



“The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal”
(I Corinthians 12:7).

The Stewardship of Talents

Central Truth: God give you natural abilities and spiritual gifts to be used in His service.

L226. Date: December 1993. **Text:** I Corinthians 4:6, 7; 12:4-13.

Topic: Stewardship; Holy Spirit: Gifts of.

You have three types of abilities: (1) natural talents, (2) acquired skills, and (3) spiritual gifts. Your natural talents were received at the time of your physical birth. Your acquired skills may be developed at any point in your life. Your spiritual gift was received at the time of your spiritual birth.

Natural talents are received by both the saved and unsaved. You have known both Christians and non-Christians who have a natural athletic ability or a beautiful singing voice, for instance. *Acquired skills* are developed by practice in both the saved and unsaved. One may become an accomplished musician whether he is a Christian or not. *Only those who are saved receive spiritual gifts*. The Christian is responsible under God to use his natural talents, to develop acquired skills, and to deploy his spiritual gifts in God's service.

This study is concerned with “The Stewardship of Talents.” Draw a distinction between these talents and the “*talents*” of Matthew 25:14-30. Those talents referred to an amount of money. These refer to a native ability to do a particular thing very well. This study emphasizes that every ability, natural or spiritual, is to be given to the service of people in the name of Jesus.

Natural Talents

One person may have a natural ability in a particular area which is superior to most of his peers. He has that ability from birth, not by any achievement on his part. He is called a “talented” person.

Some people accept their talent humbly and others are filled with pride because of it. Natural talents are no basis for boasting, however great they are (I Corinthians 4:6). One who is proud because of his evident superiority in some area should remember that he is inferior to his peers in other areas. There is no reason to be filled with pride at having what one did not gain for himself. God does not use a proud person for His purposes. He delights in using common folks to do uncommon things (I Corinthians 1:26-29). Jesus warned that the person who exalts himself shall be abased and promised that the person who humbles himself shall be exalted (Matthew 23:12). Take care how you look upon yourself and your natural abilities. In the Christian life, the way up is down!

Natural talents are a gift from God. Answer these questions: “*Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?*” (I Corinthians 4:7). Why boast of natural talents when you had nothing to do with attaining them? God gave those superior abilities to you as a gift of grace, apart from merit in you. Therefore, never boast as if it were something you had attained. Devote your natural talent to the glory of God through serving people.

There are many needs in the world. It takes persons of many different abilities to meet those needs. So God has given each of us different natural abilities to meet those needs. Why did He make you with the talents you have? He has a work for you to do which fits with the abilities He gave you. It is your privilege to be God's agent by working in the area of your natural talent. Do not be jealous of another's talent. Rejoice that God has gifted you and will use you. The admonition to “*present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God*” (Romans 12:1) is God's call for you to use all the abilities He has given to you.

Acquired Skills

I attended a concert of the symphony orchestra in a great city. I marveled at the skill of the musicians. Each could read the musical score which related to his particular instrument. Each could produce the sound of his instrument represented on his sheet of music. Each could play his part at the precise time. The result was a beautiful combination of sounds which thrilled our souls.

How were those musicians able to play in such perfect unison and make such beautiful music? They had each spent hours upon hours in study of the theory of music, the techniques of their particular instrument, and in practicing for that performance. -That is how an acquired skill is achieved.

A skill is a great ability or proficiency. An acquired skill is gained by special experience or a regular program of training. You must exercise discipline and effort to develop an acquired skill. The same discipline is required in Christians. *“They do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible”* (1 Corinthians 9:25). Why would we permit secular performers to be more disciplined in pursuing their goals than we Christians are in preparing to serve Christ?

God uses the prepared person. His people must study, practice, and develop their fullest potential to glorify God through their efforts to serve Him. No effort is too great to prepare for His service. Do not insult God by offering Him the efforts of an unprepared servant. Prepare yourself, and God will use you.

Spiritual Gifts

Spiritual gifts are widely misunderstood in practical Christian service. The very mention of the term brings up thoughts of excesses to which some go in the name of the Holy Spirit. Stop at this point and read I Corinthians 12:4-13. Note eight facts in that text concerning spiritual gifts.

Spiritual gifts are given by the Holy Spirit (verses 4, 8-11). The Holy Spirit is called by name seven times in those five verses. Verse 4 says different gifts are given to different persons by *“the same Spirit.”* Verses 8-11 say each gift is given by Him. He personally gave you the gift which you have. He gives to each person the gift that pleases Him.

Spiritual gifts are directed by the Lord Jesus (verse 5). Why is He the administrator who governs the exercise of spiritual gifts? He is the Head of the body (Colossians 1:18). Every member of your physical body has its control center in your head (brain); so does your spiritual body. As a member of His body, you are subject to His control. He governs you in the exercise of your spiritual gift.

Spiritual gifts are empowered by the heavenly Father (verse 6). In as many different ways as God's work is done, He puts His energy in all those who serve Him. That means no spiritual gift has automatic power in itself. God empowers the gift. *“God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God”* (Psalm 62:11). As the people of God serve Him, He works with them by putting power into their ministry (Mark

16:20). It must always be said of the church, *“The hand of the Lord was with them”* (Acts 11:21).

Spiritual gifts are deployed to help others (verse 7). You received a spiritual gift for the purpose of helping others, and for that purpose alone. It is to make you useful in ministering to others. In I Corinthians 14, Paul deals with the issue of speaking in an unknown language in a congregation which spoke a common language. He said it is better to speak five words which the hearers understand than ten thousand words which they do not understand. Why? Because the purpose of all ministry is to build up the others.

Spiritual gifts are so diverse that they minister to all needs (verses 8-10). There are nineteen distinct spiritual gifts named in Romans 12:6-8; I Corinthians 12:8-10; and Ephesians 4:1. They range from prophecy, knowledge, discerning of spirits, to helping, serving, and comforting. Why is there such a wide range of ministries? Because there is a wide range of needs. Just as your physical body has many members because it has many needs, so the body of Christ has many gifts among the members because of the needs there.

Do not feel inferior if you do not have the gift that another has. The Holy Spirit, in His infinite wisdom, has given to you the gift He knows is best for you to use in the kingdom of God. Minister in your area, as others minister in theirs, and all needs will be met.

Spiritual gifts are distributed by the Spirit's sovereign choice (verse 11). You cannot choose which gift you receive. That is the Spirit's decision, which was made before you knew anything about gifts. To try to seek a particular gift which the Spirit has not given to you indicates a rejection of His gift and a questioning of His authority and wisdom. Recognize your gift and rejoice in it. God himself has chosen it for you.

Do not be jealous of another's gift or ashamed of your own. Be content to serve God in the ministry which He assigned to you by giving you a particular spiritual gift.

Spiritual gifts are distributed to every Christian (verses 7, 11). Notice the term *“every man”* in verses 7 and 11. *“Every”* means the entire group taken one at a time. *“Man”* means a believer in Jesus, whether male or female. Those two words testify that each Christian has received at least one spiritual gift and is able to serve God effectively in some area of spiritual service. Do not doubt that fact. The Bible affirms it over and over. Read I Peter 4:10 and note the *“every man”* there. You are gifted. You have been gifted from the moment of your spiritual birth. Believe it. Rejoice in it. Be busy serving God.

Spiritual gifts are united in one spiritual body (Verses 12, 13, 24, 25,

27). Though there are many differing gifts which are given to many different people, they still work in a glorious unity. Their unity is based on the fact that one Spirit confers them, one Lord directs them, and one God empowers them. They all function as ministries of the body of Christ. What an amazing unity (Romans 12:5; Galatians 3:28; 1 Corinthians 10:17)!

We are not like wild cannons, firing in all directions and sometimes at one another. There is a blessed harmony in the work of God. The instruments of an orchestra will give different sounds, but the conductor directs them to blend and produce beautiful music. Such is the concurrence of the gifts of the Spirit.

What natural talents do you have by your physical birth? What special skills have you acquired by study, training, and practice? What spiritual gifts has the Holy Spirit bestowed upon you? Be certain of answers to those questions. Then discern your personal abilities, natural and spiritual. Develop your capacities by study, training, and discipline. Deploy your best energies to the exercise of those talents, skills, and gifts to the good of people and the glory of God. And remember, *“Whosoever ye do, do all to the glory of God”* (I Corinthians 10:31). The beginning of a new year is a good time to start over.

Questions for discussion

1. What is a natural talent?
2. What natural talents do you have?
3. What natural talents do you see in other class members?
4. What is an acquired skill?
5. What acquired skill do you see in yourself and others?
6. What is a spiritual gift?
7. What gift did the Holy Spirit confer upon you?
8. How are you using your talents, skills, and gifts to serve?
9. How can you become a better steward of your capacities to serve?
10. What are you doing “for the glory of God”?