



ALL TO THE GLORY OF GOD
Glorifying God with our Talents

1 Peter 4:10-11

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As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Introduction

To take all that you are and all that you've got and use it to make much of God—there's nothing greater you can do with your life. There's no higher purpose than to take your time, your treasure and your talents and use them to glorify God.

When you live for the glory of God, you're doing what you were created to do. And you become who you were created to be. This is what the God of the Bible says:

Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made (Isa. 43:6-7).

Whoever you are, wherever you've come from, your reason for existence on planet earth is the same. You have been created for the glory of God—to take all that you are and all that you have and use it to magnify God.

There's nothing worse than finding something laying around the house that's broken or no longer serves the purpose for which it was created. A rubber band that's lost its elasticity; or a razor that's become too dull to shave with; or a banana that's gone all brown and mushy. *Yet that's what we're like when we fail to glorify God.* We're not doing what we were made to do; we're not being who we were created to be. And that in fact puts us in a worse position than a rubber band without elasticity, or a razor that's too dull to shave with, or a banana that's all brown and mushy.

Two weeks ago we looked at how we glorify God with our time. And we saw that in order to glorify God with your *time*, you've got to redeem time from slavery and put it in the service of God. Last week we looked at how to glorify God with our treasure, our money, our possessions. And we were challenged with the truth that in order to glorify God with your *treasure*, you've got to treasure God with your money.

Today we come to the last of the three: talents, gifts, God-given, Spirit-enabled ministries. These are the special abilities, or ways in which God's Holy Spirit specially empowers God's

church for ministry and service. The New Testament identifies a number of these spiritual gifts; they include things like prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, leadership, mercy, wisdom, knowledge, and faith. These are various gifts of the Holy Spirit, given to members of the body of Christ, to be used to build one another up and, ultimately, to glorify God.

Today's task and today's message, is not to explore these spiritual gifts or help you identify which gift you may have. Instead, I want to answer the more basic and fundamental question: How do you glorify God with these talents or gifts you have? The answer this passage in turn supplies is this: *in order to glorify God with your talents, you got to use God's gifts, to serve God's people, with God's strength.* There it is in a nutshell. But listen to the passage itself, from 1 Peter chapter 4:

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen (4:10-11).

Unwrap Your Gift

Now, what this means is that you, first, must *unwrap the gift God's given you.*

Did you notice what Peter assumes in this verse? "As *each* has received a gift, use it to serve one another" (4:10). He assumes each and every Christian has received a gift, a talent, from God. Everyone who's been truly born-again, or inwardly renewed by the Holy Spirit, has received a gift from God, a spiritual gift. There are evidently *no exceptions.* If you're a Christian, God's given you a gift.

Yet the problem is some of you have never *unwrapped* the gift God's given you. He's given it to you; you've even received it. But it's still sitting there under the Christmas tree: shiny red and green wrapping paper, with a big silver bow on top. It's nicely wrapped and impressive looking, but it's never been opened. So, it remains unused and is therefore of no value to you or anyone else. But, worst of all, because you've never opened the gift, the Giver himself remains unappreciated and un-thanked. How could you praise Him for a gift, the contents of which are still to you a mystery?

One of the games we played in my house was to see who could end up with the last Christmas gift to open. Early on in the gift-opening process, you'd discreetly slide a package under the couch. Preferably it would be a small one, and one you weren't expecting to open so it wouldn't be too painful. Maybe you'd stash away what you thought was the annual Christmas new pair of sox or new tie.

Now, we'd always finally get around to opening all our presents and celebrating their contents. Of course, it would have been ridiculous to let a day or two go by without opening every last gift, wouldn't it? I can just imagine a couple of months going by, it's mid-July, and I find a Christmas package stashed under the couch. How odd would that be?!

Yet I'm afraid some of you have received a gift from God that's still sitting under the tree. And you therefore are missing out on the grace of God in your life, and you're missing out on the sheer joy of being a channel of God's grace into the lives of others.

Some of you are thinking to yourself right now: “How do I unwrap my gift?” Here are a few specific suggestions:

(1) Familiarize yourself with the gifts of the Spirit. You do this by prayerfully and thoughtfully read Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, which gives us a good indication of the kinds of gifts the Spirit gives to the church. Become familiar with these lists. Some of you have never done that. You should start there.

(2) Try to identify where you find yourself most at home, so to speak, in serving others. Where do you find yourself, not necessarily comfortable, but thriving. Is it when you led the discussion in your Life Group? Is it when you helped organize meals for a new mom? Is it when you welcome strangers into your house for a meal? When we’re using God’s gifts to us, we tend to find that we’re thriving or flourishing.

(3) Ask others how they’re spiritually helped by what you do. Ask those who know you well to share with you how you’ve spiritually strengthened them, and what they think is your spiritual gift or gifts. This could be your spouse or a close friend or a trusted person at church. While you may have trouble getting a handle on your own gifts, you may find that your gifts are much more obvious to those around you and who’ve been impacted by them.

(4) Participate in the class on spiritual gifts we’ll be offering this Fall. This will provide a great opportunity for you to discover more about spiritual gifts in general, as well as about how God’s gifted you in particular. It will also be a place where you can learn how to develop and then deploy those gifts for God’s glory.

Here, then, is the first step toward glorifying God with your talents: unwrapping God’s gift to you. Go over to the tree, pick up the package, and unwrap it. It all begins there. You can’t even begin to make progress in a life that honors God without first opening God’s gift to you.

Don’t Waste Your Gift—Use It Well

Unwrapping God’s gift to you is the place to start; but it’s just the start. The next step is actually *to use* the gift you’ve been given.

You know, it’s often the case that the more valuable the gift you’ve been given, the more responsible you are to not waste it, but use it well. You may have received college tuition as a gift from your parents. That’s an amazingly generous gift, but you knew that you better not flunk out your first semester. You may have received a car for your sixteenth birthday. That’s an amazingly generous gift, but you knew you better not come home late on a Friday night with a speeding ticket or a dented front bumper.

My wife Katie and I were high school sweethearts and went to home coming and prom together our junior and senior years. I’ll never forget that first home-coming when I picked her up at her house. Standing in the foyer, I nervously shook hands with her mom and dad. Then, out of nowhere, like a sudden crash of thunder, I heard her dad say to me, “Todd, I’d like to speak with you in my study for a few minutes.” Gulp! “Have I already done something wrong?” I thought to myself.

As we sat down across from one another—in fact, it felt like we were really close, like I was sitting in his lap!—he cut right to the chase. He told me what a privilege it was to be taking his daughter out to the home-coming dance; and that Katie was, together with Katie’s mother and

sibling, his most precious earthly treasure. “Therefore,” he reasoned with my little sixteen year old mind, “you’d better not do anything stupid, kid, or else I will kill you!”

You see, the more valuable the gift you’ve been given, the more responsible you are to not do something foolish with it, but to steward it well.

Now, this same principle applies in the spiritual realm. God our heavenly Father is remarkably generous with each of his children. He gives each of his children a gift, not because they’ve earned it, but because he’s so gracious. Yet with the giving of this gift comes significant responsibility. Each one who’s received a gift is to use that gift, as our passage says, “as *good stewards* of God’s varied grace” (4:10).

We’re to be good stewards with God’s gifts. We’re to be faithful and responsible. We’re to work hard to take good care of the gift he’s given us; we’re to not squander or waste his gifts, which are expressions of God’s grace.

How do we as believers tend to squander or waste God’s gifts? Certainly, the first is by failing to unwrap the gift God’s given you, as we’ve already pointed out. But a second way we squander God’s gift to us is by *failing to fan your gift into flame*.

This was Timothy’s problem, a problem the apostle Paul had to address head-on, not to embarrass Timothy, but to help him realize how high the stakes were. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul recounts how richly blessed Timothy’s been with a godly heritage of faith. He then gets to his main point: “For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God” (2 Tim. 1:6). Evidently, Timothy was a bit timid; fear had gotten the better of him and was now hindering him from using his gift. That’s why Paul says what he says to him: “God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” (1:7). Therefore, Timothy, fan your gift into flame! Let it burn! Let it blaze! Let it scorch others with its grace-giving heat!

In a word, Paul’s simply saying to Timothy: use it, don’t sit on it. In fact, don’t just use it on occasion, as need arises or you feel particularly inspired; work constantly and tirelessly at using it. In other words, don’t waste your gift; use it well.

We’ve got some folks at Calvary who’ve definitely fanned their spiritual gifts into flame. I think of dear old Cliff Raad. How many times has he retired, and yet the guy won’t quit. He keeps using his gifts. Or I think of Ruth Braun, who came to Christ at the tender age of 6 in the Sunday School at Calvary many years ago. For the last nearly 30 years she’s been teaching our two-year-olds, week in and week out. They’ve fanned into flame their gifts, and it’s a good thing.

That’s what Peter, too, is saying by reminding us that those who have received a gift must be good stewards of God’s varied grace. Don’t waste it—use it well.

Just because it’s got Your Name on It, Doesn’t mean it’s For You

But what does it mean to use your gift well? And *for whom* should we use it in order to use it well? For ourselves? Or for others?

Imagine, it is Christmas morning and your mom or dad hands you a present with your name on it. You open it, and you find inside something you really wanted. It’s a new iPad, let’s say. Yet no sooner do you want to turn it on and start downloading your favorite music and applications, than your mom or dad cuts in and tells you that the gift is not actually *for you*. Yes,

it's got your name on it. And you're therefore responsible to take care of it: make sure it's always charged up, doesn't get lost or broken and has all the right applications downloaded onto it. But it's actually *for your brother and sister*. "But I thought it was *my* gift," you say disappointedly. "Yes, it is," they quickly respond. "It's your gift—but it's not *for you*; it's *for* your brother and sister. We gave it to you so that you could benefit them with it." "But it's got my name on it," you say. "Yes, because we gave it to you. But it's not for you, at least, not for you alone. We gave it to you for the sake of your sibling."

Now, while this might strike us as a funny scenario, it's the way God gives gift. He puts your name on the gift he gives you; it's your gift. But it's not for you—but for those around. As Peter says, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve *one another*" (4:10). I'd suggest you in your Bible you underline that last phrase: one another. That's the key to the right use of your spiritual gifts. They're not for our own sake, but for the sake of others—for the sake of one another, one another within the body of Christ, the church.

Christians can easily forget that our gifts are for others, not for ourselves. Paul had to remind the Corinthians of this critical fact. They thought their gifts were all about them—status symbols. So Paul has to tell them: "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit *for the common good*" (1 Cor. 12:7). Gifts aren't for the private good, but for the common good. They're not for my own sake, but for the sake of others.

Spiritual gifts aren't for our own sake because spiritual gifts are simply God's grace wrapped in a human package. But God's grace is never *self-directed*; it's always *others-directed*. So, too, our gifts, our talents, are to be used, not for our own sake, but for the sake of others. That's what it means to use our gifts well, for the glory of God. It's got your name on it; but don't let that fool you. It's to be used for others.

Sweet Miracle of Our Empty Hands!

So, as we've seen, in order to glorify God, we must use God's gifts to serve God's people. That much is clear.

But there's a final point from this passage, and one that moves us closer to the heart of the matter. In order to glorify God with our talents, we must also serve God, not in our own strength, but with the strength he supplies. This is the point of verse eleven, where it says: "whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies" (4:11).

The reality is that serving others with your gifts isn't always easy. In fact, it's sometimes quite hard or even tedious. For those with serving gifts, you can feel like you're breaking your back to meet the needs of others and there's very little acknowledgement of the fact. For those with speaking gifts, you can feel like you've labored over your teaching and yet receive more criticism than encouragement. These can be frustrating experiences, and they can sap the joy right out of service.

You know, it's interesting to see what Peter says in the verse just before the two verses we've chosen to focus on. In that verse, Peter talks about serving others, yet he also puts his finger on what may well be the single greatest temptation we face when it comes to serving others: *grumbling*. "Show hospitality to one another," Peter says, "without grumbling" (4:9).

Yet that's where we can often find ourselves when we feel like we need to serve, and yet don't have the strength to do it. You've got the gift of hospitality and sense you should invite that family over for a meal, but you're worn out from a hectic week. Or you've got the gift of administration and feel like you should volunteer to help organize an event at church, but your work has picked up and you're worried you're not going to have enough gas in the tank. Or you've got the gift of teaching but as the fourth grade class rolls into the room, your heart sinks because you don't have the strength. And thus we're tempted to serve in our own strength, which often causes us to grumble.

Georges Bernanos wrote a powerful novel entitled, *The Diary of a Country Priest*. Set in the 1930's in a rural village in France, it's about a young priest who has assumed responsibility for his first but who's also dying of stomach cancer. Yet, ironically, the young priest's own suffering—and his sense of insignificance—enables him to serve others more effectively. His own brokenness allows him to open himself to other peoples' own disillusionment and pain, which prompts them to open themselves in turn to him.

This dimension of the novel is captured beautifully in the central episode of the novel—the priest's confrontation of the countess, Madame Comtesse. The countess is portrayed as a proud woman, hardened by earthly wealth and privilege. She's also angry and defiant, embittered by the death of her infant son. Her grief is thus mixed with anger and despair, a debilitating combination that has caused her to turn decidedly away from God.

Yet precisely in his weakness, the priest becomes an instrument of grace and transformation in the life of the countess. Through the course of their tense exchange, the countess finds herself—even despite herself—turning back to God. She then confesses this to him. Reflecting upon this later on, the priest provides a description of the way in which his own human agency played into the countess's conversion: "Oh, miracle—thus to be able to give what we ourselves do not possess, sweet miracle of our empty hands!" Consistent with this, he prays, "Lord, I am stripped bare of all things, as you alone can strip us bare, whose fearful care nothing escapes, nor your terrible love!" As one who possess nothing in himself save poverty of spirit, he is fit to serve as a conduit, not a repository, of grace. A beggar going from door to door with outstretched hand—this is the image of ministry.

This is the picture of service Peter is painting for us. If you serve, serve with empty hands. Serve not in your own strength, but in the strength that God supplies. Only in this way will you preserve all glory for him—and not for yourself.

So, don't be afraid or discouraged if you lack the strength to serve. The best thing to do is to acknowledge that fact. Then, pray that God would give you a fresh empowerment of his Holy Spirit. And trust that he has heard your prayer and will respond. When you've done that, act in faith that the grace of God's Spirit will meet you in the moment of service and supply you with supernatural strength. And, as you see him answer, be sure to thank him for his empowering grace—grace that's enabled you to serve with empty hands.

God's gifts don't stop being gifts once they've been received. We're to use our gifts to serve others with empty hands—that is, in the strength that God himself supplies. God is the one who empowers you to use the gift he's given you. And in this way, God gets the glory as the Giver not only of the gift, but of the grace to use it.

Conclusion

So, brothers and sisters, as you seek to glorify God with your talents, remember these simple truths:

- Unwrap your gift!
- Don't waste it—use it well.
- Just because it's got your name on it, that doesn't mean it's for you.
- Serve in the strength that God supplies. Think empty hands.

Shortly after Jesus had ascended into heaven and the disciples had received the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1-2), Peter was entering into the Temple in Jerusalem and there was addressed by a man who was crippled from birth. This man could not walk, and so each day his family and friends would carry him to the entrance of the Temple, set him down on the ground, and there the man would get maximum exposure to those entering the Temple and, hopefully, be able to receive money.

On this particular morning, the apostle Peter, together with John, the disciple, passed this man as they were entering the Temple. Seeing them, the crippled man asked them for money. Peter's response captures the heart of how we glorify God with our talents. Peter gazed directly at the man and said to him, "Look at us" (3:5). As if to say, "Hey, man, we've got nothing to give you! We're neither wealthy nor powerful nor influential. And even though we can walk, we're in just as vulnerable a position as you are—perhaps even more so."

The way Peter addressed the man—presumably the tone of his voice and the look on his face and intensity in his eyes—got the man's attention. Yet the man misread Peter's intentions, thinking that Peter was going to give him some money. But, instead, Peter said to him: "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you" (Acts 3:6). No money; only grace. That's the only thing Peter had to give this man. The grace of God's gift to Peter—which he could then use for the good of this man.

Peter, then, said to the man: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" (Acts 3:6). And, instantly, grace exploded onto the scene, and worship was the result! And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God, and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him (Acts 3:7-10).

This, brothers and sisters, is a parable of how you and I ought to glorify God with our talents. In ourselves, we have absolutely nothing to give anyone. But what we do have, we have from God for the good of others. So we generously give it to them.

And as we do so, we're careful to do it not for our own honor and renown. We do so not in our name, for our own glory. Instead, we do so *in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ*—for his glory, for his fame, for his renown and reputation. For only in so doing will we rely upon the strength God gives and redirect all praise and glory to the one to whom it rightly belongs: Jesus Christ.

To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen!

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