

TIME TALENT TREASURE

Using Your Gifts for God's Glory

GREG LAURIE





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Have you ever received a gift you did not like? Maybe you opened it and you tried to look happy, but you weren't happy at all. Sometimes our parents or our grandparents pick out a gift for us that we really don't like or could have done without. Other times we receive a really cool gift—one that is incredibly valuable or useful—and we end up never using it.

Are you opening, using, and cultivating the gifts that God has given to you?

We can take a gift that God gives to us and we can just bury it. “I am not going to use that gift. I am not going to develop that gift. I am not going to cultivate that gift,” we say. Why in the world would we do that?

There are three things that God has given to every believer to use in life: time, talent, and treasure. We are to take those things and use them for the glory of God. How are you using the time, talent, and treasure that God has given to you?

In Matthew 25, Jesus illustrates how we are to live while waiting for His return and what we are to do with the gifts He has given us until He comes back:

For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, “Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.” His lord said to him, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.” He also who had received two talents came and said, “Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.” His lord said to him, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.”

Then he who had received the one talent came and said, “Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.”

But his lord answered and said to him, “You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents.”
(Matthew 25:14–28)

Now here is the conclusion (Jesus always comes to a conclusion):

To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who do nothing, even what little they have will be taken away. (Matthew 25:29 NLT)

Look at how the master deals with this one irresponsible servant. He ordered, “Take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents.”

In God’s kingdom the redistribution of wealth has a different meaning. It is not: *take from the guy who has a lot and give it to the guy who doesn’t have anything*. In this story, it is: *take it from the guy who didn’t do anything with what he was given and give it to the guy who was faithful with what the Lord gave him*.

Maybe we need to be thinking about what God has given to us. As I said, He has given to us gifts. When you become a Christian and you ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit, the Bible promises that He gives you gifts of the Spirit. Romans 12 says, “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” (verses 6–8 NIV). We have different gifts—not according to our merit, but “according to the grace that is given to us.” God gives you these gifts, but they don’t come fully developed. You have to take the gift and develop it through the passing of time.

Why has God given us the gifts of the Spirit? In Ephesians 4, a definitive chapter on the topic, the apostle Paul writes, “[God] Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.” Why? “For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (verses 11–13).

I always wanted to be a graphic artist—a cartoonist. I loved the Disney films when I was a kid growing up. I really wanted to be an animator. One day, my mom, who had a lot of husbands (and boyfriends in between), brought a guy home who was an actual living breathing animator for Disney. I didn’t believe it. I said, “Prove it.” He pulls out a pencil and draws a flawless Mickey Mouse or Donald Duck. Then he said to me, “Greg, if you will take this pencil and go away and go to bed now and put the pencil under your pillow, when you wake up in the morning you will be able to draw like me.” I believed it. I grabbed the “magic” pencil and went to bed so excited I could hardly sleep. “When I wake up, I am going to be able to be a Disney animator,” I thought as I fell asleep. I woke up the next morning, pulled the pencil out, and sure enough . . . I drew the same way I drew the day before. There is no such thing as a magic pencil. Looking back in retrospect I think that guy just wanted to be alone with my mom.

Sometimes that is how we want a gift to come to us—fully developed. But that’s not how it works. God will give you a gift and you take that gift and you develop it through use. Though gifts and talents are different in many ways, they are similar in that you need to put both into practice. Maybe you have a musical ability. You get better at playing or singing through practice. Good musicians practice a lot and work hard at what they do. If you have a gift in another area, you work at that.

In the same way, God gives you these gifts of the Spirit and you develop them. Sometimes one of the best ways to find out what you are called to do is by just volunteering to do stuff. I discovered what I was gifted to do through the process of elimination.

Here is the thing: not everything will be your gift. Sometimes as you find out what you are not good at, that narrows it down to what you are good at. You may be

surprised to find that God has gifted you in an area you never expected to be gifted in. That is why we need to just get out there and do what we can do.

The Bible says in 2 Timothy 1:6, “Stir up the gift of God that is in you. . . .” The word *stir* means to fan into full flame. It is sort of like when you go camping and build a fire. You stir it and stoke it and help it to grow.

When you are done camping, you extinguish the fire. The problem is some of us are extinguishing the fire when we ought to be building it. The Bible warns to not quench the Spirit. That word *quench* could be translated “extinguish.” Don’t extinguish the work of the Spirit. Don’t take a gift that God has given you and bury it in the ground like the foolish servant.

God has a gift or gifts for you to utilize to bless others. The gifts of the Spirit are not a hobby to play with. They are tools to build with. And they are weapons to fight with.

God has given the gifts of the Spirit to bring unity in the church. You see, as we use these gifts, we discover that no one person has all of the gifts. The Lord, in His sovereign will, has chosen to give certain gifts to certain people (I don’t know why He has gifted certain people in certain ways and hasn’t gifted others in that same way). “We, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us . . .” (Romans 12:5–6 KJV).

The gifts are given for the growth of Christians spiritually and the church numerically. As it says in Ephesians 4:16, the Holy Spirit “makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love” (NLT).

What are your gifts? If you don’t know, it is time to start finding out. Just start volunteering and see what God will reveal in your life. Sometimes someone else can help you identify your gift better than you can identify it yourself.

Leonard Bernstein was once asked, “What is the most difficult instrument to play in the orchestra?” His answer was surprising: “Second fiddle.” He said, “I can get plenty of first violinists, but to find someone to play second fiddle with enthusiasm—that’s a problem.”

What Bernstein is saying is that it's hard to find someone willing to be on the sideline or in the background. How about if we just be the guy or the girl that God calls us to be? How about if we just be faithful in the little things? If you are faithful in the little things, God will give you greater opportunities.

To these folks that were faithful with the bags of silver and multiplied them, more was given. More was given because they showed they were faithful with opportunities and resources. The Lord said, "I am going to open more doors. But for you who hoard and hold on, I am taking away what you already had because you are not using what I gave you." Everyone has an ability. God does not expect the same results from every person, but He does expect the same effort.

God doesn't compare you with anybody else. He compares you with you. This is all about you reaching your potential. We, as Christians, are not competing with each other. We are not opponents. Our opponents are the world, the flesh, and the devil. Let's just do the work set before us for the glory of God. Let's just be faithful with what the Lord has given to us and run our race well and remember who the real enemy is.

Every gift is important. Who are we to say that some gifts are better than others? Paul really explains this so beautifully when he compares the body of Christ to a human body. Read these few verses in 1 Corinthians 12 from *The Message* paraphrase:

"What we have is one body with many parts, each its proper size and in its proper place. No part is important on its own. Can you imagine Eye telling Hand, 'Get lost; I don't need you'? Or, Head telling Foot, 'You're fired; your job has been phased out'? As a matter of fact, in practice it works the other way—the 'lower' the part, the more basic, and therefore necessary. You can live without an eye, for instance, but not without a stomach. . . . The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don't, the parts we see and the parts we don't. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance."
(Verses 20–26 MSG)

Notice Jesus calls the unproductive servant lazy and wicked. It can be a sin to not use what God has given you. It is a sin of omission. A sin of *commission* is doing what is wrong—knowing something is wrong but doing it anyway. But a sin of *omission* is knowing what is right and not doing it. The Bible says, “To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin” (James 4:17). You are blessed to be a blessing. The Bible specifically tells us that as believers we are to be using our spiritual gifts as we await the return of the Lord. We are told in 1 Corinthians 1:7 we should “come behind in no gift” (KJV). And from the Greek it is speaking of a gift of the Spirit. So let’s not be guilty of not opening our gifts, so to speak. Because in doing so we can actually be guilty of the sin of omission.

The Lord might be nudging you to take a little step of faith. Why don’t you take that step and see what the Lord will do? You don’t know what God has in store for you. To blow off using your gift can actually be a sinful thing. We want to be faithful, serving the Lord until Christ comes again.

Some people get sidetracked with the gifts and they become preoccupied with mystical things, if you will. They are only interested in perhaps emotional experiences or receiving special words from the Lord or having some unique encounter with God. I have had experiences with God throughout my life. I can remember times when God’s presence was so tangible it was almost too much to bear. But let me say that this has been more the exception than the rule. I have learned that the Christian life is one of faith, and there are times when I won’t feel God. I won’t sense His presence in a tangible way at every given moment, though I will at certain times, and thank God when those times happen. But we must learn to just move forward by faith and not become dependent on those things.

Now let’s look at some of the gifts that Paul actually mentions in Romans 12.

The Gift of Ministry

I like the way the New Living Translation states Romans 12:7: “If your gift is serving others, serve them well.” In other words, do a good job. It seems to me that whatever we undertake for God should be the best that can possibly be done. We want to do the best for the Lord. Why is that? Because God deserves the best. Sometimes people settle for mediocrity. I am so tired of watered down mediocre Christian versions of everything. Why can’t we do a better job? Do it for the glory of God. Whatever you do for the Lord, do the best job you possibly can do.

You know, when they built the Old Testament temple, it's interesting how the anointing of God was not only on the prophets to prophesy or on the preachers to preach but anointing from God was also on the artists to do their art. It says in Exodus 36:2, "Moses called Bezalel and Aholiab, and every gifted artisan in whose heart the LORD had put wisdom, everyone whose heart was stirred, to come and do the work."

You see, God can gift us in many areas. I think sometimes we think the only real gifted ones are the ones that either teach, preach, or sing. Yes, they are gifted, but the church couldn't do what it needs to do with only those people out there. We need everybody doing their part and one gift is not more important than another.

The Gift of Teaching

The gift of teaching is needed in the church—especially today. The Bible says in 2 Timothy 4:2–3, "Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine" (NIV).

There is a trend in the church today to diminish the role of biblical exposition. You will go to churches that have great worship, beautiful facilities, and wonderful programs for your kids. There is excitement. A lot of great things are happening. But then when the person gets up to preach, it is some short little thing—a 20-minute talk or something—and that's it. I disagree with that because I think that people will develop an appetite for what you feed them. I want people to love the Word of God. There is a trend in the church to diminish the role of the teacher and the teaching itself. If that is what is happening in your situation, it's only a matter of time until you become prey to false doctrine.

So what is the role of the teacher? To do a good job of teaching. The teacher is to, as one Bible commentator puts it, get the cookies on the lower shelf so the children can get to them. The purpose of teachers is not to impress people with how learned they may be—nor how intelligent or articulate they are. The teacher's job is to make Scripture understandable to you, so that you come away saying, "Wow, I finally understand what that verse is saying." Teaching is

a supernatural gift that has been given by God to certain people to make the Word understandable. You know it when you hear it.

I take what I do very seriously. You know, I actually spend more time preparing my messages today than I did years ago. Though I have years to draw on, I just recognize that every time I step into the pulpit my job is to declare the oracles of God and I want to carefully and rightly divide the Word of truth. Why? Because the Scripture says in James 3:1 that “we who teach will be judged more strictly” (NIV). You see, I am going to be held accountable for everything that I have said from the pulpit. I am going to be held accountable for every sermon I have ever delivered. I want to do the best job I possibly can do. And if you are called to do that, just get out there and do it.

The Gift of Exhortation

The meaning of the word *exhortation* is to come alongside a person. The gift of exhortation encompasses the ideas of advising, pleading, encouraging, warning, strengthening, and comforting. Maybe there is a fellow believer who is going through a hard time. Those who have the gift of exhortation are somehow blessed by the Lord with the insight to see the need and know what to say.

But exhortation could also involve correction. When you see a fellow brother or sister going the wrong way and you say, “Brother, I love you enough to say, don’t go down that road. I see you are on the wrong path,” that is exhortation.

On the other hand, it could be someone who is discouraged, who thinks God can never use them and you come and undergird them and say, “You can do it. I know you can do it.” And you tend to motivate and stimulate and excite others.

We read in Acts 14:22 how Paul and Barnabas would visit the churches, “strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.’”

Maybe you have heard a sermon and afterwards you are just so uplifted. You are probably experiencing the effects of the preacher’s gift of exhortation. And sometimes people who have the gift of teaching also have the gift of exhortation—so on one hand they are telling you how to do it, but on the other hand they are encouraging you to do it as well.

Maybe you have this gift. If you do, please use it so the church can be blessed.

The Gift of Giving

Now the Bible teaches that every believer should regularly give of their resources for the work of the kingdom. This is not an option. This is something that God has commanded all of us to do. And to fail to do so, to fail to give of your resources, of your money, robs you of the blessing of laying up for yourself treasures in Heaven, as well as the sheer joy of giving. As Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

In addition to the responsibility of every Christian giving of their resources, there is a spiritual gift of giving. If you have this gift of giving, Paul says, “Do it with simplicity” (KJV). That means, do it with a single mind or without ulterior motive. Do it for the glory of God, with no thought of regret or hope of repayment. So, you just do it. You don’t make a big show of it when you do it. You are discreet. You are quiet. You are low key. And you just take care of things.

The Gift of Leading

A leader has to see the big picture. And the Lord will often give to the leader the vision of what needs to happen in the future to encourage the people to move in that direction. He wants to work with people to discover their gifts, help them to work with one another, and then they all move in that direction. So how do you know if you are called to lead? Well, why don’t you just go lead and see if someone follows you? It’s a good way to know.

It is not easy to be a leader. But if God has called you to be one, you’d better develop thick skin, because you will be criticized by people, but take the role seriously and do the best job you possibly can do.

The Gift of Mercy

These are people who are supernaturally gifted to care for the sick, the poor, the aged. They are divinely endowed with special sensitivity to suffering and sorrow, the ability to notice what others may miss, and a desire to help alleviate the suffering.

If you find you are often touched by the plight of hurting people, and you want to do something for them, you may have the gift of mercy. It is a wonderful gift. People like this are often out in convalescent homes, hospitals, in jails, or in

prisons encouraging people. Maybe you have that gift. If so, God says you should use it with cheerfulness.

If you are going to do it, be cheerful about it. Don't do it out of some duty or bondage. If you are going to minister to someone who is miserable, you should not be miserable yourself. The idea is to lift them up. If you have the gift of mercy, then you have that way of just knowing what to say at the right moment, in the right way. It is such a precious wonderful gift. If you have it, use it. We need it.

Time, Talent, and Treasure

At the end of Romans, Paul comes to a close with list of exhortations that show the practical results of a dedicated life—a life using the gifts God has given us: “Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality” (Romans 12:9–13).

Again, when it's all said and done, there are three things that we can give back to God: **time, talent, and treasure**.

Time is precious and fleeting, and every morning God deposits 24 hours into your “time bank.” The Bible tells us to “redeem the time”—to make sacred and wise use of every opportunity. We must invest our time wisely and make the most of the time God has given us.

The unique **talents** God has given to each believer allow us to offer our work in the service of His kingdom. Romans 12 says that we are all parts of Christ's body, and we have important work to do.

Jesus said, “Where your **treasure** is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21). This means, wherever we place the most value, our hearts will follow after. If you treasure the things of God, your heart will be fully devoted to His kingdom.

I pray God will help you apply these gifts and principles in your life and have genuine love for others. To abhor or hate what is evil. To cling to what is good. To not be lazy, but aglow with the Spirit. To not repay evil for evil but rather with acts of kindness. To use your talents for God's kingdom, invest your time wisely, and devote your treasure to the things of God.



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