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Pastor Jeremy Vaccaro  
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

## *It's Your Call: Community Call-enge* Romans 12:1-8

We've been preaching a sermon series called *It's Your Call* about the call of God on every Christian's life. We've talked about the importance of understanding that the call begins with God, that there is a primary calling (to simply be God's) and a secondary calling (what God calls you to do). We've talked about how God will give you the gifts that you need for the call He has on your life, and we've talked about the costly nature of following Christ's call. **But how do we know what God's calling is on our lives?** How do you find your calling? Is it as simple as filling out a spiritual gift inventory? Is it as easy as going to a one day seminar on "finding your calling"? If we don't know how to find our calling, then maybe all this talk about calling is useless. Do you know how to discern your calling?

I think today's Bible passage points to the answer. That's why it's so important for us to open our hearts and minds to God's truth today. Turn in your Bibles to Romans 12. It's one of those chapters in the Bible that I come back to over and over again in my life. Today we'll simply focus on the first 8 verses to see what it teaches about God's call and how we can discover it.

Romans 12:1-8

*<sup>1</sup> Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will.*

*<sup>3</sup> For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. <sup>4</sup> Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. <sup>6</sup> We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. <sup>7</sup> If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; <sup>8</sup> if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.*

## Prayer for Illumination

As you read Romans 12, it is important to remember that in the first eleven chapters of this letter to the Roman church, Paul (the author) writes the most eloquent and detailed description of what God has done through Jesus Christ. So, as we start in Romans 12, we consider that first word, “Therefore” to be pointing back to all eleven chapters. Paul is saying, “In light of all the God has initiated in Christ for salvation, in light of the incredible grace of the Gospel, offer your bodies up to God.” These first two verses are a wonderful reminder of the primary calling for every follower of Christ. What is that primary calling? The primary calling is to belong to God; it is to be in right relationship with God through Christ. Paul says to the Romans: offer your physical, everyday life to God as an act of worship. And open yourself up to the incredible transformative power of the Gospel so that your mind is made new and you’re able to live in God’s will. Do you hear that in these first two verses? They are pointing directly at your primary calling—no matter how long you’ve known Christ, no matter how mature you are in your faith, no matter what gifts or talents you might have, your primary call is to live your life for Jesus as a sinner who has been forgiven, redeemed, transformed, and called by the work of God.

But can you find any instruction about the secondary calling in these first eight verses? Yes. Look at verses 6 through 8. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. 7 If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; 8 if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. Remember, the secondary calling is our call to take the gifts, experiences, strengths and passions that the Lord gives us and use them for Christ’s sake.

Paul reminds the Roman church that each one has different gifts. The gifts are given by God—they’re the way God equips us for the calling He has given us. If a person has the gift of prophecy—which doesn’t necessarily mean being able to predict the future, rather it is the ability to speak truth from God’s Word or Spirit into situations—if a person has that gift, she should put it to use. If a man has been gifted to serve, he should serve. If you are gifted in teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, or showing mercy—you should use those gifts in accordance with the faith that God has given you.

Does every Christian have spiritual gifts? Yes. 1 Corinthians 12:7 “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” Are these spiritual gifts listed in Romans 12 the only gifts? No. There are other gifts listed in Scripture; the main lists are Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4—and there are other gifts pointed to in Scripture. Do your spiritual gifts define your calling? (A bit of a trick question) No. God defines your calling. He is the Caller, and His call precedes your gifts. He will give you the gifts that you need to live out

your calling. But are the gifts of the Spirit connected to your calling? Yes, of course. And, can your spiritual gifts help you discern your calling? Yes. So, how do you know your spiritual gifts? The best way to know your spiritual gifts and to discern your calling in Christ is to participate in Christian community. Look back at verses 3-5.

<sup>3</sup> For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. <sup>4</sup> Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

In Christ, you are part of a body—you are part of a community—and living into that is one of the most important parts of following Christ and His call on your life. So Paul reminds the Romans: don't think too highly of yourself, remember you are part of a body. You are an integral part of Christ's community. If you are in Christ, by God's grace He has a calling on you. And the body will never be all that it can be if you don't live out that call, but there is also a calling on every other member of that body... and it matters whether or not they live it out. Look at verse 5, "each member belongs to all the others." Did you see that? You belong to each other. Is that something you thought about as you walked in from the parking lot this morning? Did you consider it when you sat down in your favorite spot in the sanctuary? We belong to each other. In other words, your life matters to and is accountable to this larger group of people sitting around you today because we are called to participate in God's mission to the world. Your calling is not just about you.

This idea of the body or community of Christ is always the context in which the Bible talks about spiritual gifts. Why do think that is? It's because it's in the community of Christ that your gifts and your callings are recognized, called out, nurtured, practiced, refined, understood, equipped, corrected, and unleashed. If you want to know your calling in Christ don't just crawl into a cave, fill out a survey, and think about it on your own. If you want to discern your calling in Christ, commit yourself to participating fully in the Christian community.

Let me make the point another way. I need a volunteer. I want you to find your calling on the platform here. Ready? Go. Do you need some help? Congregation, do you ever play that game where you try to find something with the help of another person who is saying whether you're hot or cold? That's what we're going to do. Okay, Volunteer, close your eyes because I need to show them where it is. *[Show the congregation a picture of the object, and where it is on the chancel.]* Ready? Go.

*[Questions after the object is found.]* What is it? How did you find it? The community helped you find it, didn't they? Was that helpful? Every single one of

us needs the community of Christ to help us find our calling in Christ, and live it out.

You may not know one of the important things that Pastor Mark and I have in common. Both of us are products of community college. College of Sequoias, in Visalia, California, is where every Vaccaro son spent at least one year of college. That's where I spent my freshman year. I was in the honors program there—had some of the toughest classes I had through all of college—all for less than \$1000. Pastor Mark is a product of Yakima Valley Community College – I'm sure it wasn't as good as College of Sequoias, but he turned out all right. One of the many wonderful things for me about attending my first year of college while living at home was that I stayed connected with my church family. And, it was that year that my calling in Christ really began to become clear. So while I was attending community college in Visalia, my church family, my Christian community, was my community call-ege. Get it?

That's what you are, Chapel Hill; you are a community call-ege. Last week Pastor Mark talked about a long list of people who have been raised up in this church and sent off into Christian ministry around the world. That's exactly what you have done with me. This was my first pastoral call. It was Woodlake Presbyterian Church and Sierra Vista Presbyterian Church and my Christian community in seminary who called out and enlivened my call into pastoral ministry. But you, Chapel Hill, nurtured that calling, and affirmed that calling, and refined that calling. You have taught me so much about leadership, about the mission of God, and about the way to live out God's call on me. Thank you for that; I will always be grateful for you.

But being a community call-ege isn't just about raising people up who are called to vocational Christian ministry and sending them off to other places. Being a community call-ege is also about raising up people up who are called by God to stay in this community, to be about the mission of God in their workplaces, and in their schools, and in their neighborhoods, and in their homes; **it's not just about sending people off to other places, it's about sending people out into this place.**

You have a calling in Christ. He has given you gifts, abilities, passions, strengths, experiences that are unique to you. And Christ is calling you to use those as part of what He is doing in the world. Do you want to discern your calling in Christ? Then get involved in the Christian community. Listen to what other people affirm in you. Be a humble participant in the church. Invite others into your life to help you process what it is you think God is saying to you. How can you get involved in such a big church? Join a LifeGroup. Join a ministry team. Join a Go Team. Let your church community help you discover God's calling on your life.

But guess what! The only way that's going to work is if you come at it from the other side as well. When was the last time you specifically called out or affirmed

spiritual giftedness of someone else in this room? How are you helping others in this congregation find their calling in Christ?

You belong to each other in Christ. Together you can be a community call-ege. The best way to discern your calling is in Christian community. So use the tools—the gift inventories and surveys—and spend time reflecting on your own. But don't forget that you need this community to help you really know God's call. In the end, it's not just about knowing your call. The most exciting, heartbreaking, life-giving, significant thing that any of us can do is live together the call that God has for us in Christ.

## Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **DIG DEEPER**
  1. How does Romans 12: 1-8 speak to every Christian's calling? How does it speak to your specific calling?
  2. Verse 5 says "each member belongs to all the others." How does that influence the way you live? How should that influence the way you live? What are the implications this verse?
  3. What role does the community of Christ play in helping one find their calling? Why is that important?
  4. Who is helping you discern your calling in Christ? How are they helping you? Is there something that you need to do to get more help?
  5. How are you helping someone else live into their calling in Christ? Why does that matter?