



Discovering and Using Your **Spiritual Gifts**


By **Peggy Park**

Finding your spiritual gifts can be compared to searching through a drawer full of gloves in a department store. My fingers are too short for most gloves, so it is a real achievement when I find a pair that fits my fingers as well as the width of my hand.

We experience meaningful ministry when we discover and exercise our spiritual gifts. This brings fulfillment and satisfaction in our service as well as in our Christian life. ▶

Making the **Most** of Your **Talents**

By **Conover Swofford**



In the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) Jesus taught some important principles for making the most of our personal strengths. Since God is all knowing, it is no coincidence that the word *talent*, which referred to a sum of money in Jesus' day, means something different to us. Today we use the word *talent* to refer to the unique gifts God has given us. This definition makes the parable even more relevant to us as it shows how God wants us to use the abilities he has given us.

According to the parable, a master went on a long journey and left his servants instructions about what they were to do while he was gone. He also left them the means to do it. The parallel for us is easy to see. Jesus has gone away to prepare a place for us. He has given us our talents, our abilities, our personal strengths. Philippians 1:6 says, "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

Like the servants of the master in the parable, we have work to do while we wait for our master's return. And like the servants in the parable, our Master has given us everything we need to do the work he's asked us to do.

What an incredible challenge God has given his creation—to be all that he created us to be. Each of us is a unique creation of God. The master gave to each servant "according to his ability" (v. 15). Who would know better what our abilities are than the one who gave them to us?

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No Envy

At times we may think we need more talent than we've been given. We may think it's unfair someone else has more talent than we have. Or perhaps we wish we had someone else's talents. This kind of thinking ignores the fact that God has given each of us the specific talents he wants us to have.

The servant who received five talents didn't boast that he had received more than the others. The servant who received two talents didn't complain that he had less. The servant who received one talent didn't envy the other two. In fact, he thought the one talent he received was too much to handle!

No talent should be despised. If you're uncertain about your personal strengths, ask a close friend to help you identify them. Other people see us differently than we see ourselves and often see things we overlook. It may surprise you to hear what others think about your gifts and abilities.

Sometimes a listening ear is more valuable to a friend than an expensive gift. We use our strengths to encourage each other.

The mother of an autistic child was in despair because the child's teachers were not optimistic about his ability to learn and function in the world. A member of the mother's church heard about this and told the mother, "God created your child for a purpose only he can fulfill." God gives each of us a place and purpose in life.

Using What We Are Given

One of the ways we thank God for the talents he has given us is by using our strengths to bless others. We use our strengths to help build up the family of God—the church. The early church held everything in common, including meals and finances. We can use the talents God gave us to help not only our church but also our communities.

We don't want to be like the one-talent servant. He was careless with the talent his master gave him. James 4:17 says, "If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them." When we focus on what we can't do, we often fail to do the one thing God created us to do. The secret lies in refusing to compare ourselves with others and instead asking God to show us what he wants us to do.

A young man was blessed with a musical gift beyond anything he could have imagined. He played the piano as if it were a part of him. His skill became known and one of the leading concert pianists of the day offered to teach him. He graduated from college and received a full scholarship to the Vienna Academy of Music. He spent a year in Vienna. When he came home, instead of using his talent, he stopped playing. He refused to teach piano and took a job at a local community college teaching computer skills. The wonderful talent God gave him was wasted. He never used it.



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Biblical Success

As you seek to use your skills and gifts more effectively, it's easy to get caught up using comparison with others as your basis for success. We know the world's viewpoint about who is successful and who isn't. But what is the biblical definition of success?

- Joshua 1:8 tells us that keeping God's Word in our heart and meditating on it will make us prosperous and successful.
- Ecclesiastes 10:10 says that wisdom brings success.
- 2 Kings 18:6, 7 says that Hezekiah was successful because he held fast to the LORD.
- In 2 Chronicles 20:20 Jehoshaphat tells his people that faith in God and his prophets will make them successful.
- Jesus tells us that laying up treasures in Heaven is the smart way to go (Matthew 6:19, 20).

As you pass through this world on your way to your eternal home, remember to measure your success in God's terms.

Reaching the Goal

Our goal is to win God's approval. Instead of focusing on what we can't do, we must do what we can and give God the glory. Our talents improve with use. But if we hide our light, it goes out. The

one-talent servant wasn't punished for burying his talent. He was punished for disobedience and his refusal to put to good use the talent his master had given him. Something is better than nothing. God rewards any efforts we make.

None of the servants used his talents for personal gain. We exist for God; he does not exist for us. God gives us the talents, strengths, means, and opportunity; he works through us and then says, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21, 23). The servants were rewarded according to faithfulness and uprightness of heart, not degree of opportunity. The two-talent servant received the same reward as the five-talent servant.

God blesses what we do for him. Those who observe his work in our lives are blessed as well. Nothing we do in this life compares with how we will feel when God welcomes us home and says to us, "Come and share your master's happiness" (25:21, 23). And why is our master happy? Because we have used the talent he gave us in his service.

"I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them" (John 13:16, 17). •

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