

Sermon preached at Faith Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Virginia,  
on Sunday, February 21, 1988, by the Rev. W. Graham Smith, D.D.

### **ROMANS 12:6-7; 1 CORINTHIANS 12:28**

“God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well...If  
your gift is that of serving others, serve them well.”

“And by God’s appointment there are in the Church...those who  
can help others.”

### **WHAT ABOUT LENDING A HAND?**

A church that is successful in God’s eyes is one in which each member is using his or her  
spiritual gift. And each one of those gifts is important and necessary.

I relish the story about the talented organist, in the days before organs were electrified. A  
boy had to sit behind a curtain at the side of the organ and pump the bellows so that there would  
be sufficient wind to fill the pipes. This organist had given a brilliant concert in which the great  
deep pipes had sent forth their glorious sonorous tones. After people had finished congratulating  
him, the little boy, who had worked so hard at the bellows, remarked, “We did pretty well, don’t  
you think?” The organist replied disdainfully, “What do you mean ‘we did pretty well’?” He  
gave the boy no credit at all.

About a month later, during another concert, the organist came to a stormy passage that  
required all the wind of which the bellows were capable. Suddenly the sound of the organ began  
to fade away. The organist signaled for more wind, whereupon the little boy looked out from  
behind the curtain and asked, “From now on will it be ‘we’?!” When the organist nodded  
vigorously in the affirmative the lad went back to his work with gusto!

The emphasis in the church’s ministry must always be on the “we.” Not just the  
minister’s, but everyone’s gift is needed, so that the church’s melody of truth and love may  
sound forth with harmony, beauty, and volume.

I heard once about a Christian in Seattle, who saw a young man handing out tracts at a  
busy downtown intersection. He was rapidly giving out the tracts without stopping to engage in  
conversation. “Why doesn’t he talk with someone?” thought the Christian who was watching.  
“His method is so cold and impersonal.” Finally, unable to contain himself, he approached the  
young man, and looking him straight in the face asked, “Why don’t you speak to someone about  
the Savior?” And in a flash, he realized the awful, hurtful thing he had done. The young man was  
deaf and could not speak. But he was doing what he could for his Lord.

Many believers who lack speaking gifts have serving gifts; and that is why I am dealing  
with the “serving” gifts first in our present series of sermons. In 1 Peter 4:11 the Apostle says a

beautiful thing, “Are you called to preach? Then preach as though God Himself were speaking through you. Are you called to help others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies, so that God will be glorified through Jesus Christ.”

I want to speak this morning about the gift of serving others. Look at what St. Paul says in Romans 12:6-7 and in 1 Corinthians 12:28:

“God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well... If your gift is that of serving others, serve them well.”

“And by God’s appointment there are in the Church...those who can help others.”

Now the clause “those who can help others” is, in the King James Version, translated “helps”; and in the Greek, it is just one word; and this is the only time this word occurs in the New Testament. It is a beautiful word, and it means literally “a lending a hand to.” Here is the picture. Someone is climbing painfully up a steep rock face. You are at the summit, and as your friend, almost exhausted, comes within reach, you lean over, give him your hand, and pull him over the top.

In Luke 10:40 an exasperated Martha uses the verbal form of the noun when she says to Jesus, “Sir, doesn’t it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and give me a hand in the kitchen.”

So, the gift of serving others, the gift of “helps,” carries the meaning of “lending a hand.” You remember how in the early Church the first seven deacons were appointed so that they could “lend a hand” to the Apostles. Amongst those first Christians there were a lot of poor people who needed help. And part of the practical help provided was the equivalent of our “Meals on Wheels” program—a daily distribution of food to those who needed it. But apparently those who spoke only Greek complained that their widows were being discriminated against, that they were not being given as much food each day as the widows who spoke Hebrew!

Do you see how Satan was attempting to neutralize the ministry of the infant Church in two cunning ways? — (1) by creating dissension among the believers; and (2) by attempting to sidetrack the Apostles from their primary responsibility to pray and minister the Word of God.

But with divine insight the Apostles resisted the temptation. They said, “It would be poor strategy for us to neglect prayer and the ministry of the Word in order to administer a ‘Meals on Wheels’ program.” And what they said to the Church was this: “Look around among yourselves, and select seven men, wise and full of the Holy Spirit, who are well thought of by everyone; and we will put them in charge of this business. Then we can spend our time praying, preaching, and teaching.”

And so, you see, the first deacons were chosen and ordained to “lend a hand” to the Apostles. (The word “deacon” means literally a “waiter” or a “servant.”) And the glorious result was that God’s message was preached in ever-widening circles, and the number of disciples increased vastly (Acts 6:7).

You understand, then, that the gift of “helps,” the gift of “serving others” is the Spirit-given ability to serve the Church in any supporting role; and when spiritual gifts are mobilized in any given local congregation, a large percentage of members will undoubtedly find that their gift is that of serving others.

Some commentators would say that the gift of “helps” is a one—on-one, person-centered gift; and they would define it as the special ability that God gives to some members of the Body of Christ to invest the gift they have in the life and ministry of other members of the Body, thus enabling the person helped to increase the effectiveness of his or her spiritual gifts.

Someone has described people with the gift of “helps” as “the glorious company of the stretcher-bearers.” You remember the story found in Mark 2:1-12 of the four men who carried their friend to Jesus on a stretcher, letting him down through the roof. Well, I have four wonderful stretcher-bearers, and their names are Linda Glenn, Thelma Rhyne, Evelyn Wagner, and Harriet Bredehoft, our gracious and competent office staff! The past five months have been a nightmare as I have had to function without the benefit of an office. You talk about being up the creek without a paddle—that’s me! These godly women type my letters and sermons and do a host of things that free me up to get on with the work of ministry. My spiritual gifts would drop catastrophically in their effectiveness if it were not for these stretcher-bearers! For example, I haven’t run off one page on the mimeograph machine in the 17-1/2 years I have been in Alexandria. This is not because I’m afraid of soiling my hands. The reason is that Thelma Rhyne regards this as one of the many things she can do in exercising her gift of “helps” in her ministry to Christ and the Church. I tell you, the secretaries are the unsung heroes of any Christian congregation.

Through the years I have had others in the congregation who have lent a helping hand by recording the sermons on audio and video tape and seeing that they get to the people who request them. Every week we send a little note of welcome to people who attend our services for the first time. Mr. Howard and I sign these letters, but Deacon Lanah Berryhill, amidst all her responsibilities at the State Department, types these letters for us. And when someone thanks me for “our” letter, I simply smile and blush!

Mrs. Glenn types the Bulletin at home each week, and Mr. Chris Lamb takes it to the printer and then brings the finished product on Sunday morning. Miss Wagner types the sermon each week and Elder Len Deibert takes it into the District and has the copies run off for us. J. W. Ellis and Len Deibert prepare the newsletter and have it printed each week, and Dan and Helen Franssell prepare the labels. Mrs. Glenn staples, stamps the return addresses, affixes the labels and postage stamps, and mails them! What shining examples of lending a hand—and I wanted you to know what goes on behind the scenes as our fledgling church gets off the ground.

Those commentators who say that the gift of “helps” is a one-on—one, person-centered gift would say that the gift of “serving others,” that Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians 12:28, is more task-oriented, directed more to service of the congregation at large, than to a particular person, such as the minister. They would define the gift of service as the special ability that God gives to certain members of the Body of Christ to identify the unmet needs involved in a task

related to God's work, and to make use of available resources to meet those needs and help accomplish the desired goals.

I think of our "Tiger Teams" who haul our equipment back and forth to this school each Lord's Day. God bless them! Do you know that a courageous lady is driving the "wonder van" this month? Mrs. Kathy Atwell. (We call it the "wonder" van because it's so old it's a wonder it ever makes the trip, but it does, on a wheel and a prayer!)

And what of those who drive for "Meals on Wheels"; who provide sandwiches for Hopkins House, and cookies for our coffee hours; those who help in the church nursery; who photograph historic events in the life of the congregation; who design posters; who assist so efficiently as ushers and money counters; who edit the newsletter, and act as church historian; who assist the office staff by stuffing envelopes; who engage in the jail ministry; who participate faithfully in our Wednesday evening program at Woodbine Nursing Home? And what about our splendid organist, choir director, and choir of singers who so harmoniously exercise their gift of serving the congregation in the ministry of music? No one could ever estimate the cumulative effect of their work in the growth and strengthening of the Body of Christ.

These are but a few of the ways in which you are exercising the gift of "serving"; and I hope that those who join our congregation as new members will get into some program where you can help our ongoing ministry; because those who don't get involved within six months often never get involved at all.

Most important, the gift of "serving" should never be thought of as a lowly or second-rate ministry. Without the exercise of this most vital gift, the work would fall flat on its face.

And now, let me tell you of something extremely exciting, in which many of you may employ your gift of "lending a hand." Just this past week the Evangelism Committee authorized the launching of a "telemarketing" program. Do you know that more than 300 new churches were established during 1986 and 1987 with "instant" congregations already larger than the average Protestant church in America? And they were all started through a telephone ministry! For example, our Central Evangelical Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, Missouri, of which Dr. Andrew Jumper is pastor, had a vision of planting a new congregation out in the suburbs. They marshalled a group of members at Central who were willing to "lend a hand," and they made 20,000 phone calls. At the first service, more than 200 people showed up, and already they have their organizing pastor, and are a strong and growing congregation.

Just think of the advantage we have here at Faith, as we get into this program which I don't believe any other church in this area has used, up to this time. Would you like to see 200 more new people attending here on a Lord's Day morning? Then volunteer your gift of "serving others" by joining this telephone ministry. Statistics confirm that 20,000 calls will bring in 200 people. Granted, that is only a 1 percent dividend on your investment of time and energy, but 200 more people, at this point, could revolutionize our ministry of outreach here at Faith. Lest you be frightened by the thought of 20,000 phone calls, let me tell you that the initial phone call is supposed to last 45 seconds or less—it consists of only one or two questions:

(1) Are you now actively involved in a local church? and

(2) If not, would you like to receive information on our new church?

In this coming week we will be writing to obtain the Manual which sets out in detail every step in the process of making this ministry effective; and if you feel that you would like to be one of those who would be willing to use your telephone to the glory of God, we want you to contact the chairman of our Evangelism Committee, Mr. Dan Franssell, and tell him of your desire to “lend a hand.” I am personally so excited about this glorious opportunity that confronts us that I can hardly wait until it is launched. And it will, of course, be an ongoing ministry of the congregation, as thousands of new housing units are built in our immediate parish area.

My friends, catch the vision, get to work in the spirit of sacrificial service, and God will bless us beyond our fondest dreams.

Remember, if the Lord has blessed you with the gift of helping others by “lending a hand,” He doesn’t hold you accountable to preach or teach. He simply holds you accountable for giving assistance to the total ministry of our church in any way that brings glory to Him, that leads souls to the Savior, and strength and encouragement, hope and joy to fellow travelers on the highway of life.

“O strengthen me, that, while I stand  
Firm on the rock, and strong in Thee,  
I may stretch out a loving hand  
To wrestlers with the troubled sea.”

**AMEN.**