

**Series: *LIVING BEYOND MYSELF*—November 12, 2006**

**DIVE!**  
**Romans 12:1-8**

**I. INTRO**

- A. I remember the distinct feeling I had in the pit of my stomach one year when these guys took me to what they described as a **really cool place** on this lake in upstate New York. The **cool place** was a cliff--about 40 feet off the water. The distinct feeling I had was called **fear of being hurt!** I stood there for a while—imagining all sorts of disastrous scenarios, most of them centering around the thought of my whole body exploded into big chunks floating on the water. But worse than all that was being labeled a chicken. -So I jumped. **You won't die. Hold your nose. Jump. Legs together...legs together...BAM!** After 5 minutes, I found the surface again. I looked around—no limbs floating beside me. I was **ALIVE!**

1. There are lots of barriers in life that keep us from jumping--diving into something new—and tangled up in most of them, even when it comes to making a difference in the world, is **fear.**

-Fear of the unknown, fear of looking incompetent, fear of failure. Fear that someone will demand something you are not prepared to give. Fear of getting hurt. And mixed up with the fear is doubt—that it will be worth it, that it will be fun—and doubt that in a maxed out, stuffed, tired life, we have what it takes to keep a promise.

2. Today, I'm going to challenge you to push through your fears, your doubts, and your busyness—and move toward what I believe, for some of you, will be the entry point to the most life-giving, meaningful era of your life.

- B. I know that I'm promising a lot when I say that. But I'm not saying it on my own. I believe it's a promise from God. And I also know that if you're ever going to find out if it's true, you'll have to **Dive!**

-I have learned this about life. To learn anything—or even find out of you **like** it—you have to **dive;** jump in. Try it. And I want to tell you why...and **how.**

**II. SOME SOBER ASSESSMENT**

- A. As I stood on the cliffs that day at Delta Lake, I had to do some sober assessment of my situation. Was I healthy? Was anyone else, like--dying? Was it **too** far? Was it possible for me to **not** jump and still be a manly man? Could I **jump** and still be a manly man? Were there any rocks just under the surface? If you're going to jump, you have to know what you're jumping into! Right?

-Well, in the Romans 12 passage we're looking at this morning it basically tells us to be fully engaged in this life of following Jesus. It says we need to do a **sober assessment** of ourselves. Let me read the actual passage.

**Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is true worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.**

Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. 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 faith God has distributed to each of you. For 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, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully (Romans 12:1-8 TNIV).

1. Notice what it says first. Basically, it says that you and I need to take a long hard look at everything God has done to make it possible for us to have this amazing relationship with Him. How He's set us free from the power of sin and darkness—and sent His Spirit to live in us. How He has a master plan for life on this planet that is absolutely magnificent!

-The question this first section raises is this: ***Do you want to know God's will? Do you want to be a part of God's plan—or are you doing to do your own thing*** So, let me ask you; are you going to be a part of ***God's plan*** and do ***God's*** will with your life—or not? If so, these verses tell you want to do:

- a. Offer yourself to Him as completely as you can. .
  - b. Don't get squished into the way everyone else thinks you should live.
  - c. Third, allow the Spirit of God to give you a new way of thinking about people; about life; about what matters and what doesn't. Do this—and you will be ***transformed***.
2. I'll tell you exactly what question you need to ask if you take this trail. The question is: ***Are the ways of Jesus true and right...and will I be really, really glad I followed them?***

-If His ways are true and right, if ***His*** way is really the way this whole world is put together, if you decide that doing God's will is the most important thing in life—well, then you take your ***first shaky steps on a path toward obedience***, believing that, if nothing else, you're headed for the adventure of a lifetime!

B. So, what next? Well, you need to sober up! Do a sober assessment of yourself.

1. We unconsciously do this all the time. Really. We think about what we're good at—and what we're not good at; what we love, what we like...and what we hate.

-The first caution we are given is one I talked about last week, ***Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought...(Rom. 12:3 TNIV)***. Anyone ever watched ***American Idol*** or ***Canadian Idol***? Ever seen anyone there who thinks more highly of themselves than they ought—like, their voice sounds ***really*** good to them when it's echoing in the shower and they're using a bar of soap for a microphone?

-Jesus modeled humility—and it is an absolutely essential requirement in God using your life.

You may be a stunning success in the world you life in—but don't ***ever*** walk into God's work thinking, "Wow! God sure got lucky the day He signed ***me*** up!"

2. I'm not talking about de-emphasizing your importance or putting yourself down. It's just a matter of seeing yourself, not as superman or superwoman--but as part of a team. And it will take the **whole** team, the **whole** Body of Christ to get Jesus' unfinished work done in this world. It's the power of **together**. So, with humility, **think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you (Rom. 12:3b TNIV).**

-How? Well, at the core, it's taking the time and effort to experiment with things; figure out how God has wired you up. People do this in different ways. There was an article in the Yorba Linda, California newspaper that gave some helpful guidelines for people trying to figure out what their major should be in university. It said

"...If you graduate with a science degree, you normally ask questions like, "**Why does this work?**" If you graduate with an engineering degree, you ask questions like, "**How does this work?**" If you graduate with an accounting degree, you normally ask questions like, "**How much will this cost?**" And if you graduate with a liberal arts degree, you normally ask questions like, "**Would you like fries with that?**" A little humor for you liberal arts people!

3. What I want to do this morning is help you a little with the sober assessment—especially in this area of spiritual gifts. The whole concept of "Spiritual gifts" sends some people right off the weirdness scale. The image some have of this is a person getting zapped by God; and they're vibrating and twitching—their eyes rolled back in their head. And when it's all done, it's like their hair got frosted and they talk with a British accent or something like that.

-The Holy Spirit usually works in very subtle ways. **A spiritual gift is a supernatural ability given by the Holy Spirit to every followers of Jesus so they can, together with others, advance the purposes that are close to the heart of God in this world.** The gift is there—ready to go, but it takes time and skill to learn to use it.

-Years ago, my Uncle Charles gave me his old violin. He paid \$250 for it during the depression—which was a price of a good used car. It was a good violin—in fact Annie sometimes uses it here. But getting that gift didn't mean I could play it. When I practiced, the dog used to go to the basement and howl. But I took lessons, practice—and after, oh, say—20 years—I was ready to play in public. Getting an instrument or tools or paintbrushes as a gift means you now have the **equipment** to do the job.

-Now, look for a minute at the **Living Beyond Myself Gift Assessment** tool you were given. Let's look at the area called **Spiritual Gifts**. Romans 12 doesn't include all the gifts that are on this list, but it does give us some examples—and as we go through these, you might get an idea of what some of your gifts might be. And I would encourage you, this morning, to just **think. Ask**—what gift or gifts has maybe God given me?

- a. Romans 12:6 starts this off by saying, **If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith (Rom. 12:6a TNIV).**

-Now **that** sounds a little strange to our ears, doesn't it. **Prophecy** sounds like someone predicting the future. And it does have that dimension. My Dad had that gift, and on several occasions spoke very directly to people about where the path they were on was taking them—and it **happened**. One day he spoke to me in the same way about a rebellious course I was on. I'll tell you, it made the hair on the back of my neck stand up. I will **never** forget that moment.

-It's the gift of bringing the truth of God's word into someone's live to guide them—and it occasionally has an edge to it. It's a gift that gets used in counseling, in small groups—and it's almost always a call to action; a call to a new direction in life. The Bible says—if you have this gift, then **prophecy! Use it!** Someone needs it!

- b. There's another important gift. This passage goes on talk about the gift of serving, or helps. It says, ...**If it (your gift) is serving, then serve (Rom. 12:7 TNIV)**. Serving is also known as the gift of **helping**. When a person has this gift, they typically **love** working behind the scenes doing things. We had a ton of people who used this gift to turn this building from a strip club into a church—and they **loved** doing it; built lifelong friendships in the process.
- c. Verse 7 continues, **if it (your gift) is teaching, then teach**. The gift of teaching is the ability to understand the teachings of God's Word—and then clearly explain them in a way that makes sense to, and challenges others.

-Now, does it just function in front of a large group like this? Obviously not. It can be used to teach kids, or teens, or small groups. Just a note here; some of you are professional teachers. What you do on a daily basis may be your talent and **not** your spiritual gift. Talents are natural; spiritual gifts are **supernatural**. It's important to remember the difference.

- d. There's another very important gift mentioned here; the gift of **encouragement**. **If it (your gift) is to encourage, then give encouragement (Rom. 12:8 TNIV)**. A person with the gift of encouragement can walk into a room where a bunch of people are talking and laughing—and within 45 minutes have a sense of who's struggling. And it's not just a gift of knowing—it's the gift of being able to speak strength and reassurance and comfort into their lives.  
-If you have this gift, it is an **amazing** gift, and when you use it, people will never, **ever** forget you. And you need to use it, because our world, our church **desperately** needs it!
- e. Verse 8 of Roman's 12 continues, ... **If it (your gift) is giving, then give generously (Rom. 12:8 TNIV)**. Now, all people are called to give, to invest a tithe or tenth of what we make into God's work. But this gift of giving is different. Some people have been gifted by God to do extraordinarily well at making money. Why? To stockpile it? No—the gift of giving allows people to pour resources in all the ways God is advancing His purposes and bringing justice and ending poverty on this planet. This verse says, "If you have this gift—then **give generously!**"

- f. And there's the gift of leadership. ...**If it (your gift) is to lead, do it diligently (Rom. 12:8 TNIV)**. God intended the church—and His causes in this world to be led by people with the gift of leadership. People who know how to cast a vision and inspire people to move toward it—and build teams of people who, together, and get his work done. How do you know if you have that gift or not? John Maxwell, a writer on leadership says, "He who thinks he leadeth, but hath no one following him is only taking a walk!" Is anyone following you? That will give you some idea if you have this gift—and if you do, you had better be leading them in the right way! Right?
- g. The final gift listed here is the gift of mercy. ...**If it (your gift) is to show mercy, do it cheerfully (Romans 12:8 TNIV)**. People with the gift of mercy have been given the ability to show compassion to people in need; people in pain. How many of you try to stay away from hospitals? Well, someone with the gift of mercy knows how to go into a hospital room where others are shuffling around awkwardly—and instinctively know what to do and say to bring comfort. If you have this gift, God has called you to use it—to bring care to people He loves.
4. Now, this is just a sampler plate when it comes to gifts. Look down through the list of gifts and ask, "Which of these seem to come most naturally to me." Now, some of you may be thinking, "Well, what if I'm wrong?" If you're wrong, so what! Cross it off. Learning which gifts you **don't** have is **very** important.

-The important thing is to **start**. Jump in! Move in the direction of discovering the gift God gave you. If you've noticed on that same flier, there are lots of different places where you can serve—places where your passions and your talents and your gifts can be explored.

- a. If you have the gift of encouragement—or hospitality, you might find yourself on a team that opens its arms to people as they come through the door and helps them feel at home in a small group.
- b. If you have the gift of help or craftsmanship, you may find yourself on the facility team that keeps The Olive Branch campus in repair; or maybe on the decorating team that prepares the décor for different seasons and series of messages.
- c. If you have the gift of teaching, you may find yourself forever immortalized in the hearts of children as you help them experience God's love for the first time; or you may find yourself teaching a bunch of crazy 7 and 8<sup>th</sup> graders who fill your heart with joy.
- d. If you have the gift of evangelism, you will probably find yourself filling seats here with friends and acquaintances, or leading a small group of seekers as they explore tough questions about God.
- e. If you have the gift of mercy, you may find yourself on a regular team from Branch Out—the caring loving arm of The Olive Branch—that spreads love and care and practical help to Scoot Mission, or Out of the Cold ministry to the homeless, or driving people to doctor's appointments.

- f. If you have the gift of leadership or administration, you may find yourself on the Governing Board, or leading a ministry, or planning a calendar of events for children or youth.
  - g. If you love the arts, you may find yourself leading music with kids, or singing or playing on a music team—or working with our tech team, or doing a drama, or helping us develop a video ministry that will be used when we have satellite locations in Toronto, or the Beaches or in Scarborough.
  - h. You might have the gifts to lead a team to help a sister church of TOB who's dealing on the front lines with AIDS patients and orphans.
5. Sometimes God uses talents we've always had—and developed, like music—or administration. But spiritual gifts are abilities that you usually never even realized you had. When I started out serving churches, I honestly had no idea what gifts God had given me until I started trying things. If you were to talk to people who knew me in high school and university, they'd tell you that I never spoke publicly or led anything.

-I have no idea where God will lead you and what He will do through you. But I **do** know this--the **skies the limit**. And when you follow God with all your heart, He will lead you on an adventure that may be scary, but you'll **love**, that you'll find it meaningful and significant. And most of all, I know that you'll never find out what your calling is until you **try! Experiment! Develop what you've been given!**  
 -And our plan here is to help people fly! To assist people like you in your quest to find your sweet spot. Our goal is to see people become truly great as God judges greatness! And now it's up to you!

### III. DIVE IN!

- A. This past summer, we had a blast with our Sheltie, Jazz. You have to understand—Shelties have this instinct bred into them to care for children. Whenever our kids are horsing around, she races up, barks, and tries to break things up.  
 -So, at the cottage where we had our vacation, when Matt and Selina would jump off the end of the dock, and swim. Jazz didn't know **what** to do with that—because she was kinda scared of the water. So, she'd race down to the end of the dock, slide to a stop—and stand there and bark. She'd pace back and forth—walk up to the edge as if she was going to go in. Then it was like she said, "Nah! Bad idea. Don't think I will. It will take a **long** time for all this fur to get dry.  
 -But, eventually she couldn't stand the suspense. She slipped and fell in a few times. Then she would actually jump onto one of the swimming mats. And then she finally jumped off the dock—and would swim out to the kids and try to herd them back in toward shore. **[picture]**
1. I believe a lot of people come up to the cusp, the edge of their calling—of following Jesus, of really believing that He is God, just as He claimed to be. That when He talks about life, that's the way it **really** is. That is mission is the most significant think happening in this world. They think about what it would mean to become the person God created and gifted them to be. And it's like they reach the edge of the diving board...look down, and say, **Nah! I don't think so**. People have questions. Tough questions—in fact, maybe some of you do.

-And what people are looking for is some kind of firm footing. **Certainty** that when they step out, they won't fall or look dumb. **Certainty** that if they follow their calling, everything will work out.

-And sometimes even when we do believe, when tough times hit, or people ask questions we can't answer, the certainty **we** once felt fades. Ever have this fleeting thought when someone's firing questions at you, "Maybe I **am** a fanatic—a religious freak who has no brain!" What Jesus said was tough—and sometimes in a world like ours—looks bizarre. Give my money away? Forgive someone who keeps doing mean things? It seems like such a huge jump.

-But the truth is—**everybody jumps**. Everybody does. There are no really cool people who just stand on the sidelines, reserving judgment—waiting to see if others will play the fool. Everybody jumps. Following Jesus is a leap—engaging in His mission is a leap, but, so is following materialism, or Mohammed, or science.

2. See, **not** following Jesus is a leap, too. It just takes your faith in a totally different direction. If a person believes Dan Brown's version of history, it's a leap—it's a jump. See, rejection of one thing is acceptance of something else. When you choose to follow Jesus—not just from a distance—but up close and personal—and engage in His mission, then you are saying, "I believe that the **Jesus** way of life is the best possible life."

3. Blaise sang the Bob Dylan song a couple of weeks ago, "Everybody's Gotta Serve Somebody." That's true. Everyone does. And everybody **follows** somebody. Some people actually follow themselves—which is the biggest leap of all. See, **everybody's jumping! Everyone!**

-One of the most common reasons or excuses people give when it comes to using their gifts and engaging in their mission is, "I don't have time or money to do that!" And, of course the truth is that we **all** have what we need—time, money, energy--to do what God asks us to do. We just use it in other places. **Everybody jumps!** We just **jump—dive**—somewhere else—based on what we value.

If we value fishing—that's where we jump. And, I might add, it's a **noble** place to jump, but I digress. You **will** jump—and it will be in the direction of something you **think** will bring a good return on your money and time.

-All I'm asking you to do this morning is to try serving, try using the gift you've been given somewhere. Be brave! Jump! You're not signing your life away. We don't have professionals on the phones that will hound you about coming back. We're just convinced that a jump toward God is always a jump toward freedom and toward meaning.

-We, as a community, believe that every human has been given unbelievable—sometimes totally untapped potential. That you probably have abilities buried in you that you never knew even existed. We believe that this community will be a good community if a lot of people jump; but that it will be a transforming community if **everybody** jumps. And we've got this little window of opportunity to do it.

B. Let's get back to the diving analogy. The Olive Branch is a little like a public pool. We don't wear swimming suits to church; what I mean is that there's a lot going on at the pool at any given time. Laps, treading water, synchronized swimming—with those weird rubber caps, diving, splashing in the kiddie pool. Same pool—lots of different things going on. The common denominator is that everyone's in the pool. Except for the lifeguards—they just walk around blowing their whistle and never getting wet!  
-The only difference is that we're not doing our own thing. And it's not recreational—it's the most important mission in the world.

1. You may be thinking, "So, does it count if I'm serving somewhere outside this building, this gathering?" A big HUGE **yes** on that! See, our goal is to become one of our community's greatest assets—and I see that happening as ordinary people like you and me engage people who would never come into a church building. And a lot of you are doing that—coaching teams, working in the school system and political system, using your influence for the glory of God—and that's fantastic! The point is—***the sky's the limit!***

-But I would encourage you, even if you're actively engaged in the community, to engage in serving in ***some*** way as a part of the body here; a part of the team. Do ***both!***

-Again, my dream for The Olive Branch is that we would literally help people find their wings and ***fly!*** That we find whole new ways of reaching our culture—creative, daring, risky things—things never thought of before--dreamed up and put into action by normal people like and me and you. Well, like ***you!***

2. I think you'll find out that diving is fun! Sometimes exhilarating! Listen to what some of the people from The Olive Branch have said about serving:  
-"I can probably tell you in very few words what happened to me when I decided to volunteer with the building project. I can honestly say that it was one of the most positive and fulfilling experiences of my life. My family and I got to know so many people and it gave all of us a real sense of belonging. My daughter, Amanda, said that everyone working together were building relationships as well as a church. Check out the corner beading - she did a nice job"...Debbie.

"I got a job working in a retail store where I met a manager named Matt. This really great, ***off the wall*** guy. ...One day I went strolling in the food court and saw Blaise, I don't think she remembered who I was, but I walked over to say ***Hi***--then noticed Matt was with her. This was Matt's wife.

"A few months later Blaise approached me telling me that a new church was opening up with Ken as the pastor and that she was running the worship and needed a guitarist. After some thought I signed up and haven't looked back since. God has been amazing these last few years. He really has opened doors for me to work with the most important people in this church, the youth and young adults. Since serving God I have been a part of the Olive Branch worship team, a youth leader, and small groups leader. I have seen what amazing things God has done in the lives of many people AND I have built some amazing friendships along the way. I am excited to see what happens when more people feel a call to serve; we will blow the roof off of this place!"

....Trevor

“Having lived in Sri Lanka, India, Africa and Jamaica, I saw real poverty all around me. However, my eyes were wide shut because I had a very comfortable life and never knew what it was like to be hungry and without a roof over my head. Several years later, I became a Christian and I am now involved with Branch Out and Community Care under the wonderful and caring leadership of John Deacon. I have had the privilege of serving at Scott Mission on many occasions and I recall how anxious I was the first time I volunteered to go there. No worries, God’s Grace was with me and instead of experiencing the feelings I had in my youth, I was overcome with a tenderness and compassion for the men and women that I was so blessed to serve. I wanted to hug them and tell them everything would be alright just like my Mom and Dad did when I was a kid. I cried on my way home and walked around the rest of the day wondering how I could possibly make a difference to those less fortunate in life.

“My life has changed, I have this overwhelming feeling of love and a desire to reach out to people out there, especially those who are less fortunate than us. I had no idea that I could ever feel this way, so now I just have to overcome my shyness! My eyes are wide open, thanks to the Wonder and Glory of God in my life.”

...Pramila

“When Kim from our Roots group opened her pre- school at the church, I volunteered to help in any way. I thought maybe I could help with the paper flow or something. But no - I now go in Thursdays and read Bible stories to the little ones. We have started to do crafts too! I think I enjoy it more than they do.

I help Anne with the Seedlings 1 week a month and with the JK 1 week a month. I hope one day I can be called a Sunday School teacher. I know there is something else God wants me to be doing in the future to help more..... And I'm listening, Lord!” ...Susan

#### IV. CLOSING

Remember how I talked about the old violin I inherited from my Uncle Charles? Well, I eventually learned to play it. I’d practice—play when no one was in the house. I was always a little disappointed in how I sounded. When I hit Junior High—I discovered something **wonderful**. Playing in an orchestra. Suddenly, my squawks and sour notes blended into something beautiful. I mean, none of us were great—but **together...**we really sounded good—with all the parts.

And that’s what we want to be. Kind of an orchestra where **together**, we’re beautiful. Majestic. So, we’ve decided that we will be a community where **everyone** belongs and **everyone** engages and **everyone** becomes what God has called them to be. You’re on the edge of the board. Are you going to dive or not? I’d say **go for it!**