

How to raise \$3.5M
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If you're a problem solver, maybe you've already gotten the calculator out and started crunching the numbers on this new building. You've taken the total number, \$3.5M (it's a big number) and you've divided into the number of families here at FBC. Maybe you just rounded the number of families you think will give and let's say that's 100 families. So, \$3.5M divided by 100 families; that equals \$35,000/family. So, if everyone does their *fair share*, you reason, this thing will go.

How does that plan sound to you? I'm guessing for some of you that's pretty overwhelming and discouraging. That's almost \$1000/mo! A lot of you don't have that kind of income or savings to do anything close to that. You were hoping to give around \$1000 to the entire campaign over 36 months, not 1 month. Maybe, even, this is a reason it's been hard to get excited about this campaign and the vision because it's a constant reminder to you that you can't give much money to put a significant dent into our \$3.5M goal.

Or maybe you can pull off \$35,000 in 36 months; in fact, you could do that 4, 5, 6 times over. But you're skeptical if everyone else is going to give their *fair share*. So, you're wondering what's going to happen; maybe it even tempts you not to give. You might think, "Why should I give so much if others won't?"

Our sermon text this morning is just what we need. Before we get to the text, I want to point something out to you: we don't think this way with anything else concerning our church, do we? We don't say, "It's only fair if every family takes two Sundays a year to lead our singing and music." Yikes! That's not how we find Sunday school teachers. Everybody needs to take their turn (regardless of how well or called someone feels about teaching). What about our maintenance needs with our facilities. I'll tell you what: it would take me 2 to 3 months to accomplish some of the projects our maintenance men get done in just a week. Here's my point, brothers and sisters: the church of Jesus Christ (this one) doesn't just divvy up the needs and spread them out with no regard to gifts or skills that God has so graciously given, do we? We meet the needs according to the grace God has given each one of us. And there's a reason for that and it's found in Romans 12 (READ Romans 12:3-8).

There's all kinds of great stuff in this passage that I can't get to because of time. Here's what I want to do: I want to use this passage to help all of us understand the degree of service God is calling all of us to within his church. How much time should I give the church? Should I serve as a SS teacher or not? They want me to help decorate the church, should I? I was asked to sing on the worship team? Pastor asked me to lead a certain task force; is that something I should do? How much money should I be giving Sunday after Sunday and how much to the *Reaching Beyond* campaign? This passage answers those questions. It doesn't answer with a specific number (right? just give me the answer). But it tells us God's call on our lives within his

church given the skills, gifts and abundance he has given me (REPEAT). And my prayer, of course, is not just that this passage makes an impact on how you think through the *Reaching Beyond* campaign, but also your involvement in the church for decades to come.

Let me briefly summarize what Paul is commanding this church to do and then I want to draw your attention towards the particulars. Paul just stated some of the most helpful verses in the entire Bible concerning how we, sinners saved by God's amazing grace, should live. Present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God. This is your act of worship to God, FBC. And you'll be able to live that life when you resist conforming to the patterns of this world; instead of being conformed, be transformed by the renewing of your mind. When your mind is renewed you'll know what God's will is for you.

That's verses 1 & 2; now starting in vs. 3, Paul gets more specific about what that life-laid-down on the altar of God looks like. And he's giving this command to the entire church. Do you see that in vs. 3, "For the grace given to me I say to everyone among you." This isn't just for the leaders; it's not just for a select few. This command is for everyone.

The first thing Paul emphasizes is the need to think rightly about ourselves. That's pretty clear from the next two commands. First, the negative command: don't think too highly of yourself. He then gives the positive command: think about yourself with sober judgment. What will happen if I obey God's command? What's the result if we think with sober judgment? I see several things.

1. You'll notice and recognize that you live in a community of brothers and sisters who all have different gifts. Look at vs. 4, "For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function." When we our proud, it is always seen in our relationships with other people. Why? Because when I'm proud I'm always concerned how I stack up with other people. I'm smarter than her. I'm a better singer. I didn't make that mistake. Pride turns you into an unkind person. So humility, which is having sober (or right) judgment about myself, sees, admits and rejoices that we all have different gifts within the body. Some teach. Others lead. Others fix things. Others care for the hurting. And because we have different gifts, we have different functions. Certainly they overlap and intersect as we're all pulling in the same direction.
2. Sober judgment also leads me to recognize God is the giver of these gifts I have and others have. Vs. 6 makes this clear; it says, "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us." So, notice this: My gifts and your gifts; my abundance and your abundance is due to the grace given to us. That means you and I have what we have because of God's grace; because God has chosen to give me what he's given me. You have what you have because God in his infinite wisdom, mercy and grace has chosen to give that to you. On the flip side, what I don't have (but what you do have) is because God chose not to gift me with it.

But this teaching leads somewhere; notice where it leads. Vs. 6, "Having gifts that differ according to the grace give to us, *let us use them.*" Notice the command. Don't just look at these

grace gifts! Don't just admire them or talk about them. Don't compare what you can do with what I can do. Use the gifts God has given you. Implement them. Make them operable. Use them where? Within the body of Christ, of course. That's what he's been talking about. And to what degree (this is a really important question)? We all use the gifts, skills and abundance God has given to us in proportion to the grace and faith God has given. Paul says that two times. Vs. 3 says we are to have sober judgment about ourselves, "each according to the measure of faith God has assigned." Also, in vs. 6 he begins this list by saying if you've been given the gift of prophecy, the degree to which you use that gift is in (look at the words) "in proportion to our faith."

What does that mean? It means I'm honest about myself. Humility isn't thinking horribly about yourself; humility is thinking rightly about yourself. And here's something that's true about you and me; God has given all of us gifts, skills and talents and abundance. Some of you are really good singers or instrumentalists. Humility isn't saying, "I stink at music;" humility says, "By God's grace, I can play well and serve others musically." Some of you are so warm, kind and hospitable. Humility says, "Thanks to God's mercy, I'm pretty good at extending a helping, hospitable hand." Sometimes we need help with this; we need help seeing what where we are gifted. But for many of us, we just have to look at our abundance. What has God given to me in abundance? Teaching ability? Leadership? A problem solving or mechanical mind? Time? Money? A way with kids?

Let me tell to you about Patrick and Jonathan, these two brothers in Christ. Patrick has been gifted by God with a way with teenagers. He gets them; and they get him. When he talks they listen. And when teenagers talk, Patrick understands. His measure (abundance) of this gift is high. Now, Jonathan's isn't gifted so much like that. It's not like he's forgotten what it's like to be a teenager, he's only 25 (Patrick's 45). He just doesn't have the relational skills, the empathy that makes Patrick such a great youth worker. But give Jonathan a computer project and watch out below; he's fantastic with anything and everything technological.

Why? Why is Patrick one way and Jonathan another? Because of what Romans 12 is teaching. God gives the measure of faith and grace to us by his own choice. Consequently, we are to use them in that proportion for the benefit of the body of Christ so that the world may know God is glorious.

Now, I want to show you one more thing before we apply this to our lives and also specifically related to our goal of raising \$3.5M. Paul lists seven different gifts or services starting in vs. 6. These are not the only seven gifts that God gives; we know that because other passages highlight other spiritual gifts that God gives. So, I would say Paul is simply picking seven examples to make his point. He first says prophecy; he then highlights service and leadership and mercy. How should people with these variety of gifts use them? In proportion to their faith. That means, "to the degree you have those gifts, use them in proportion. If you have the prophetic gift in abundance, use it abundantly. If you have the gift of leadership in abundance (that's found in vs. 8... and some of you do), use it abundantly with great humility and with high character.

Now, notice that one of these gifts that Paul highlights is specifically related to finances. He says, “the one who contributes, in generosity.” How should one contribute? Generously. Both of these words “contributes” and “generosity” are money words in the NT. For example...

- Eph. 4:28 say, “Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share (there it is - “contribute”) with anyone in need.” Share what? The money or wages he earned by doing honest work with his own hands.
- 2 Cor. 8:2-3 says, “for in a severe test of affliction, their [the Macedonian church] abundance of joy and their extreme poverty overflowed in a wealth of generosity (there it is) on their part and they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means of their own free will.” The saints in Jerusalem were struggling so the Macedonian church gave money generously to help them.

So, here’s the big idea specifically related to our *Reaching Beyond* campaign as we all think about what to give: we all should give in proportion to the grace God has given us (REPEAT). For some of us, God has given us much so we should give much. If God hasn’t given us an abundance of money, we should also give sacrificially, but that sacrifice will be (should be) in proportion to what God has given. This passage, in my view, isn’t promoting a modern notion of fair share, but it does promote the idea of equal sacrifice. All of us sacrificing for each other in proportion to the grace God has given to us.

I’m hoping this isn’t too surprising to you when it comes to money. The Bible tells us clearly where wealth comes from. Deut. 8:18 says, “You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.” Look where the power to get wealth comes from? The Lord; not me. Whatever I have it’s “glory be to God” not “glory be to my hard work or intelligence.”

And what are we to do with this wealth? Well, we were already told what to do in Romans 12. Are there any other passages like this? How about 2 Cor. 9:11, “You will be enriched in every way for all your generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.” Look at the construction of that verse; God enriches you for the purpose of being generous. I hope you see, my good brothers and sisters, that what we’ve talked about this morning is God’s design and plan for his church and promoted through the scriptures.

So, that’s the text; that’s God’s word. May we have ears to hear and hearts to believe. Let’s apply some of this.

Can you see how Paul is trying to shape the life of the church? Can you see how this passage helps you and I learn how we should be relating to one another and how by all of us operating in the areas of giftedness, we make this body function to the glory of God? It’s beautiful; it’s God’s design. I want to apply this passage to our *Reaching Beyond* campaign and then more generally to our life together as a church.

Here's goal #1 of the *Reaching Beyond*: That FBCers would contribute \$3.5M in 36 months. The wording of this goal is intentional. The wording doesn't say: that \$3.5M would be given; that \$3.5M would be found in someone's backyard; that God would drop \$3.5M from the sky. No! that FBCers would contribute \$3.5M. This is God's design. God has given the money to us that we might use it for his kingdom work in proportion to the grace given to us.

This is how we represent God well, brothers and sisters. This is how we glorify our God before Taylor County. I truly believe in the depths of my heart that God is more honored and glorified by \$3.5M raised by all us of contributing according to the measure of grace given to us rather than, say, someone donating a lottery ticket, which just so happens to be the winning number and covering all of our expenses. Wouldn't that be nice? Wouldn't that make funding this building a whole lot easier? Yes, it would be nice if holding onto as many earthly treasures is our goal. If that's our goal (holding on to earthly wealth, earthly possessions, earthly treasures) then this building, this campaign is a burden. Friends, we proclaim the exceeding worth of Jesus and his kingdom by sacrificing an abundance of our earthly treasures (what might those be? Time. Money. Possessions. Reputation... that's what the world values) for the kingdom work of God.

I don't know how much money you should give to this campaign. There are a lot of factors involved. What are your current obligations? How much do you have in savings? Are you anticipating some big expenses? How many more years can you get out of your automobile? How many people do you support? And for how much longer? And a thousand other factors, right? That's why it's hard to come up with that final number, right? It's hard for me and Korby. It's hard to take all of these factors into account and live sacrificially, yet also wisely.

Here's what I can say, though: I need to give in proportion to the grace God has given me. It's my responsibility; it's God's command to me. May it not be that I have ability to serve my church with the gifts God has given me and I refuse to do that because of my selfishness and unbelief and disobey Romans 12. I'm 38 now... I've been married for almost 17 years; over these years Korby and I have accumulated thousands of dollars in savings (more than we currently need); my income is more than I need. I've had to ask myself, "God why have you give me more than I need?" Romans 12 gives me the answer; it's to use those resources (and also my teaching ability, my home, my leadership ability... everything God has given me) for the good of the church in proportion to the grace God has given me. This is also your responsibility to your church family; it is God's command to you.

Let me apply this passage, though, to our church family for beyond the campaign. This is how we should be participating in our communal life all the time. What do you have an abundance of? What has God graced you with? Use that for the good of the body. Don't be conformed to the pattern of his world. It's hard not to. The world says, "Your retirement years are for you." God's word says, "All your years including your retirement is for God." The world says, "You worked hard for your money; it's yours to enjoy." God's word says, "God has enriched you

in every way so you can be generous on every occasion.” The world says, “You’ve worked with children 20 years; it’s time to be done.” God says, “I made you that way for that purpose, why would you stop doing it?”

Friends, everything God has for us in his word is for our good. I’m thankful today for God’s word and I pray he will help you apply.

Small Group Questions

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1. Read Romans 12:3-8 again to remind you of the sermon text.
2. Pastor Brian tried to poke a few holes into the American or worldly idea of “fair share.” What phrases, statements or ideas from Romans 12 would you use to argue against a modern notion of “fair share?”
3. Read vs. 4-6. Share with each other how God’s wisdom is displayed by this plan for the church. What do you say “Wow!” about?
4. Based on the phrase in vs. 6 “Let us use them,” could we (should we) say that it’s sinful (it’s wrong) not to use the gifts that God has given us for the sake of one another?
5. Do you feel a growing sense of responsibility to the body with the abundance God has given you after reading and studying this passage?
6. Do you have a clear idea how God has “graced” you with abundance (gifts? time? skills? talents? resources?) and how to implement that for the good of FBCers?
7. Pastor Brian said that humility isn’t thinking poorly of yourself; but instead, humility is thinking rightly of yourself, both good and bad. Do you agree with that? What might be missing or wrong about that idea?
8. What’s hard about thinking rightly about yourself (having sober judgment about yourself)? Where might you get a wrong view of yourself?
9. Do you believe we think of money differently than other “grace gifts?” (i.e. everyone using their “grace gift” in proportion to what we’ve been given) If so, why do you think we do that?