

**BodyBuilding: Serve Strong**  
***Delivered March 17, 2013***

Most of the time I think I am pretty helpful around our house. As I've said before, with Rita and I both working, I've never felt like it should be entirely her job to keep the house clean so I try to pitch in where I can. I love to cook, and since I'm usually home in the afternoon I usually end up doing a lot of the cooking for our family. I help with the dishes, shop for the groceries, and will even clean up the bathrooms from time to time.

But there's one chore that I can't seem to come to grips with, no matter how many times Rita asks me to help out with it: folding the laundry. I don't mind putting laundry in the washing machine, moving it to the dryer, even taking it out of the dryer and tossing it into a laundry basket but the monotony of folding every piece of clothing and figuring out who it belongs to feels like torture to me. I know it's ridiculous, but every time she asks me to help with it, I'm convinced I must have this horrified look on my face like she has asked me to build the great pyramids from scratch or something.

In fact, I will make just about any excuse imaginable to get out of folding the laundry. It's not that I'm incapable of doing it, just that I would so much rather be doing just about anything else. So instead I will offer to do any other chore in the house rather than fold the laundry. If Rita has asked me to do it while she is away, I guarantee I will procrastinate it until the last minute in the hopes that either (a) the laundry will fold itself, or (b) Rita will forget that she asked me to do it and will fold it on her own. Yes, I realize how absurd that is. I also realize how incredibly selfish I can be when I willingly choose not to help Rita, making her work more, and then try to justify it later.

So let's be honest this morning – we all find ourselves in similar situations from time to time. It could be that the situation arises in your own home, or at your workplace, or in your school. We all come across moments when we know that if we got involved and stepped in to help even a little bit we would lighten the load for someone else and that it would be greatly appreciated.

Quite honestly we can all be just a bit selfish in those situations where we see someone else struggling under a responsibility but we know it will inconvenience us some if we move to help. So we know that we could help, but refuse to do so. There are other times where we don't help because we simply don't know exactly how to help, so even if we wanted to, we wouldn't know what to do anyway.

To be as direct as possible this morning, I'm not going to sugar coat the message. Sometimes that attitude surfaces in the church. We might look around and see things getting done (or not getting done as the case may be) – things that we like and enjoy about our church – and we assume that someone else is always going to take care of them. We fail to ask ourselves a really important question: how can I be a part of making this happen, rather than just enjoying the benefits?

We are like me. I like when the laundry is clean, folded, and put away; I would just rather someone else do it for me. But we also know that no home, workplace, or even church, can possibly run at its maximum effectiveness if only a few people are engaged in its work. We just spent four weeks talking about how we envision our church

changing perceptions about Jesus and the church in our community, but that won't happen without contributions from all of us – young and old, visible and behind the scenes. We don't show up here to consume, but to serve.

We're going to read a few verses from 1 Corinthians 12 this morning, which is actually one chapter in a three chapter long discussion where Paul does some heavy theological lifting for a church that seems confused on a couple of key points. Among those challenges is their perspective on the way that God has given spiritual gifts to the church and the purpose for those gifts. Chapter 12 is really the "go to" chapter as a description of what the church is and how it is supposed to function as a unit.

To make his point Paul employs the metaphor of a human body. The body is made up of many different parts, or members. All of those parts are distinctive and unique in their own right, but none of those parts is therefore superior to, or more necessary than, any other part of the body. For the body to function they all have to work in coordination with one another. Even though they are diverse in their specific functions, they are united in their overall purpose and mission. The specific contribution of each body part adds to the effectiveness of the entire body.

In verses 4-6 Paul lays out a key premise for us to grab onto if we are going to shape our view and perspective of what it means to be the church. It didn't take much for you to hear it when we read it, right? There are three phrases each accented with two parallel words – different and same. There are different gifts, different ways to serve, and different expressions of God's power working in each of us. But in all of these differences we have evidence of the same Spirit, the same Lord, the same God at work within the church. This combination of diversity and unity is a reflection of the nature of God himself – one God in three persons.

God designed the church to be a place of diversity and difference not just in what we look like, talk like, and where we come from, but also in the deeper things about us. God has intentionally shaped each of our lives with our different talents, and invested various spiritual gifts in us. The same Spirit who allows us to confess that Jesus is Lord (v. 3) also distributes gifts to those who make that confession. The Spirit himself chooses how to distribute those gifts as an intentional investment in the body so that we can accomplish our purpose together. If you don't make use of those talents and gifts, then you are essentially telling the Holy Spirit that he messed up in the gifts that he gave you.

Verse 7 clarifies the purpose of these gifts being distributed to each of the members of the body. God gives these gifts to make his presence visible in the church – what Paul describes as the manifestation of the Spirit. And in some circles that seems to be all that is required – God shows up by the spiritual gifts and people are stirred up by it. But Paul pushes it further. God doesn't just manifest his presence to people so that they will be stirred up, but so that by showing up among the church the body would be built up in what Paul describes as the common good of the whole church.

When the Spirit's gifts to the church are seen as a means to the end of the common good of the entire church body, united with a common mission and purpose, then the gifts shine as they ought. They are not ends of themselves, but they are the means to the end of God building his church. He makes our impact much larger when he

empowers us in our mission to present Jesus to the world. When we walk in the power of the Spirit at work in our gifts then we exalt Jesus as the head of the church and Jesus is ultimately glorified and honored through us. Every gift the Spirit gives to every person in the church is meant to be in service to his mission and purpose for his body.

Of course there are two unsatisfactory options when it comes to serving with our gifts and talents in the church. The first is that we choose to hide our gifts and refuse to use them. There are any number of reasons given for this from time to time. Maybe we compare our gifts to someone else's that seem more impressive and we silently wish God would have given us "better" gifts. Sometimes we refuse to serve because the last time we tried to we got our toes stepped on and our feelings hurt, so we've decided not to go there again. And sometimes it just comes down to our selfishness – we don't want to serve, so we don't. But when we refuse to use the gifts God has invested in us, we rob God of his glory and sabotage the common good of the church as a whole.

The second option is that we use our gifts in a way that is meant to bring honor and attention to ourselves when we're finished. There are times that we find ourselves serving with our gifts and then are recognized for what we do. In those moments there will always be a powerful temptation to take more credit for it than we deserve. When we give in to that temptation we rob God of his glory and sabotage the common good of the church because we make it seem like we are somehow more important than some other member. In either of these cases we will prevent the body from fully realizing its purpose and potential for God's Kingdom. God brought you here on purpose, and he intends to use you here for his purpose – that is incredibly humbling and rewarding!

There is one level of satisfaction you can derive from hiding your gifts or using them for your own glory. It feels good to you; it gratifies your ego and your desire to be recognized, needed, affirmed and appreciated. But there is another, deeper, level of satisfaction you can find when you lay down your gifts in service to a greater good than your ego. When we lay down our gifts in service of Jesus and the common good of his body, then the quality of our satisfaction increases. It feels more rewarding and fulfilling. Ultimately our glory and honor is too small an ambition for the gifts God has invested in us. It can't possibly compare to the glory of God revealed in the church when each member finds a gift and place to serve the common good of the whole body. Then we really shine and function the way God intends.

I will say it as plainly as I can. We need you to find a place to serve here at New Life if we are going to have a chance to become all that God intends for us to be. To accomplish the kind of community transformation that is at the heart of God's purpose for us we need all hands on deck. I would go so far as to say that you owe it to the one who invested those gifts in you to find a place to serve in his body for his purpose and glory.

This week I want you to spend some time talking with God about your gifts and talents and how they could be used to serve him and the common good of his body better. You already know the reasons why you might not be engaging, but lay them out before him. I think you will find that just in the process of saying them, you'll feel convicted. Ultimately the truth is that when you don't use them, you're not just depriving God, or the church, but yourself of the joy of contributing to the common good and mission of the body of Christ in the world.