

Wired - And Energized

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[0 : 00] Romans chapter 12, verses 1 through 8. And if you are able, I would invite you to stand for the reading of God's 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 it 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 functions, so we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another.

And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly. If prophecy according to the proportion of your faith, if service in your serving, or you who teach in your teaching, you who exhort in your exhortation, you who give with liberality, you who lead with diligence, you who show mercy with cheerfulness.

[1 : 25] Wind of God, breath of God, spirit of God, we pray that you would take these words, which you inspired in the mind and heart of the Apostle Paul, you would take these words off the page now, and cause them to come alive in us as never before, for we pray this in Jesus' name and for his glory.

Amen. You may be seated. Last Sunday, I began on a note I had never begun on in 20-plus years of preaching.

I said, I submit to you that if you will hear me out on what I'm going to develop from Romans 12, you will experience new freedom and joy as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

I'm thrilled by the number of people, number of you, who told me that that actually happened for you. One person spoke of being released from decades of poor self-esteem.

Another person told me of not being able to stop the flow of tears over finally being able to embrace the person she has known she has been all her life. I said last week that this text in Romans 12 is teaching one basic truth, and it is this.

[2 : 47] Jesus Christ has uniquely wired each of his disciples to live and serve in a unique way. The usual way of putting it is to say that Jesus Christ has uniquely gifted his disciples to serve and live in unique ways.

But since I've come to see that his gifting is not simply something upon us, but is something deeper, something constitutive of our very being, I'm choosing to use this word wired.

The one by whom and for whom we were created, the one by whom and for whom we were redeemed, has wired each of us deep inside to live and serve in unique ways.

Live and serve. Not just serve, but live. This wiring affects everything about us. It affects every realm of life. It affects the way we relate in our families and in our workplaces.

It affects how we spend our time. It affects the way we relate to the living God. Jesus Christ has uniquely wired me deep in my soul to live and serve in unique ways.

[4 : 03] Jesus Christ has uniquely wired you deep in your soul to live and serve in unique ways. When we embrace this fact of life, when we recognize his wiring of us and then choose to live and serve consistent with it, we discover new freedom and joy as a disciple.

Last week, I used a story by church consultant Bruce Bugbee, which I think illustrates the major point the Apostle Paul is going after in Romans 12. Bugbee begins by imagining the animals shortly after the act of creation forming a school.

And you remember that Bugbee said this had to be a well-rounded school with a well-rounded curriculum of swimming, running, climbing, and flying. In order to graduate, all the animals had to take all of the courses.

Each of the animals rose to the top of the class in terms of their unique expertise. The duck was first in swimming. The rabbit was first in running.

The squirrel was first in climbing. And the eagle was first in flying. But because the school insisted that all of the animals operate in all of the different functions, each of them became terribly frustrated.

[5 : 21] The duck was getting poor grades in running. The rabbit was doing poorly in climbing. The squirrel was failing in flying. And the eagle was drowning in swimming. Now, the point of this is obvious.

But it's an obvious point that I don't think we have grasped yet. When any of the animals was required to operate outside of that which they were designed to do, they not only did not do well in that other function, they also ended up not doing as well as they could in the function for which they were designed.

The rabbit developed a twitch in her leg from having to spend so much time in the water learning to swim. And that twitch in her leg caused her not to be able to run as well as she knew she could run. When we try to operate outside of our wiring, we not only do not do that other function well and experience frustration, we also are not able to do the function we are uniquely created to do as well, and we experience depression.

Now, it's at this point that I think I need to make a qualifying statement. What I'm developing from Romans 12 does not give us an excuse for not trying to help others in ways for which we are not wired.

[6 : 47] In those situations of need where we are the only person present, the Holy Spirit does give us unique powers, unique ability to respond to the need in front of us. When I'm in a situation of need and I'm the only one there, I can't say, well, sorry, I'm not wired to meet this need, so I'm going to move on.

I'm to respond the best way that I can, trusting the Holy Spirit to give me the gifts and the abilities to do something. But then, like the good Samaritan, I'm to then bring that person or that need in contact with those who are uniquely wired to meet that particular need.

It would be silly of me to come upon a person with a broken leg and then say, sorry, I'm not wired for mending legs and leave. But it would be equally silly for me to, having done what I could do about it, then bring that person home and try to take the person through the whole process of healing.

It would be wiser for me to do what I can do in the immediate need and then bring that person to the ones who are uniquely wired to mend legs. If I were to continue trying to do what I'm not wired to do, I will experience greater and greater frustration.

And because at that time I'm not doing what I'm uniquely wired to do, I will experience greater and greater depression. What the Apostle Paul is after in this chapter in Romans 12 is freeing us to do and be what we are uniquely wired to do and be.

[8 : 19] We, the Johnsons, have a rabbit. We call the rabbit sugar. Now, I knew when we got the rabbit that rabbits are wired to run and hop and eat carrots.

But I did not know that rabbits are wired to dig holes. I should have known that watching rabbits in the wild. Where else do they live but in holes?

But I didn't remember that. I didn't know they're wired to dig holes. When we first got the rabbit, we put her in a cage, in a hutch, up off the ground. But she had no room to run or to hop.

I felt badly for her. So I took a section of ground alongside of our backyard patio, and I enclosed it with chicken wire so she would have this nice place.

She was then free to do what I knew she was wired to do, run, and she was free to do what I did not know she was wired to do, dig holes. Boy, was she a happy camper.

[9 : 20] Digging holes all day long. She is a brilliant engineer. Just a brilliant digging engineer. She digs a hole, piling up the dirt behind her. When that pile gets too high, she stops digging from the hole, moves back, moves the pile out of the way, then goes to the hole, digs more dirt out until this new pile comes, and then when that pile gets too high, she moves that pile on top of the other pile.

And she keeps doing this. She can move mounds of dirt, most of which, of course, was spilling through the chicken wire fence onto our patio. One day I decided to see how deep these holes went.

So I took a baseball bat, and I put it down into the hole. I was able to put that baseball bat down under the patio, the full length of the bat and the full length of my arm up to my armpit, and I was able to swing that baseball bat under there in a one-foot diameter circle.

She can move dirt. Well, I couldn't just let her keep throwing dirt on the patio and digging a hole under the ground, could I? So I decided to move her to another part of the yard.

Sharon knew how frustrated I was with this, and she came up with the idea of then putting not only chicken wire around the pin, but to put chicken wire on the ground, on the dirt surface, so she couldn't dig up that area.

[10:40] Not bad. So I built the pen with lots of room for her to run, but no opportunity for her to dig. Problem solved. A few days later, Sharon made a comment about how badly she felt for the rabbit.

A couple days later, she made the comment again. A couple days later, she made the comment again. This went on for two weeks. Well, last Monday night, Sharon came to me, and she says, I hope you're not going to be angry with me, but after last Sunday's sermon, I went home and cut a square portion of the chicken wire on the ground out so that the rabbit could dig.

The rabbit is happier. Sharon is happier. And now I'm having to find a way to manage this yard decently and in order. Well, I think you can see the parable in this.

If we are going to freely follow Jesus Christ in our unique wiring, we are going to have to cut away some of the chicken wire that keeps us from doing that, which is what I, as your pastor, promise to do.

I will do everything in my power to cut away the chicken wire that keeps the church from expressing its uniqueness according to Jesus Christ.

[12:06] Now, in Romans 12, verses 6 to 8, the apostle Paul, who many people call the apostle of the heart set free, identifies seven ways in which Jesus Christ has uniquely wired his disciples.

Although each of us can function and has functioned in some of those ways, I believe that each of us nevertheless is uniquely wired at a profoundly deep level to have peak performance when we go with one of those wirings.

I believe that what Paul is describing here are motivations, not skills. Skills are something we can learn. We can hold seminars on skills. What he's describing is motivations, something deeply ingrained in us by the Holy Spirit.

The seven motivational wirings are prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, and mercy. Now, what I want to do today is walk through that list again.

We did it last week, but I want to do it again. And I want to do so not only to help each of us understand ourselves better, but to help us understand other members of the body of Christ better.

[13:17] We as a whole church will experience new joy and freedom in ministry, not only by each of us embracing our uniqueness, but also by each of us trying to understand the other person's uniqueness.

What I'm going to do now is shift from a preaching, teaching mode into more of a workshop mode. And I have in front of you, in the insert, this chart. What I'm going to do is I'm going to walk through Paul's list of spirit motivational wirings.

I'm going to do that four times. I'm going to walk through that list four times. The first time, I'm going to suggest a one-sentence statement of the passion each of these wirings has.

Then the second time through, I'm going to give you some more words that I think describe this wiring. The third time through, I'm going to give the downside of each of the wirings. They each have a downside.

And then the fourth time, I'm going to suggest particular portions of Scripture that each of these wirings is uniquely drawn toward. Okay? So more of a workshop. I'm going to do this for a few minutes, and then I'll wrap it up.

[14:23] Here we go. What is the passion of each of these giftings? What drives each of these? What drives us? Prophecy.

It is the passion to see and to help other people see. Service. I'll go through this twice, by the way, so that you can copy it down.

Service. It's the passion to see to it that needs are being met. Teaching. It's the passion to understand and help others understand.

Exhortation. It's the passion to come alongside people and help them take the next step of maturity.

Giving. Giving. It's the passion to make resources available.

Leading. It's the passion to make sure the job gets done. And mercy. It's the passion to be there for people.

[15 : 30] I'll do that all again. Prophecy. It's the passion to see and to help other people see.

Service. The passion to see to it that needs are being met. Teaching.

The passion to understand and help other people understand. Exhortation. The passion to come alongside and help people move the next step. Giving. The passion to make resources available, to make ministry happen.

Leading. The passion to see the job get done. And then mercy. The passion to be there. Now, hopefully, a little bit of each of those passions is in all of us.

After all, those passions are the passions of Jesus. And if he is in us, then each of us ought to manifest all of them in some way. Yet I'm still going to say that one of those passions is dominant in us.

And the freedom and joy comes when we go with that. Let me go through the list again. With some more words. And you won't be able to copy down even if I go real slow. So just take a few words that mean something to you as I go through this.

[16 : 35] Prophecy. Other words that help understand that are truth. The need to see reality as it really is. An abhorrence of deceit.

A passion to know God as God really is, even if that knowing overwhelms and crushes. Always thinking in terms of possibilities and potential.

It doesn't have to be this way. And needing to tell others what they see. That's a crucial part of this motivation. They see and they need to tell what they see.

Service. Words like, recognizes concrete, tangible needs. Detail-oriented.

Organized. No task is beneath him or her. And joyful spirit. Of all of these motivations, I think this motivation is the most joyful.

[17 : 41] Which gives us a clue, by the way, that joy is found when you give your life away.

Teaching. Words like precision. Organize.

Systematize. Always balancing one particular text against the whole counsel of God. Faithfulness to the truth. Faithfulness to the truth once for all delivered to the saints.

Consistency. Congruity. Enjoys the work of research. Finds delight when eyes go on in their students. Exhortation. Exhortation.

Exhortation. Words like relationship. Relationship is crucial for this motivation. One-to-one. Side-by-side.

Comfort the disturbed. Disturb the comfortable. Wisdom. This wiring sees the Christian life as a walk.

[18 : 44] Enjoys seeing the other person take the next step toward maturity. That's where the joy comes. When the person makes the step. Giving. Words like generosity.

And liberality. Catalyst. This motivation is, it wants to give partly to meet needs, but partly also to catalyze more giving. I think this motivation never says, we do not have the funds.

They're good to have on this session. They'll never say, we do not have the funds, because these folks know how to get the funds. They're never ashamed to talk about money. And they enjoy seeing ministries take off, because they found the resources for them.

Leading. Words like administration. Step to the front. Shape up the troops. Fulfill the vision.

Leaders regularly say, hey, look, group, we're all in this together, and we're all going to succeed.

And they're willing to make hard decisions and suffer the consequences. Mercy.

[20 : 00] Compassion. Unconditional love. It matters not why you're in the circumstance you are to the mercy person. Mercy person meets a person with AIDS.

They don't have to know how they got the AIDS. All that matters is they got the AIDS. And they're there. Even if the person does not move on to the next step, the mercy person will still stay there.

The mercy person has the ability to see and feel all of the sides of an issue. Can you imagine what would happen in our different ministries if we could get these motivations working together as a team?

Now, what will help is if we'll understand some of the downsides of each of these wirings. So let me walk through that. And it's okay to chuckle when you come to you, when I start talking about the downside, all right?

You ready? Prophecy. Here's the downside. Easily wounded by criticism. Can jump to conclusions too quickly.

[21 : 09] Tends to step in where they're really not needed. And tends to take responsibility for things they're not responsible for. I'll give you a little window into me.

Just give me two days with President Clinton and I can make it work for him. That's not my responsibility. But I always think about it.

You don't think two days will do it. That's what I heard you say. Jumping in where we don't belong. Service. Service folks are easily discouraged when there's not gratitude.

In fact, that can even move into a little bit of resentment. Service folks tend to get overcommitted. And because the service folks so want the need to be met, they can tend to make sure that everyone else around them also addresses the need.

Teaching. Downside. Tends to become so preoccupied with the doctrine, crossing the T's and dotting the I's, that he or she misses out on the relationship with the one about whom the doctrine is speaking.

[22 : 28] Can let faithfulness to doctrine become more important than the quality of relationship with the person who does not yet understand the doctrine. Can tend to be a little demanding.

Exhortation. Like the prophecy folks, the exhortation people can jump too quickly to a conclusion and jump in where they're not needed. They can become impatient with folks who are not moving on.

And they can become committed to too many people and slowly but surely suffer relational overload. Giving. The downside of giving.

In wanting to make sure that certain projects happen, they can be tempted to manipulate and control. And they can experience great hurt when a project they have funded has not been voted on by the rest of the folks.

Leading. Leading. Can quickly become exhausted because they have not wisely delegated. They tend to be insensitive to the issue of timing.

[23 : 39] It's hard for leader folks to decide to take time to pray. And the desire to see the vision be accomplished can overcome relational integrity.

Mercy. Because he or she simply wants to be there for others, they can get stuck there. A long time. The mercy person is a candidate for codependency.

And in my experience, it's right. The mercy person tends to never be wrong. I've never met a mercy person yet who will admit they're wrong. And that's because they're always dispensing mercy.

They're always dispensing mercy.

To other people and to themselves. So how do we overcome the potential downside? How do we avoid the potential trap? By the renewal of our minds, says Paul.

Be transformed by the renewal of your minds. Which at minimum means soaking our minds in the Bible. So let me now, the last time through this list, suggest portions of the Bible to which each of these wirings is uniquely drawn, and portions of the Scripture which can help equip us better.

[24 : 52] Ready? If you're wired for prophecy, you'll find comfort in passages like 1 and 2 Kings, where we see God working with the prototypical prophets Elijah and Elisha.

You'll also find great comfort in Isaiah, where we find the mind of God, and in Jeremiah, where we find the heart of God, and in Habakkuk, where the prophet is told, hang in there.

I know the vision isn't being fulfilled yet, but it will be. If it tarries, you wait for it. You'll find comfort in the Revelation, where we clearly see Jesus in all of His glory and victory.

You'll find comfort in the book of Ephesians, particularly the first half. And then you'll find comfort in the Gospel of John, where we find the phrase, we beheld His glory. Service, folks.

I would commend to you the book of Exodus, where we see God addressing the tangible needs of His people as they go to the Promised Land. The book of Haggai.

[25 : 53] This is the prophet who cared about the temporal, concrete needs of the temple. 1 Timothy, which addresses the very temporal needs of the church, like budgets and the caring for the widows.

And you will like the Gospel according to Luke, because it's in Luke that we meet Jesus, the need meter. It's in Luke that we have the parable of the Good Samaritan, which teaches us how to care without burning out.

Teachers. I think that the books that you will find most helpful are Deuteronomy, which means the second telling of the law, where Moses systematizes what he taught before.

The book of Judges, where Israel is learning to discern the truth, once given by revelation. Isaiah, that's Israel's greatest theologian.

Romans, where Paul systematizes the Gospel. Hebrews, this massively brilliant articulation of the finished work of Jesus Christ. And the Gospel of Matthew. Because it's Matthew who collects Jesus' words and deeds in an orderly fashion.

[27 : 02] Exhortation. 1 and 2 Chronicles, where we see the inherent consequences of obedience and disobedience. Proverbs, which are the wisdom sayings for everyday living.

Amos, this is the prophet who has a burden to move people on to the next step. Ephesians, especially the second half. And the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, where we find Jesus coming alongside people and helping them move on.

Leader types. You will be blessed by a study of Ezra and Nehemiah, where God empowers leaders to rebuild the destroyed Jerusalem.

You will also be blessed by the book of Daniel, where God raises up this foreigner to become a significant leader in exile. Exodus, where Moses is called to lead.

Joshua, the reluctant leader. 1 and 2 Timothy, which is about leadership. And I find that leaders will find help in the Gospel of Mark. That's because of the word immediately. 36 times in the Gospel of Mark, immediately Jesus said.

[28 : 09] Immediately Jesus did. Immediately Jesus did. And leaders like this word immediately. Giving. You will be blessed in the book of Exodus, where you see the generosity of God for His children as they cross the desert.

2 Samuel to 1 Chronicles. The life of David, who is the great generous giver. Philippians, where Paul celebrates Jesus Christ, the provider.

And the Gospel of Luke, which has the parables on generosity. And it's in the Gospel of Luke that we learn about this whole support team that was behind the 12 apostles. And then mercy. If you're motivated for mercy, you're going to find help in Genesis 12 to 50, where God extends His mercy to this profoundly dysfunctional family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

You'll like Hosea, who is the prophet of the second chance. The Psalms, where the prayers for mercy are found. And Philemon, where Paul makes the appeal for love's sake.

And you will find comfort in the Gospel of John, where you meet the tenderness of the Good Shepherd. Well, you can see how different we are. How wonderfully different we are.

[29 : 20] You can see also how we need each other. And you can see that's a profound and wonderful testimony to the creativity of Jesus Christ, that He can create such a variety of disciples.

I have a few minutes, so let me do this one more thing. One more thing to help put legs on this. And that is to ask some questions of you that I think get at what make you tick.

Okay? I'm going to ask you these questions in relatively rapid fire. You just write down your immediate impulsive response on this. Okay? You can just put that on the back of that sheet of paper.

I like to ask these questions when someone is sitting in my office with me or at a restaurant and we're talking about what makes you tick. These questions are what help me discern that. First question.

As you look out at the world today, what in your mind is the world's greatest need? Now, hopefully all of us would say to know Jesus Christ.

[30 : 22] So, let me rephrase the question. Out of all that Jesus Christ could give the world today, what does the world need the most? Some of you will say grace.

Some of you will say guidance. Some love. Some healing. I'll say truth. No right answer. Second question.

What is it that you want to see happen in other believers' lives? As you look around this assembly, as you look at one another, what do you want to see happen in our lives?

We're going to give different answers to that. Third question. What bugs you about other believers? I'm serious about the question.

It's a tricky question. What bugs you about other believers? Why that's tricky is your answer might reveal your own sin. But it also reveals what it is that makes you tick.

[31 : 27] What you care about. Fourth. My favorite question. If money were no object, and you knew that you could not fail, what would you want to attempt right now for the kingdom of God?

If money were no object, and you knew you couldn't fail, what would you want to attempt for the kingdom of God? I think our dreams are big clues to how we're wired. And then the fifth question. This is the question that Presbyterians don't like to ask. The question is, where do you find your greatest joy? We don't like to ask that, do we?

We get a little nervous with that. Where do you find your greatest joy? Frederick Buechner has rightly said that God's call upon our lives is found at the intersection of the world's greatest need and my greatest joy.

God's call upon your life is found at the intersection of what you think is the world's greatest need and where you find your greatest joy. And as your pastor, I'm committed to doing everything I can to help as many of us discover that intersection.

[32 : 55] Wired. Jesus Christ has wired each one of us to live and serve in unique ways. And here's the final point I want to make about that today.

The wiring only works if it's plugged in to the socket. The giftings of the Holy Spirit only work in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And the power only flows if we're plugged in to the Holy Spirit. Which is why Paul begins this whole text the way he does. Brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, I call you to present your bodies a living sacrifice.

Your real self. Your whole self. And the promise of this text is when I present my body to Christ, the juice starts to flow and I discover the joy and freedom he promises his disciples.