



Grace & Grit
Part 3 – Grace Has a Place for You
Pastor Ted Cunningham

I have a question to start today. How many of you have ever felt like there was a place...? Maybe it was a sports team, a group at school, maybe a group in the community and you never quite fit in. I led out with the athletic teams; that's where I never quite fit in. We all have a place where we can probably go back to in our mind. Maybe it was when we were young and in school, thinking through how we just weren't accepted and for whatever reason.

Today, in Part 3 of Grace and Grit, we're talking about this is a place for everyone. It's a place for everyone. If you have placed faith in Jesus, you have been given a spiritual gift or gift mix in the body of Christ. There is a place for you in the body of Christ to serve and to be a part of. And as we jump into this, I want to give you a few core values of our church. Just so you know, if you are brand new to our church, this is what we, for the last almost 20 years, have been passionate about.

We've always prioritized heal over growth. We want to be healthy as a church body. We want to be healthy as the body of Christ. When I go to the doctor, the doctor doesn't look over my charts and me and go, "Hey, I'm really proud of you; you've gotten a lot bigger since the last time I saw you." No doctor has ever said that to me because doctors aren't looking for that. They are looking for my health.

So, I loved asking this at 8:30 and I can't wait to ask it at 10:00. How many of you woke up this morning with a few aches and pains? Look around the room. What is a 10-year-old doing raising her hand. Do you even know what an ache and a pain is? Anyway... Yeah, and you know... How many of you stay in bed for a moment...? We've done this over the last 12 months. We lay in bed checking for symptoms.

I've been doing this in hotel rooms on Saturday mornings when I'll be flying home after an event. I'll always get some guy at an event who is a rebel and wants to grab my hand and bring me in for hug saying, "I ain't afraid of no virus!" I ain't afraid of no virus either, but I want to be able to fly home and not have to drive home when I wake up tomorrow morning with symptoms.

But, yeah, we've been waking up going, "This is going to affect a lot about not just livelihoods, but how much we get done throughout the day. If you've ever recovered from illness like the flu or something in recent years and you know that sick feeling... You don't want to do anything. You don't want to go anywhere. I may work from home, but I'm not going to be at my best. But then when you recover, what are you feeling like? I can take on the world. I can do anything.

If you've seen the new comedy special on Netflix by Brian Regan... I love this guy as a comedian. He hasn't done one for a couple of years and he has all white hair now, completely gray hair and that's what he starts off with. He goes, "I went into quarantine and came out a senior citizen." He said, "I went to the doctor the other day and I told the doctor, 'There's this spot above my knee. It's about the size of a fist. This is the only place it doesn't hurt. Do you have a pill that can make my whole body feel like this one little spot right here?'"

You know when you're firing on all cylinders and you feel awake, alert, feel good, and maybe you shake off the early aches and pains of the morning, that's when you're going to be at your best and most productive.

So, we don't go for the tips and the tricks and strategies of the church grown movement. We haven't ever been into that. We want to make sure we maintain health because we know if we're healthy, the gospel goes out into our community, the gospel goes out to the ends of the earth.

One of the ways we really stay on this health is by **prioritizing the purposes of the church over the programs of the church**. We read in Revelation 2 that the Church of Ephesus had a lot of great things going on. They were commended for all of the good stuff they were doing. However, they forgot their first love. You should never judge the health of a church by its calendar, by programs or events. You can have a lot of stuff going on and not be healthy. We prioritize the purposes: worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and evangelism.

Another big core value for us is that **we always prioritize people over positions and titles**. I love when people come up to me and go, "What do we call you?" I say, "Ted. That's my name." I know what people are saying with honor, but this isn't something we get all caught up in around here. People are the priority.

To launch into this, if you have your bibles, turn to Romans 12. We're going to be going through Verses 3 – 8 as we look at the body of Christ today, your place in it, and how grace has been given to you to run with that, and to find your place, to discover your place, and then actually use your spiritual gifts. But it all begins with humility. It begins with understanding that this all comes to us... As we looked in week one, if you have placed in Jesus Christ, you are a new creation in Christ Jesus. And he has given you good works to do, which he has prepared in advance for you to do, so we want to discover that.

We read in 1 Corinthians 15, the Apostle Paul says, ***9 For I am the least of the apostles... Some would argue he got a late start. ...and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them... When you read that, the argument is easy to make. He traveled more, he planted more churches, he wrote more scripture. ...yet not I... Just as God worked in Paul, he works in you and he works in me. ...but the grace of God that was with me.***

But on our journey to health and trying to maintain humility – and probably one of the reasons why you didn't fit into one of those other groups – there is a disease if we're not careful that we can get as the body of Christ and it is called **comparisonitis**, a made up term. It's a fakey, fakey term, but you get what

we're saying. These are a lot of the reasons why you maybe didn't fit into that group at school. Or there is a group in the community that you never found that you were clicking with.

Abilities: That's why... I would have been one of the best athletes of the 20th Century had I had abilities and strength and balance and all of the stuff necessary to be a great athlete. **Status** – you didn't come from the right family. "I don't have the **intelligence**, the **wealth**, the **education**. That group likes to run with educated people." Maybe **age**, **gender**. We do not look at all of this when we're talking about the place that you have in the body of Christ. What I love about where we're going with this today in Romans 12 is **there is no need to compare or compete because Jesus makes us all complete**. In other words, however God is using you in the good works that he prepared in advance for you to do... However he is using you, we shouldn't become jealous of that; we should be cheering that on.

We should be celebrating that in your life. I get the flesh. I think this is why even in Romans 12, Paul is going to lead out again with humility because all of us can allow the flesh to take over and see how God is using someone else and say, "Why not me?" Some of you are fighting being in Branson. I meet with people all the time who say, "I didn't plan on being here, but I'm here." Stop comparing your ministry with ministries across the country. Stop comparing what God has called you to do in Branson, Missouri with what God has called someone else to do in Chicago or New York or Los Angeles. He has prepared in advance good works for you to do and there by the grace of God go forth.

We read this humility again in Romans 12. ***3 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... Every time we serve in the church, every time we operate in our spiritual gifts, that we would be reminded this is given to us by God and it's nothing that we need to be boasting about. ...in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.***

So, let's talk about spiritual gifts. We're going to go through what they are and probably spend more time on what they are not. The reason we're doing this... For those who are brand new to the church... If you are a new believer in Christ Jesus, we want you to understand what comes to you at the moment of your salvation. We're going to spend a lot of time on what it is not so as you're reading the scripture, as your being discipled, there's no confusion.

Let's give you two definitions to start. Let's look at two definitions of spiritual gifts before we continue in the seven that Paul is going to outline in Romans 12.

"Spiritual gifts are divinely given capacity, distributed among believers to build up the body of Christ."
This is John Walberg's favorite way to say it from Dallas Seminary.

Bob Deffinbaugh puts it this way. *"Spiritual gifts are those endowments of power which enable us to carry out the vital functions of our body life in Christ as members of His body. These endowments are a supernatural enablement so that supernatural results are produced. It is only when our Lord returns, when the church is taken up into glory and fully perfected, that the need for spiritual gifts will cease."*

So, this is where we are going to find our unity. We are a diverse body, but we have unity, and we operate in these spiritual gifts to serve one another and build one another up.

So, here are a couple of things about spiritual gifts. What they are and what they are not. We would call this your gift mix. We're going to talk at the end here in just a few moments on how you can begin to discover these. Everyone has at least one or more spiritual gifts given at the moment of your salvation.

This is a very important point to make. **No one believer has all of the spiritual gifts.** I've worked with believers in discipleship, brand new believers who assume that is the pastor, the pastor has all of the spiritual gifts. Let me say this clearly and write this down if you're taking notes. Your pastor is not Jesus. Jesus, when he left, he distributed these gifts to us so all of us come together when we're functioning in our gifts. That is the body of Christ working and having health. But I've seen it. "If there is a problem in the church, the pastor will take care of it." "If you need this done, he'll take care of it." That is not what we believe here. It is not about a pastor or one or two. Spiritual gifts isn't about an elite group of Christians. Get that out of your mind.

Let's talk about what it is not. We have to spend quite a bit of time on this so this is very clear as you study the Bible. **Your spiritual gifts are not the result of your status, your age, your education, vocational training, intelligence, or determination.** Why is that important? You can't will yourself a gift. You can't pray for a spiritual gift. It comes to you at the moment of your salvation. Put as much willpower into as you want, that's not how it works.

Spiritual gifts are not your passions, abilities, personality, or experiences. We call this your spiritual shape. We will direct you to where you can go take an assessment on this at the end of the message. Your spiritual shape or your spiritual gifts, heart motivations, or your passions... What are you passionate about? Who do you really love serving? My passion is marriage and family. That's why I wake up in the morning thinking about how to help couples. So, I'm using my spiritual gifts within that passion here in in Woodland Hills and elsewhere. My abilities, my personality make up who I am, makes up who you are, and your experiences. I love personality tests. They can be a good tool. But there is so much more about you than what a personality assessment can share because experiences also define a lot of who you are and where you are today.

Spiritual gifts are not the Fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, faith, and self-control. This fruit is to be cultivated in the life of a believer and comes alongside spiritual gifts, but that's not what we are speaking of today.

Spiritual gifts are not spiritual disciplines. Bible reading, meditation, memorization, prayer, gathering with other believers for fellowship. We're not talking about those. We're talking about the gifts, that supernatural endowment of power given to the believer.

Spiritual gifts are not acts of Christian service. I love this. So, you're going to read in this list in just a moment: serving. You're like, "I ain't got that gift. I don't have to use that one." "I don't have the gift of giving, so I don't have to give." "I don't have the gift of mercy, so I don't have to show empathy to someone who is struggling."

We're going to be talking about spiritual gifts but don't confuse that as we're going to read in 1 Peter: 4 in just a moment. You are to use your spiritual gifts to serve one another in the body of Christ. But don't look that the assessment we're going to give you in a little bit and say, "Oh, I don't have that one, so I don't have to do that." No. The difference between the spiritual gift that's been given you and the act of Christian service that we are all called to in giving and in serving.

Spiritual gifts are not the purposes or programs of the church. We already talked about worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, evangelism. We're not talking about purposes and we're not talking about programs. This is important because I'll hear people say, "Children aren't my gift" when we're asking people to serve. Okay, good point, but here's really what you should probably say that would be better. "Children are a gift from the Lord, but they are not a spiritual gift." They may not be your passion but let me tell you to run the children's ministry at Woodland Hills Family Church takes a lot of different spiritual gifts.

The worship ministry at Woodland Hills, do you know how many spiritual gifts it takes to lead us each week in worship. There is so much behind the scenes that goes into this. And it is fun to watch a body working together in a healthy way and everybody using their gifts. You can see it. You know when it's working and when it's happening. So, you may say, "I don't want to do greeting; that's not..." Listen there are all sorts of spiritual gifts involved in the greeters here at church and ministries of our church. So, don't confuse spiritual gifts with programs or purposes.

Let's continue in Romans 12 with this great illustration of the body. We read about spiritual gifts in Romans 12, Ephesians 4, 1 Corinthians 12, but here, Paul says, **4 For just as each of us has one body with many members... Different parts. ...and these members do not all have the same function...** This is why when I wake up in the morning if something is hurting on me, isn't it amazing how it just effects the rest of the body and we're dragging the rest of the body along. **5 so in Christ we...** I love the word picture here. **...though many, form one body...** And we want to be a healthy body. We want to be a body where all parts are functioning and doing what God has given them and called them to do. **...and each member belongs to all the others.**

About a year and a half ago, I was called by a lady from our church. She said, "My mom is in the hospital." Mom is a member of the church. "She's at Mercy and it doesn't look good." This lady had been on several rounds of antibiotics and it killed all the good bacteria in her stomach. When she was explaining it to me, it didn't sound that life-threatening, but then she said, "Ted, it is not good." It's a senior lady in our church, a dear friend. I run up to Mercy to see her. When I walk in, she's sitting in a chair and looks fine. I'm like, "That's how you got me up here." No. I go, "I love you; I had to come in." She was doing great, and we were talking and having a great time.

The doctor walks in. They're still trying to fix the problem that she has no good bacteria in her stomach that we all have.

I always love when I get medical on you. You're like, "Just ask Travis to explain all this to us."

The doctor comes in and says... This was one of the most embarrassing moments in a hospital I've ever had. The doctor said, "We want to share with you a new treatment that we've discovered. It's been working well with our patients. It's called a fecal transplant."

I looked at the member and said, "I'm going to go step out in the hall for just a moment. I'm going to give you your privacy."

This member goes, "You sit there, preacher. You ain't going nowhere."

So, I just sat there, trying to act... This young female doctor, with great enthusiasm... I mean you should have seen her face lit up about fecal transplants. She explained it and she said this is really what I think we need to do for you. All we need is a donor."

I said, "Again, I'm going to go lay down in the hall out there; this has been way too much information for me. And I hate to say it, but you're going to need to leave our church too. We're going to need you to go to First Baptist. I think Jeremy would make a fantastic donor."

Now, listen, Woodland Hills, I love you. I do. I love every one of you. I'd give any person in here, who is a match, one of my kidneys. But I am drawing a line with passing a blender around. It ain't happening. We're part of the same body, but we are not going to take it that far. We're here to serve one another and to build one another up. I love this illustration because it's about being healthy. The thing I love about that illustration is what it takes to get that body going because this one issue in the stomach bringing someone down, taking someone out. I think about that.

If we want to be a healthy church... Remember, we are prioritizing health, not growth. If we want to be a healthy church, what is your part in that? There are two ways people walk into this church and I would say any church in this country or around the world.

The first way is they walk in and go, "How will this church serve me? What can I get from this church?" Now, if that person is not a believer, we welcome them with open arms. We are grateful they are here. We want them to come to know Christ and then find their place in this body. But you know what that feels like and what that smells like and what that looks like when someone who claims the name of Jesus walks in and it's about, "What can I get from this place?"

The second is the person that walks in... And this is what I love. We get it all the time here at the church. Before they even move here to Branson, people will start contacting us and go, "Hey, I'm looking for a place to serve." Some come with agendas, but most don't. Most come with, "Hey, this is what I know the Lord has equipped me to do. Here are my gifts. How can I be a blessing to the body of Woodland Hills Family Church?"

Two very different approaches to coming into the body of Christ.

Continuing in the text, here's what we learned. **Using your spiritual gifts helps others use their gifts.** And if you're coming in with that first attitude, that first approach, the true test of a servant is how you respond when you're treated like one. How you respond when you actually roll up your sleeves, put a towel over your arm, and use the gifts that God has given you. And do so with sober judgement, not taking the credit, not trying to figure out if you're getting enough applause or if the spotlight is on you. No. *It's, I'm serving, I'm a part of the body of Christ.*

1 Peter 4 puts it this way, **10 Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others...** Keep this in mind when we go to that list because serving is one of the seven gifts we are going to look at. **...to serve others as...** So, the difference between the gift and the act of Christian service. **...faithful stewards of God's grace...** And this is important because of what Paul is going to say in the next text. We always see the list of spiritual gifts, but we don't see the part where he comes in with the grit and says, do this wholeheartedly. If this is your gift, do it, use it. If this is what you've been called to do and this is your part in the body of Christ, tackle it, go after it. Don't just discover it and sit on it, faithfully administer God's grace **... in its various forms.** That's what we love about so many different gifts in the body. We know that **the diversity of spiritual gifts in the church brings unity.**

Let's look at some of these gifts from Verse 6 – 8. **6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying** (Declaring God's truth), **then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve...** If you have this gift, then put it into practice and use it. **...if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement...** Find the person today before you leave in this body that needs some encouragement. Do it. Don't just know what your gift is, use it.

...if it is giving... Don't do it halfheartedly, do it wholeheartedly. **...then give generously...** Don't give and be like, "I've done my part, I'll step back." No. Someone with the spiritual gift of giving is constantly looking for ways to use it. I look around in here right now and... This is what I love about body life, especially after you've done life with people for some period of time. I can see these gifts played out in this church. I don't call out names or point to people, but I could point to people right now and know that person has the gift of giving. It just flows out of them. And it's not a once a week, drop something in the offering, it's just every time they get an opportunity to give to someone, to bless someone, they are doing it. they are giving generously. That's the grace and the grit.

...if it is to lead, do it diligently... not halfheartedly. Pour it on. Lead. You know this. You may have the spiritual gift but not the position. This is often what leads someone into a position. People notice it. **...if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.**

So, we don't only get the gift, we get the approach and we get the attitude. As we talk about these gifts, I want to just say this... and again, start with the same thing we've said all year. We have honored all decisions during this time. It's a little bit different in the 8:30 and the 11:30 since we're talking to our church at home family. In this conversation of spiritual gifts, it's one of the things I struggled with for a year. How to do body life. There are some pastors who think this is easy. You just have an on campus and an online and it works. To me, it hasn't been that easy. To me, it hasn't been that simple.

It feels like two different churches and it's just hard to get it functioning. But I would say one of the biggest challenges of online church or church at home is limited opportunities to exercise your spiritual gifts. I know there are some right now that are watching and this hasn't held you back at all in exercising your gifts. You get it.

I'm talking to the group whose really now at that place they have developed a new habit of watching online. I just want to encourage you. If the underlying health conditions have been taken care of and you're ready to return but the convenience of staying home, not for health reasons but it's just that the pajamas are easy, I just want to encourage you to get back to face to face and in person gatherings.

Set a time. Maybe it's Easter. I've heard from people that "This is my last shot and I'm coming in on this day." Whatever that is for you, I just want you to process that and think that through as a family. I think we pick this up from Paul's writing all over the New Testament. "Boy, I'm sending you this letter, but I long to see you face to face. I want to see you face to face because you are a part of this body."

There are some who haven't skipped a beat. Using your gifts in this body hasn't been diminished one bit from you not being on campus in 12 months. Some of you actually stepped it up and you're leading the online Bible studies and you're encouraging people. Your gifts are still being used and for that we are grateful. I'm talking about the one who has found it a little bit convenient to step away from body life, to just think through for the next couple of week or months how you enter back in.

We'll end with core values, as we started. **Every member of this church is a minister.** You're looking at the lead pastor, but I am not the minister, the only minister. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, we believe in the priesthood of the saints, you are a minister of the gospel of Jesus. And we want you to use your spiritual gifts.

We believe every ministry is important. We don't walk around here talking about what ministry is more important. That is not at all how we view this. You are an important part of the body of Christ. And to remind us all, it is by grace, through faith, that we are saved. We looked at this in the first two weeks. But it is also by grace, through faith, that we serve. And He gets all the glory for everything that we do and everything that happens in this church.

In closing, let me give you a couple of ways you can discover your spiritual gifts.

1. I want to encourage you to take an assessment. You can go on our church app or go to woodhills.org and you'll see the shape assessment. Again, this is a tool. This isn't the end all be all, but it's a great tool to jump start you into the conversation and to continue learning and being disciplined about spiritual gifts. We'd love for you to take that. If you are brand new believer... You've been baptized and you feel like you are stalling out, get on there, take the assessment. Let's continue to grow in our faith in Christ.

2. Serve. I have found this one to be almost more important than the first one. Get elbow to elbow with other believers. Get involved in body life. Just serve and then in that serving, you'll get number three.

3. Ask others. You're going to find out from others. I've had plenty of people in my life tell me, "That's not really..." We have auditions for the worship team and all that. That's probably one of the main places in the church we explain to people "This is not your gift." That's not an easy thing to do, but it helps to ask others.

Can I just encourage you? I get this often. There are those who show up to a church with an agenda. Instead of wanting to find their place in this local body, they show up with a book, a DVD, a curriculum, or a program and they say, "If you'll do this, I will come and be a part of your church and lead it." After someone gets into the church and we find out they are truly into serving others and building up others, it's not about pushing our personal agendas or our personal programs. There are a lot of different program that fulfill all the different purposes of the church and a lot of great ones. And we don't have the energy, the capacity, the resources to do it all, but there are plenty of places of services in this church for you to use your spiritual gifts that have been given to you to serve and to build up this local body and I want to encourage you on that journey.

Father, in the name of Jesus, we thank you. As we sang today, the name of Jesus has power that has healing. As we sing that over our families, as we sing that over those who are addicted and those who are hurting, those who are depressed.

I pray for the one who has never placed faith in Jesus and this conversation of spiritual gifts is the first time they've heard it. I pray that today would be the day they confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in their heart that he has been raised from the dead that they would be saved. And that they would begin this journey of discovering their spiritual gifts and entering into body life here at Woodland Hills Family Church.

I ask, Lord, that this body remain healthy. Anything that needs to be dealt with that is not healthy or that's leading to this comparisonitis or any other disease or cancer that would creep in, bring that to our attention so it can be dealt with, so we continue to be healthy and used by you and give you all the glory for it.

It is in the name of Jesus that we pray it. Amen.