



Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Laborers

## TENDING OUR TALENTS • Hilary Kimes

God is most pleased when we use our natural abilities for His glory.

One of the things I like best about shopping is finding the perfect gift for someone special. I'm thrilled when that person delights in my gift. If someone obviously does not appreciate the gift, I'm crushed.

How similar God must feel when we neglect the perfect gifts He gives us. As a loving Father, He created us with natural abilities and strengths and then, on top of that, bestowed spiritual gifts as well. Why has He done this? God granted us gifts and abilities so we can serve others, as well as give part of ourselves back to Him. "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11,12).

In receiving these gifts and abilities, we have several choices: We can set them aside in disappointment and pursue something that looks better in our own eyes, we can develop them for personal gain, or we can cultivate and practice them as our own gifts back to God. When it comes to long-term fulfillment, however, we find greatest satisfaction when our gifts and abilities are used as intended, with grateful glances toward the Giver.

Some people claim they don't have any special talents or gifts, or they don't pursue discovering them. But God desires every member of the body of Christ to use the abilities He divinely gave; therefore, each believer has the responsibility to seek out and discover God-given talents. Doing this can launch a lifetime of enjoyable stewardship and service to God.

One way to recognize our talents is to notice things we excel at and enjoy doing. Another is to ask close friends or family members which areas they see as our strengths. Yet a third is to take one of the various tests that measure our strengths and weaknesses, as well as reveal spiritual gifts.

After recognizing our talents, however, we may compare ourselves to others, and react in disappointment. Instead of trusting that our "Father knows best," we compare God's gifts for us to unrealistic personal or social expectations. Society may favor certain talents, but they might not suit us as individuals. By failing to look at a gift's true value, we not only cheat ourselves, but we cheat God as well. "Isn't He, the Potter, greater than you, the jars He makes?" asks Isaiah 29:16 (Living Bible). "Will you say to Him, 'He did not make us'? Does a machine call its inventor dumb?" God has created us for a purpose—we should follow the direction He lays out.

Others develop their talents for personal gain. In today's "me" society, some overlook the fact that God holds all responsibility for our talents. They take the credit for themselves, either because certain things have come easily, or because they worked hard for their accomplishments. Yet, when we selfishly take credit for what God deserves, we fail as faithful stewards to God. Many fall into this trap because of pride and the attractions of success. When this happens, God probably feels as I would if I were to give a child an art kit and the child painted for others, but never for me.



Consider how pleased God must be when His children use the gifts He's given to honor Him. The apostle Paul is a good example of someone who used his talents for himself first, and then for God. When we first read in the Book of Acts about Paul (then called Saul), he was using his zeal, passion, and gift of teaching to persuade people not to follow God. In fact, he persecuted and imprisoned those who believed in Christ. But after he met Christ in a personal way and was filled with the Holy Spirit, Paul used those same gifts to help lead many people to Christ.

It was the apostle Paul who wrote so much in the New Testament about our gifts and talents and the use of them. Paul's life wasn't easy once he began using his gifts for God's purposes, but he experienced the joy, peace, and contentment that come when we serve God in the way He's gifted us to do. We should also consider our relationships as we look at stewardship of our talents. Think of your relationships with friends and family members—are you using your talents to help them follow Jesus? God has given us the talents we have so that we can help strengthen others.

When people use their abilities for God, an exciting thing occurs—a diverse, yet unified body functions more efficiently and serves as a better witness to the value and joy of following Christ. Since every person possesses different abilities and spiritual gifts, the body of Christ can fully function only when everyone takes advantage of what God has given them. Romans 12:6 tells us, “And since we have different gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them accordingly.”

Each of us should be content with what God has given and exult in our own uniqueness. “Now there are varieties of gifts,” Paul said to the Corinthians, “but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons” (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

When everyone does what he or she has been created to do, God's will is also accomplished more readily. In fulfilling the Great Commission, for example, if all believers were to apply their specific talents to the task of making disciples, the gospel would spread more quickly and have a greater impact.

Luke was a man who understood stewardship. As a physician, he was most likely exact, and he used this precision to write detailed accounts of Jesus and the beginning of the church. Luke wrote his gospel “so that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:4). By willingly using his ability to clearly present facts, an accurate account has been preserved throughout time.

And we today, by opening our hearts to the gifts God has given us, can not only further God's kingdom and find greater fulfillment in life, but can also give a heartfelt “thank you” to the one who so graciously bestowed upon us so many gifts in the first place.

For more information about spiritual gifts, check your local Christian bookstore. One test used by some Campus Crusade staff members is the Wesley Spiritual Gifts Questionnaire from the Fuller Institute. To order one, call 1-800-238-5537.

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