

***Romans 12:1-8.***

***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.***

***This is good and pleasing to our God!***

- 1. Be renewed in your thinking***
- 2. Be transformed in your lives of service***
- 3. Belong to the body of Christ***

*Where did you get the idea? What would move you to take on such a big undertaking?* These are the type of questions that we have heard for nearly the last two years as we have been preparing for the opening of our Little Lambs Learning Center. The answer when you really stop and think about it is simple: the answer is Christ. The love that Jesus has placed in our hearts is what moves us to serve our God and serve our neighbor. The love of Jesus moves us, compels us, to offer our time and our resources to serve our God in many ways. And this was a way that we as a body of believers thought we could serve him.

Sure somebody came up with the idea, that idea was hatched, researched, developed, and then implemented. There were different committees, all sorts of people working on this. It took time. We had meetings, we searched for a director, we hired staff, we filled out a whole lot of paperwork, we found and built and bought materials, but long before any of that there was Christ. There was this wonderful faith that we were blessed with, there was this wonderful God who has saved us and united us to himself and to each other through faith in Jesus Christ.

It all originates from, it's all because, it's all about Christ and his love for us that is so undeserved, so wonderful. This mercy and grace is what moves us to follow and to serve, and to act in faith. We have been saved by grace through faith.

Think about that for a moment. By nature we were lost and fallen sinners. Lost and condemned, dead in sin and corrupted from conception, we were headed for hell and God in his grace intervened to save us. In his undeserved love he saw us. Through time and eternity he set his gaze upon us. And in his gracious care God sent his Son to save us. God himself took on flesh to take our place. The almighty suffered for our sins and rose to give us life. And the Holy Spirit saw to it that this Word was sent out and reached us. With a splash of water connected with his powerful promises, with simple words shared from a servant of God, whether it was a Christian parent or friend or pastor, God brought us to faith. Our Father found us and made us his own.

This good news gives us peace and joy. This good news gives us meaning. Creatures lost and wandering in this sinful world have been brought into the loving care of our Lord. God is our Father. We are his children. Jesus is our Good Shepherd. We are his sheep, his little lambs. He loves us and cares for us. What comfort this good news gives us. What a blessed message of comfort that we have to share.

In a world that can seem so lonely, so cold, we are assured that we are held in the Father's warm embrace. In this world that can seem so chaotic and pointless, we have a God of order who created us to serve him, who saved our fallen race, and sets us free from sin, and sets us free for a life of service. Our Lord gives us purpose. He gives us direction. He gives our lives eternal meaning. We are privileged to serve our God in love both now and eternity. We have been saved by grace through faith. Sinners, lost and condemned, we are now saved and precious pieces of our Father's kingdom. We are precious members of the body of Christ. We are individuals who are able to use our different gifts and abilities to serve our God. We are part of the body of Christ and together we have work to do for him.

And that's Paul's point here in Romans chapter 12, isn't it? In view of God's mercy, because of God's amazing mercy and grace, we are set free to serve our God. He urges his brothers and sisters in the faith, "Offer yourselves, offer your bodies, offer your time, and treasures, and all that you are to him who loved you and gave himself up for you. Give yourself up to and serve the one who had compassion on you and saved you!" And as Paul encouraged the Christians back then to use their different gifts to serve, the Lord calls us today to use our different gifts to serve our God in thankfulness. ***4 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 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.***

The world at large sees that kind of thinking as hokey, and pointless, and so backwards, don't they? "Serve yourself," "put your needs first!" the world cries and our flesh is eager to listen. Our sinful flesh is agitated by this very notion. *I don't have time for this. This is pointless. Why should I use my time and money to serve others, to serve the Lord, I have better things to do?* But we are renewed in our thinking when we consider the mercy of God. God is the one who gave me my gifts and abilities. God is Father who skillfully created me has given me my mind and members, my talents and abilities. He is the one who gave me the abilities I need to hold down a job and to make a living. He knit me together in my mother's womb, and when I, his dear creation, rebel against him, he does not reject me and forsake me, but in love he rebukes me and forgives me, and calls me to serve him. What mercy! What grace! The God of the universe cares about each one of us as individuals and he put our needs first. The Son of God did not come to this earth to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. In love, in mercy, he gave his life for me, to pardon and to cleanse me. And when we go back again and again to that simple gospel; when we go back again and again to this love of God that is so amazing, so compelling, not only our thinking changes but our lives our transformed as well.

All of us have fallen into the patterns of this world. We become selfish in our thinking and it carries over into our actions. We get into that familiar selfish rut where we think only about our own needs and not the needs of others. We become lazy and apathetic and greedy. We use our bodies to serve only ourselves and our desires. We become selfish with our treasures and clinging tightly to this worldly wealth we miss out on opportunities to help a neighbor in need or support a promising ministry. Supporting the church is squeezed out of the budget and seen as foolish or unnecessary burden. The more we listen to the ways of the world, the more that give ground to the sinful nature, the more we become greedy with our time too. Indulging in the pleasures of the world we neglect our role as husband or wife, father or mother, neighbor or concerned Christian friend. We ignore the responsibilities and commands that God have given to us. We ignore our role in the body of Christ. Instead of serving our God, we give our time, ourselves to work and play throughout the week and then we sleep in and stay home on Sunday. We avoid church. We put off bible study; not only because things come up, not only because life gets busy, but deep down we are selfish with our time. Whenever our thinking is turned inward, whenever we fall into this pattern of this selfish world, it begins to show up in our outward actions.

In view of God's mercy our thinking changes. As we consider what he has done for us. We are cleansed inside and out. As we hear about the selfless acts of mercy and love that our Savior lived; and how he died to save us we are renewed to live for God. This renews our thinking and transforms our lives as we make time to come and hear learn more about him. Taking in his very body and blood in the Lord's Supper, standing or kneeling shoulder to shoulder with fellow Christ as individuals we receive forgiveness and peace that unites us, we are renewed in our thinking and inspired to serve one

another as Christ has served us. Slowly but surely, or maybe even suddenly, we realize how pointless it is to live only for ourselves and we are moved by the love of Christ to serve others. Motivated by the love of Christ we no longer ignore our place in the body of Christ, but we use the gifts and abilities, talents and treasures, that the Lord has given us to serve each other and we may even consider how we can serve in the church. In view of God's mercy our thinking is renewed and our lives are transformed into lives of service and love.

And this is all done in love and out of love for Christ. He unites to the body of Christ so that we may serve him and forever in heaven. We *belong* to the body of Christ. This is a wonderful privilege and a high honor. This is not hard service demanded by some critical boss who is constantly looking over our shoulder; this is not a workplace where we are jockeying for attention and for individual praise, but this cheerful and grateful service to our God who has saved us. This is a precious member of the body of Christ functioning in role that serves God and neighbor.

God in his goodness has places us into his family and unites us to something bigger than ourselves. He unites to the common goal of giving praise and glory to God. He gives us the wonderful privilege of working in and working to extend his kingdom. In and amongst this family of believers he enables us and gives us opportunity to encourage one another and spur each other on toward love and lives of faith. In this body of Christ he enables us to do some amazing things, things that we could not do on our own. Such as support this congregation and other ministries and missions in America and throughout the world as well. In this body he unites us in the faith and enables us to do some wonderful things as we seek to share the gospel and the love of Christ.

Little Lambs Learning Center is certainly evidence of that. United together in a common faith we have been able to accomplish something rather remarkable. And it was all possible because we worked together as a body of believers. People with different talents and abilities were able to support this project. Prayers and gifts, time and effort, from this body of believers and from other area congregations were all offered as the body of Christ. Today we celebrate this! Today we share in our master's happiness, we give God the glory, we ask God to continue to bless our efforts at Little Lambs, and we pray that he would continue to enable us to function as the body of Christ in many different ways, to the glory of God. Because this is good and pleasing to our God! Amen.