

LOVING ONE ANOTHER

Let's Think about Our Church

Romans 12:6–18

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Even as death crept close, Socrates proclaimed his teachings while standing on trial before the Athenian democracy in 399 BC. Plato witnessed Socrates' defense during which Socrates spoke these challenging words: "The life which is unexamined is not worth living." The jury would not accept Socrates' philosophy, so they condemned him to swallow hemlock and perish.¹ But his words endure.

To critique society proves dangerous and even deadly in our world. Socrates knew this. However, evading self-examination proves even more hazardous for the people of God engaged in an eternal mission. Whether it's a local church examining its organizational culture or a person considering his or her spirituality, both must self-examine for spiritual growth and effective living.

For this reason, Chuck Swindoll gives a powerful two-part series on Romans 12:6–21 to help us reflect on our own lives and churches. This *Searching the Scriptures* study will help you analyze your life's choices so you can edify God's people in the local church and shine the bright light of the gospel through your renewed life.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

In Romans 1–11, Paul presented his most extended theological argument. In chapter 12, he fastened handlebars onto his doctrine so we can navigate life with it. Since God has kept His promises by decisively enacting salvation through Jesus Christ (Romans 1–11), Paul concluded in Romans 12:1–2:

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Quotable

*I don't know
of a greater reason
to be used up
than to be used
up for the glory of
God in the work
of a church.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Before we dig into our study, take a moment to turn Romans 12:1–2 into your own personal prayer for guidance. Write your prayer here:



Observation: Reading the Ingredients

What a magnificent thought to know we can encounter God in His Word. How do we begin? We simply read the text. Slowly. Carefully. Meditatively. Repeatedly. So all you need for this step is your Bible, some time, and a pen. Don't rush to the academics because God may have something to show you He didn't show the scholar. Begin by reading Romans 12:6–18.

What We Do—Romans 12:6–8

Paul first described what the church *does*. Before examining the seven gifts, look closely at Romans 12:4–6.

The church is Christ's _____ (Romans 12:5) made up of different _____ (12:5) with varying _____ (12:6). These gifts come from God's _____ (12:6).

Below, let's list the gifts and what we're supposed to do with them (12:6–8):

1. If we have the gift of _____ then we _____.
2. If we have the gift of _____ then we _____.
3. If we have the gift of _____ then we _____.
4. If we have the gift of _____ then we _____.
5. If we have the gift of _____ then we _____.
6. If we have the gift of _____ then we _____.
7. If we have the gift of _____ then we _____.



LOVING ONE ANOTHER

Let's Think about Our Church

Romans 12:6–18

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

As Chuck says in his sermon, it's these spiritual gifts that make the church so magnetic in a community. Take a moment to write down anything else you observe in Romans 12:6–8.

How We Do What We Do—Romans 12:9–18

It's always helpful to consult multiple translations. You may want to take time to read this passage in the *NASB* and the *NLT*. Chuck captures the essence of this passage in a single word: *love*. According to Romans 12:9–18, *how* should we do what we do? With love.

Romans 12:9a says, “Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them.” Paul elaborated in 12:9b–18. Just look at those imperatives. You may want to underline them. How many can you find? Churn a few of them over in your mind. Then write down the three that are most meaningful to you during this season of your life.



Interpretation: Understanding the Nutrients

Now that we've observed what the passage says, we need to understand it. We want to study the passage in its original culture and language, as best we can, so we gain clarity in our understanding of God and life for today.



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S01
3

LOVING ONE ANOTHER

Let's Think about Our Church

Romans 12:6–18

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

First, we'll pull out the Bible dictionary. If you don't have one, we recommend the *New Unger's Bible Dictionary (NUBD)*. Let's begin by looking up *Spiritual Gifts* and *Body of Christ*. If you have the *NUBD*, then you would find the first under *Gifts, Spiritual*. For *Body of Christ*, look up *Body* and then find the subheading *Figurative*. Record your insights about the purpose of the gifts and their value in the body of Christ.

In his sermon, Chuck defines the gift of prophecy (Romans 12:6) as the gift to proclaim God's truth with conviction—to proclaim what God has already revealed. Before the Bible was written, prophecy meant proclaiming what God had already revealed in the past *and* what He *will* do in the future. As you can see, prophecy has changed. Now let's consult Dr. Constable's online commentary. Visit [Lumina](#) and then click *Constable's Notes* on the right reading pane. Scroll down to read his notes on the gifts mentioned in 12:6–8. In the space below, record what you find most helpful.

Did you realize that Paul used two different words for *love* in this text? In Romans 12:9, he used the Greek word *agape* and in Romans 12:10 he used the Greek word *philadelphia*. Let's distinguish the meanings. Dr. Bill Mounce graciously provides us with a New Testament Greek dictionary for free on the Internet. As you use it, remember the following:

- Gloss: basic usage of the word
- Definition: English translations of the word
- Concordance: every occurrence of the word in the New Testament



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Search *agape* and *philadelphia*. Write down the fresh insights you glean from probing the dictionary.

Note Romans 12:11, “Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically.” For the context of this verse, Paul calls us to labor specifically in our love for others. Paul calls us to labor in living out our renewed way of thinking because of the new power God has given us by His Spirit through Jesus.



Correlation: Comparing the Flavors

After we've interpreted the text, we should compare it with other passages in the Bible that mention a similar topic. We call this correlation.

In his sermon, Chuck says there are four lists in the New Testament which speak of the spiritual gifts. These include Romans 12:6–8, 1 Corinthians 12:27–28, Ephesians 4:11–12, and 1 Peter 4:10–11. No list details every gift, but each author referenced only some of the gifts to convey his point.

Paul's 1 Corinthians 12 contains the longest discussion of gifts. Take a moment to read this chapter and record anything Paul said that gives you a better understanding of Romans 12:5–8.

Notice 1 Corinthians 12:31: “But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way” (NASB). Spiritual gifts are necessary for you and me as we carry out God's purposes, but there remains a universal principle, the excellent way: *love*. Just as Paul transitioned from spiritual gifts to love in Romans 12:6–9, he did likewise in 1 Corinthians 12–13. So remember: the gifts describe what the church does, and *all* that we do is to be done with love.



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S01
5



Searching the Scriptures Tip

In his book *Searching the Scriptures*, the fourth step of Chuck's Bible study method is application. He directs us to ask questions like, *Is there a verse I need to memorize?* or *Is there a person I need to forgive?* **Specificity** is key to application. Get specific! Most of our spiritual growth comes from making small, incremental changes as the Lord reveals them to us in His Word or when we pray. When we apply Scripture to our lives, let's remember the words of Dr. Howard Hendricks: "Guard against the slimy ooze of indefiniteness."²



Application: Adding the Spices

Do you know what your spiritual gifts are? You may have more than one, or you may have one God wants you to use more than others. If you're unclear about your spiritual gifts, there are two ways to discover how God has gifted you.

First, which of the gifts listed in Romans 12:6–8 do you regularly exercise? Exploring the ways God uses you can help you understand the gifts He's given you. Second, which gifts do you naturally gravitate toward and enjoy? That's an easy method to discover how God wants to use you. Record your thoughts as you reflect on these questions.

Now that we've reflected on the past, take a moment to jot down ways you would like to grow in your gifting(s) and ministry to your church. Remember, the local church is the locus of Jesus' action in the world. He's chosen us to be stewards who carry out His purposes.



LOVING ONE ANOTHER

Let's Think about Our Church

Romans 12:6–18

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

If you're still confused about how God has gifted you, approach your pastor or elders and ask what they see in you and how you can build up the church.

Now it's time to get specific. Have you loved without sincerity? Do you cling to something that is bad instead of good? Do you serve God with enthusiasm? As we conclude, use Chuck's application principle of *specificity* to write a prayer, a confession, or an action to do this week to love someone or to help your church.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for making me a member of Your global church and for gifting me so I can build up my local church. I pray for humility so I can do, with joy and enthusiasm, what the church needs rather than what I want. In the end, it's Jesus' glory I'm aiming for and the joy of others I strive for. It's in the strong name of Jesus I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. See Paul Johnson, *Socrates: A Man for Our Times* (New York: Classic Penguin, 2013), 139–84.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2017), 176–77.



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S01
7

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Let's Think about Our Church

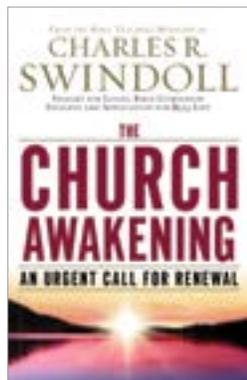
Romans 12:6–18

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

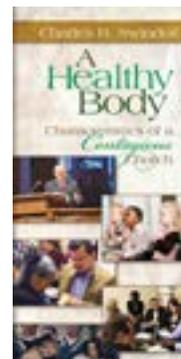
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Tools for Digging Deeper



**The Church Awakening:
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For the 2018 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Aaron Massey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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S01
8