, this is what happens when you're not careful. And do you see the parable in all of this? Cords are always laying across your path.

[18 : 48] The evil one is always trying to trip you up. You need to be more alert to all of the dangers, visible and invisible around you. Right? I just discovered there's some prophets in the room.

Now, do you see yourself? Do you see yourself in that? Do you see your wiring respond to the brokenness of life? Now, the question is, which of those seven responses is the most appropriate? All of them. Which is the most Christ-like? All of them. Read the Gospels and you find Jesus Christ responding to the wreckage around Him in all seven of those ways.

Each of the seven responses is but one way that He responds to life. Now, brothers and sisters, conflict in the body of Christ lies just here.

Conflict in the body of Christ arises when one of the seven motivations thinks that it is the only appropriate way to respond to brokenness. I'll say that again.

[19 : 58] I think that most of the conflict in churches lies right there when one motivation thinks that that's the way everyone ought to respond to brokenness. The problem becomes when the mercy person demands that all of us respond to the brokenness around us by being there for one another.

The problem comes when the giving person says that all of us need to dig deeper in the wallet. The problem comes when the teaching person among us says, you've got to see it my way.

That's like rabbits demanding that eagles run and eagles demand that rabbits fly. The fact of the matter is that each of the seven motivations is right.

It's just that each is but one of the seven ways in which Jesus Christ would respond. Let me now elaborate just a bit on this.

Walk these seven motivations through a little bit more. I'm going to do more with it next week. So if I don't do enough today you'll know that I'm going to try to do some more next Sunday. And as I do try to come to terms with which of these wirings has been built inside you.

[21 : 18] Prophecy first in the list. The word simply means to speak forth. This motivational gift is the ability to speak a fresh word from the living God.

It's not so much foretelling although sometimes it can be but forth telling. The very heart of the gift of prophecy is thus says the Lord. Now this gift cannot be exercised at will.

This is the one gift that requires waiting for it to be exercised. The one who is motivated in this way cannot say at two o'clock this afternoon I'm going to prophesy. There's no guarantee that that's going to happen.

Because prophecy is dealing with the living God coming upon that person with a fresh word for his people. As I read through the prophets I'm taken by the fact that every time the prophet introduces a new word from God he uses the phrase the word of the Lord came upon me.

And you have to wait until that word comes before you can speak it. Which means then that preaching is not always prophecy. Ordinarily preaching is teaching or exhortation.

[22 : 31] Prophecy is speaking a particular word for a particular group of people at a particular time for a particular reason. It may be a word of warning, it may be a word of comfort, it may be a word of demand, it may be a word of encounter, but when it comes the people of God know that it came.

Service. Second. The word that Paul uses here is diakonia from which we get the word deacons. Now all disciples of Jesus Christ are to be servants in one way or another.

But what Paul is talking about here is a unique kind of service, a unique gifting for service. People with this gift are the ones who walk into a room and immediately they spot the temporal needs. They can immediately tell the real needs of people, the felt needs of people, either for food or for clothing or for a bulletin to be printed or for microphone cords to be moved around or chairs to be set up.

They recognize concrete temporal need and want to respond to it. I think it's significant that Paul places this service gift between prophecy and teaching.

[23 : 34] Do you notice that? It goes prophecy, service, teaching. I think he places it there because it tells us that the work of prophecy and the work of teaching will not get done without the servers. Thank God for the servers who make it all happen so that the prophets can prophesy and the teachers can teach.

Teaching, third gift. This gift involves the careful, systematic interpretation and application of Scripture. The teacher's job within the body of Christ is to impart information, to help people understand the word of God spoken by the apostles and the prophets.

The teacher's burden is to help the church remain faithful to the word once for all delivered to the saints. Why do we need theology? asked Dr. Clark Pinnock. Because Christianity is a missionary religion and if we are going to get the message out, we had better get it right.

And so God wires certain people within the body of Christ with gifts of discernment and wisdom so that they are able to protect and pass on the faith. Exhortation, the fourth.

The word that Paul uses here is the word paraklesis. Ring a bell with you? It's related to the word paraklete, which is Jesus' word for the Holy Spirit. And paraklesis simply means coming alongside, coming alongside someone.

[25 : 01] Jesus Christ has sent the Holy Spirit to come alongside us, to counsel us and comfort us and guide us. And the Holy Spirit calls people to come alongside, to counsel, to comfort and to guide.

God. If you have this motivation, you find yourself always wanting to come alongside people and help them move on in discipleship.

The great motive of this motivation, I think, is to come alongside the person, help them take the next step of obedience. Someone has said that this gift, the persons with this gift want to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable.

comfortable. There are a couple of exhorters out here. Comfort the disturbed, but disturb the comfortable. See, it didn't matter. Come alongside to help the person take the next step.

Giving. All Christians are to give of their financial resources. But I think what Paul is referring to here is a special motivation to give. Persons with this gift have the capacity to give in very generous ways.

[26 : 05] Now, there's a debate about this. The debate is whether or not the person is giving away his or her own possessions and resources, or as John Calvin thought, the person is giving away the resources of the congregation.

I take the former. The Spirit of God inspiring people to give away one's own possessions and wealth. I find, by the way, in that case, that those people are usually the recipients of great financial blessing.

And God blesses them financially because God knows where it's going to go. He keeps blessing them financially because he knows it's always going to be given away. See?

Now, those are the perfect people, actually, to put in charge of the finances of the church. Because they know about God's provision and they know about God's generosity.

Put them in charge of the funds of the church, and they'll know how to manage them. Paul says that if this describes you, you are to give with liberality, or as another version has it, give in a big way.

[27 : 06] Leading. The word that Paul uses here is a military term, and it's related to the word which means stand up before others. The person with this gift is the one who is motivated to get to the head of the line and to start making things happen.

This person wants to whip things into shape. I know a few of you around here. Wants to whip things into shape. To get resources and people together to meet people's needs.

This is the perfect gifting, the perfect wiring, by the way, for the role of elder. Another word for this is administration. People who have the capacity to graciously pull people and resources together to meet people's needs.

People with this wiring are always asking us, well, what does this program have to do with helping people meet Christ? What does this program have to do with furthering the kingdom in the world? And then, seventh, mercy.

I think Paul puts this last because it's the most tender and I think the most beautiful. Mercy is the key word in the three chapters that come before Romans 12.

[28 : 12] And mercy is God doing for us what we could never do for ourselves. Mercy is God doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves and what as a result of sin we don't deserve Him to do for us.

Persons with the gift of mercy are motivated to feel for and with other people and motivated to come alongside them simply to be there.

The exhorter wants to come alongside and help the person make the next step. The mercy person doesn't care if a person makes the next step. That person is motivated simply to come there and be there and be present for the person.

Like Christ is present. Okay, seven wirings. Prophecy, service, teaching. Exhortation, giving, leading, and mercy. Seven different ways Jesus Christ has motivated His disciples.

Again, which of those is most Christ-like? All of them are. Each of them is. Each of them is but one way Jesus Christ responds to the wreckage of the world around us.

[29 : 15] This is why we're in the body. He gives the body to be able to respond in all seven ways. How has He wired you? How has He gifted you?

It is my conviction that if we will simply come to terms with that unique wiring, and if we will come to terms that other people are not like us, and if we will quit making them be like us, and then if we will release each other to go for our uniqueness, the sky is the limit in terms of what can happen in this church.

And I'll try to develop that more next Sunday. Let me conclude today by sharing myself. I'm going to run the risk of being misunderstood here in the next few moments, but it's worth it for me if one of you, as a result of my experience, can be set free to live and be the way Christ created you to live and be.

I wish that I had had these insights at the beginning of my ministry. I would not have squandered ten years trying to figure this out. So if I can just share my experience and only one of you is set free to go with it, this is worth it.

I am wired for prophecy. I used to think I was wired for teaching. Yes, I love to teach, and I'll teach the rest of my life. Give me an excuse to teach, and I'll teach.

[30 : 44] I enjoy the hard work of study and of research, and because of my physics background, I'm wired to analyze and organize. But I am more deeply wired for prophecy, which means that I am wired by God and called by God to spend lots of time alone in the presence of God.

I am not afraid of solitude or silence. I long for solitude and silence. In fact, I cannot function without big chunks of solitude and silence.

I will die inside if I do not have enough time to soak in the Word and to pray, to listen, and to wrestle with God. Anyone identify with me here?

A few of you? Only a few. We're alone. So, this means then that I cannot be in the midst of church politics for very long.

Say that again. It means that I cannot be in the midst of church politics for very long. Because I'm highly intuitive, intuitive goes with the prophecy wiring.

[31 : 58] Because I'm highly intuitive, I immediately become aware of the unspoken agendas of the people who've come to the meeting. You know what I mean? There's the meeting where all of the talk is on top of the table, and you can hear that with your ears.

But I immediately become aware of the unspoken agendas, even before the persons articulate them. Now, what that means is then that I slowly start to get overwhelmed by that.

I become overwhelmed by all the conflicting unspoken agendas beneath the table, and I need to tune out and go inside to some quiet place where I can hear the voice of the good shepherd, and then come back and be engaged again.

Which is to say, I'm not good at administration. You've heard me say that before. I'm not good at running the church. Now, because the role of the senior pastor has, over the last decades, taken on huge administrative functions, mistakenly taken on huge administrative functions, I, out of duty, have done my best with this administration thing.

Like the rabbit, I've given my best shot at flying. But I'm not good in the role. In fact, the rest of the staff has been telling me lately that I am not only not good, I mess things up.

[33 : 26] That was hard to take. It took a couple days to get over that. The staff just gets everything lined up for this program that we've designed. They get it all lined up, all the, everything's in line, and then I come along with new vision, new possibilities, new potential, and screw it all up again.

See? They are telling me that if I'm late for the management meetings on Monday, that would be very fine, thank you. Now, Lynn is good at administration.

She can stay right there in the fray a long time and keep her balance. I don't understand that. But that's, you see, because she's wired for this.

She's wired for program administration. And because of her background as an attorney, she's all the more cut out for ecclesiastical management. Crazy.

But wired. It dawned on me that, you know, there's, you change two letters in that word wired, it comes out weird. No, not you, me.

[34 : 38] Just dawned on me. Okay, okay, okay, no, I lost it. Sorry, sorry. That was terrible. Okay, now I come to my point.

What am I sharing? I hear people speak of administration as Daryl's weakness. Weakness. I hear people speak of administration as Daryl's weakness.

Weakness. The question I want to ask is, why do we call it my weakness? How can it be a weakness if I'm not wired for it?

Get me? Get me? Talk to me. How can it be a weakness if I'm not called to it? When we use the word weakness, it reveals two faulty assumptions.

Two faulty assumptions. The first assumption is that we expect one person in the body of Christ, namely the pastor, to have all the gifts. That is to say, we expect the senior pastor to be a junior Jesus.

[35 : 59] How do I look? See? A junior Jesus wired with all seven motivations. Where do we get that idea?

Where is it written? See? The second faulty assumption is that it reveals that we are evaluating people from a perfectionist perspective.

I think perfectionism is one of the things holding us back. And we expect of those on the top to even be more perfect. Romans 12 explodes both faulty assumptions.

It explodes both of the myths. No one is perfect except Jesus Christ. And no one has all the gifts but Jesus Christ.

Paul says in this text, Are you with me?

[37 : 06] Are you with me? To use the word weakness with regard to me and administration is like saying the rabbit is weak on flying.

Weak? Weak? Weak? Weak? Weak? The rabbit is weak on flying. The rabbit isn't wired to fly. To use the word weakness of any other disciple of Jesus Christ in an area of ministry is like saying that the eagle is weak on swimming.

Weak eagles are weak on swimming. Eagles weren't wired to swim. But oh can they fly. So I say this morning, let the eagles fly.

And let the rabbits run. And let the squirrels climb. And let the ducks swim. And let the prophets prophesy. And let the servers serve.

And let the teachers teach. And let the exhorters exhort. And let the givers give. And let the administrators administrate. And let those who have mercy give mercy. And the work of Jesus Christ will get done in the world with a high degree of excellence, without anyone burning out, and with new freedom and joy.

[38 : 22] Amen.