Once upon a time there were two brothers, both farmers, who each married artistically creative wives. Each couple was blessed with five children.

The first brother and wife decided to involve their children in everything they did. So every son and daughter helped plant the crops, cut the hay, milk the cows, feed and care for the livestock, and repair buildings and equipment as needed. Each daughter and son also watched their mother paint beautiful pictures, and soon were required to try their own hand at sketching and painting. In the evening the family listened to beautiful music, and at the right time, every child had to take piano lessons. All the children learned to farm, but not all took to it naturally. All the children learned to appreciate the arts, but only a few were naturally any good at it.

When these five children finished schooling and grew up, one became a farmer just like dad. One daughter loved the piano and pursued a career in music. A son used his ability to draw to become an architect, and another daughter discovered an ability to teach, just like mother had taught them the arts. And the youngest child became a veterinarian, springing from a love for animals and a natural sense of understanding what they needed.

The second brother and wife decided they would not influence their children to pursue any particular path. The children were sent to school, but never helped dad farm or participate in mother’s creative arts. When they graduated from school, they were asked what they were going to do with the rest of their lives. “Will you be a farmer like your dad?” “I don’t know. I’m not sure where I’d start.” “Will you be a painter or play the piano?” “I don’t know if I can—I’ve never tried.” “Well, what are you naturally good at?” “I’m not sure.”

What gift(s) have you been given by the Holy Spirit? What are you supernaturally good at? How do you know?

FOR DISCUSSION

In the story, above, what made the difference between the two families? How was the outcome different for the children?

Romans 12:3-8

*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. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 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. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; 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.*
Explore God’s Word asking questions of what you saw. The notes which follow may help you to think through these questions.

1) How do you discover your natural abilities and talents—the things at which you do well?
   - How do you know you are really good at something (and not just fooling yourself)?

2) How do you discover your supernatural (Spirit-given) gifts—the things at which you do well?
   - How do you know you really have that gift (and not just fooling yourself)?

3) What is the difference between natural abilities and supernatural gifts?
   - Can a natural ability become a spiritual gift? If so, what would make it spiritual rather than just natural?

4) How many spiritual gifts are there?
   - Does every believer have a spiritual gift? Do you? What is it (are them)?
   - How are you using it (them)?
5) Must a spiritual gift be used with and for other people, or can it be used alone and for personal benefit? (see 1 Corinthians 12:7; 14:12)

- What is the purpose (goal) of Spirit-given gifts?

- How do you know if that purpose/goal is being reached—and reached well?

6) Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. How are we to serve together? What should it look like?

Finish this sentence: I can serve together by . . .

Notes On The Passage (Adapted from Dr. Thomas Constable Bible Study Notes)

Romans 12:3-8

3 - Paul began this pericope with a reminder of his apostolic authority. He probably did so because what he was about to say required personal application that would affect the conduct of his readers. The Romans had not met Paul personally, so he urged them to receive his teaching humbly. A humble attitude was also important as they evaluated and exercised the individual abilities that God had given each of them (cf. 1 Pet. 4:10). Paul had had experiences with Christians, who were proud because of their spiritual gifts, in Corinth where he wrote this epistle (cf. 1 Cor. 12:14-31; 13:4; 4:12, 20). The main point of this entire paragraph (vv. 3-8) is that Christians should "not think more highly of" themselves than they should, but use "sober (sound) judgment" in evaluating themselves.

The "faith" in view in this verse, and in verse 6, seems to refer to the scope of one’s particular gift, as Paul uses the idea of the "measure of grace" in Ephesians 4:7. Such a view of oneself, in relation to his or her gifts is "sound judgment," because it is consistent with reality. The "measure of faith," therefore, does not refer to how much faith one can muster up, but to the design of the gift God has given. This amount varies from believer to believer. Spiritual gifts do not reflect the worth of the person who has them. For example, a person who has gifts that enable him or her to minister effectively to large crowds of people should not conclude that he or she is a superior Christian.

4-5 - It is important that we remember we are part of a larger organism ("body"). We are not just a loose collection of individuals ("members") each doing our own thing. Paul had previously used the body to illustrate the church in 1 Corinthians 12. What he said here recapped the main idea that he expounded more fully there. The body of Christ is a unified
organism ("one body"), and its members are diverse, personally and in their functions ("members do not have the same function"). All the members belong to each other ("individually members of one another"); there is mutuality in the church. As members of each other, we cannot work independently effectively. Each member profits (benefits) from the contribution of every other member, as well.

6 - The "gifts" that we have are abilities that God has given us by His "grace" (cf. 1 Cor. 12:6; Eph. 4:7; 1 Pet. 4:10). They are capacities for His service. The list of seven gifts that follows is not exhaustive but only illustrative (cf. 1 Cor. 12:27-28). Paul's point here was that it is important that we use our gifts, and that we use them in the proper way ("exercise them accordingly"). All the gifts, in order to be effective, must be used "according to the proportion" (Gr. analogia) of the "faith" that God has given each of us. The "faith" in view, as in verse 3, is probably the amount of faith God has given us, not what we believe, namely, Christian teaching.

7-8 - All the gifts Paul mentioned in verses 6-8 need exercising within the body of Christ for its members' mutual benefit (cf. v. 5). Obviously other gifts have other purposes. However, Paul was stressing here the need to recognize that the members of the body contribute to the common welfare. For each gift listed, he was speaking of the way we use these gifts.

"Service" or "serving" (v. 7, Gr. diakonia) probably refers to ministering to the material needs of other believers. "Teaching" involves explaining what God has revealed (cf. 1 Cor. 14:6). "Exhorts" or "encouraging" translates the Greek word parakalesis (cf. v. 1), sometimes rendered "comfort." All three words are good translations. The context provides the clue, to the main idea, wherever the word appears. Here, "exhortation" is perhaps the best. Whereas teaching appeals to the mind, exhortation (preaching) appeals to the will. "Giving" is capable of broad application within the body. We should practice giving with singleness of heart, namely, freedom from mixed motives (cf. Acts 5:1-11), "in sincere concern." The idea is not, so much, giving lavishly, as giving single-mindedly: to please the Lord. "Leaders" experience the temptation to simply enjoy the benefits of their position instead of providing true leadership by serving. The RSV translates this phrase "he who gives aid, with zeal." "Showing mercy" relates to ministering to the sick and especially needy. A "cheerful," rather than a grudging attitude, is an important part of such ministry.

Going Further

One thing we can do to train ourselves to remember, is to memorize a part of what our Father has said to us. The Holy Spirit can use this to change our thinking so that our "heads" are more like Jesus. This week, memorize 1 Peter 4:10.