

LESSON 7

Your Abilities and Talents

In the ancient Jewish culture, parents had a responsibility to help their children discover their gifts, talents, and skills so they could succeed. The Hebrew Talmud supports this responsibility of the parent: “He who does not teach his son a trade is as if he teaches him robbery” (Tosefta Qiddushin 1:11).

Today, there may be fewer instances of parents imparting skills to their children. More common is the idea that people possess natural gifts that are obvious and that lead to a fulfilling career. For example, a young man or woman who understands mathematics and finances may choose a profession in banking or accounting. Others work well with their hands and go into building trades. Some with a knack for understanding the details of past events become historians. A fascination with science and analysis could lead a person into the medical field.

However, many individuals are unsure about their gifts and how to apply them. What are your best talents and skills? Are you currently working in an area of your strength? Or, do you feel frustrated because your abilities go unused or unrewarded? Do you have a plan to discover your best gifts? Where do you go from here? One of the greatest tragedies is wasted talent.

In his book, *Beggar to King*, Walter Duckat researches the primary trades of biblical characters. Under the trades beginning with the letter “C”, Duckat lists the following: calker, camel driver, candy-maker, captain, caravan chief, carpenter, carpet-maker, cattleman, census taker, charioteer, cheese maker, choirmaster, chorister, circumciser, clothier, cook, coppersmith, counselor, counterfeiter, cupbearer, custodian and customs clerk” (Duckat 1968, 35). It seems there was something for everyone to do. What about you?

Do you know what God wants you to do? Have you made a clear assessment of your talents, gifts, and skills? You need to find out what gifts God has given you and use them to glorify Him. This assignment may not be easy. But be encouraged! God is your help and sustainer (Psalm 54:4).

By looking into the Scriptures and events of life, we will assist you in making personal discoveries that will strengthen you. Here is a noteworthy observation—while the Lord often uses our strengths, we should not limit ourselves to think that God uses only our strengths. God may use whatever ability we have. Our weaknesses may be the tools He uses for His glory. Therefore, be aware of all your talents and abilities, even the ones you are not very excited about. God's grace is sufficient, and His power is perfected in our weaknesses (2 Corinthians 12:9).

LESSON OUTLINE

Biblical Teaching on Human Gifts and Abilities

Jesus' Teaching on Human Gifts and Abilities

Practical Differences in Human Abilities

Biblical Purpose of Gifts and Abilities

Identifying Your Personal Gifts and Abilities

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. *Identify fundamental truths about God-given gifts and abilities.*
2. *Examine the Parable of the Talents.*
3. *Describe the difference between God-given or inherited skills and the talents we develop through personal improvement.*
4. *Explain what the ultimate purpose is for our talents and gifts.*
5. *Indicate the talents and gifts God has given you.*

Biblical Teaching on Human Gifts and Abilities

Objective 1:

Identify fundamental truths about God-given gifts and abilities.

God is a giver. He gives us life and breath and provides for our physical and spiritual needs. Certainly, the greatest gift God ever gave to humankind was His Son, Jesus Christ. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Jesus opened the door for us to be saved and enjoy eternal life. Even if we never receive anything else from God besides salvation, that would be enough. But the fact is that God has given us even more gifts beyond salvation. Let us review a number of key biblical truths about the gifts and abilities that God has given to us.

God is the Source

James wrote, “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17). James actually speaks twice of God’s giving to make a clear point to his readers. The first time refers to the act of giving; the second instance refers to what is given. The NRSV Bible conveys this idea well: “Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.” God is the source of any ability we possess.

God Creates Opportunities to Use Your Talents

Generally speaking, people who have something good to offer find doors opening to them. “Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men” (Proverbs 22:29). Whatever gifts and abilities the Lord has given you can provide ever-increasing opportunities for you to use them. God’s gifts will be recognized and honored both inside and outside of the church. This advances His kingdom.

God Omits No One

The apostle Paul reminds us that “each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that” (1 Corinthians 7:7). God has not omitted any member of His family. Now, this verse refers specifically to gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is evident that God wants all believers to operate in the gifts of the Spirit. More detailed information on this topic is found in lesson 20 of this course. However, it is safe to say that every believer also has abilities and talents that are God-given.

Talents and skills we may have already discovered before knowing Christ take on new meaning and purpose after we are saved. As we realize what we can do for God with our talents, we rejoice in the completeness we feel in Christ. In fact, the assets of God are at your disposal. If you are lacking anything, God can provide it through Christ “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). The psalmist wrote, “Those who seek the Lord lack no good thing” (Psalm 34:10).

Humility

“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up” (James 4:10). Humility is a prerequisite before God can use us to our greatest extent. We should not be inappropriately proud and forget God, who is the giver of gifts, talents, and abilities.

Purity

God uses clean vessels, and conversion is where it all starts. Our sins are forgiven as we trust in Christ. Then, as we mature in the knowledge of God, we develop a passion for purity and holiness. This is not to say that unsaved people do not have gifts, talents, and skills. Indeed, many do, but unbelievers cannot achieve their fullest potential because they are disconnected from God. Though the world may acclaim them, they will not taste of God’s best. They receive their rewards here. None await them after death. Notice carefully what Jesus said, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves

break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also'" (Matthew 6:19–21). As a child of God, be self-disciplined. Live a life worthy of God. Be holy.

Accountability

Christians are not only God's children but also God's servants. The resources God gives are intended to serve specific purposes that will advance the kingdom of God. Our gifts are not to be forgotten, hidden away, or misused. Believers are required to use God's gifts properly and responsibly. In the next section, we will study the Parable of the Talents and learn more about our accountability to God.

Jesus' Teaching on Human Gifts and Abilities

Objective 2:

Examine the Parable of the Talents.

Read the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14–30. Jesus taught many truths about the kingdom of God through parables, which were short stories that compare something familiar to something not so familiar. In this parable, a wealthy man prepares to go on a journey. Before departing, he entrusts his wealth in varying amounts to the care of three servants. A talent represented an enormous amount of money in biblical times.

In the same way, the Lord has entrusted to each of us certain gifts and abilities. Just like in the parable, the Lord expects us to put these things to work for Him until He returns. Have you ever taken time to do a thorough inventory of the many wonderful things God has given to you? You might be surprised if you will be honest, think hard, and list all the ones that come to mind.

We have some giftings and abilities that come to us due to genetics—musical or artistic ability, intelligence, appearance, aptitudes, etc. Other things come through

God's favor and His guiding of our lives coupled with our diligence—skills, wealth, and position. Other things entrusted to us are of a more spiritual nature such as a special gifting, call, or enabling. You may want to consider spiritual gifts in this case. All these things mentioned are part of what God entrusts to us.

Since all of us are different and God knows what is best for us and His kingdom, it is most logical to assume that God gives to people in a way that best suits their personality, location, opportunities, tastes, and temperament. While we may balk or complain that God is unfair in giving more to some than to others, we must trust that God knows what He is doing. Perhaps before we make the claim that God is unfair, it might be good for us to see whether we are fully using the talents, giftings, and abilities He has already entrusted to us. In the parable Jesus states that the man going on a journey gave to His servants “each according to his ability” (Matthew 25:15). So, never complain because of your uniqueness and giftings. Remain humble and useful for the Master.

We should also bear in mind the sober reality that one day all true Christians will have to give an account of their lives. We will have to explain how we have used the “talents” entrusted to us. It is clear that the Lord is looking for a return on His investment, and you can be sure that God keeps good records. There will be generous rewards for the diligent beyond anything we can remotely imagine. Our Lord will say, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness” (Matthew 25:21).

Finally, this parable teaches us that God will not only reward faithfulness and diligence in using what He entrusts to us, but it also reveals He will judge those who do nothing with their talents, gifts, and abilities. The servant who did nothing with his master's goods showed poor judgment. His excuse was that he feared his master, knowing him to be a hard man. In other words, the servant figured he would be better off to

return the talent intact than invest it and potentially suffer loss. Whatever the reason, the servant was wrong to not do something for his master and wound up banned from his master's presence. There is an old expression that says: "Use it or lose it." Here is an example of that. So, make your life count. Use every talent, gift, and ability for God's glory and the advancement of His kingdom. You will never regret it.

Practical Differences in Human Abilities

Objective 3:

Describe the difference between God-given or inherited skills and the talents we develop through personal improvement.

Most people would agree that there are at least four needs basic to human growth: the need to be loved and to love; the need for security and trust; the need for acceptance and forgiveness; and the need to achieve and to serve. To understand the difference between God-given talents and developed abilities, the following illustration comes to mind: Place a goose in a pond. Even if it was raised in a controlled environment where no ponds were available and has no "pond" experience, the goose will quickly be at home in its new environment. In a matter of minutes it will happily be doing what geese do to make life suitable for them. That is because geese are designed for the pond environment they inhabit. God has given them the abilities and understanding necessary for their existence.

Unlike geese and others of the animal kingdom, humans are created by God to be uniquely individual. We are even considerably different from the other people around us, not only in personality, temperament and interests but also in our God-given or inherited talents. For instance, two people can grow up in the same home with the same parents, yet be clearly different in gifts, talents, and skills. Each of us has already been provided a God-ordained combination of personal attributes. No one else has the combination of qualities we possess.

Here is how the psalmist David explained it:

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! (Psalm 139:13–17)

Each person has natural inclinations and abilities to do particular things. Many people can even do things that no one has ever taught them to do. These natural gifts are blessings from our Supreme Maker. But simply having talent is not enough. We must enhance these God-given abilities for His glory. Solomon wrote, "Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth" (Proverbs 10:4). As the apostle Paul entreated believers to be diligent in their lifestyles, he cautioned, "We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised" (Hebrews 6:12). In other words, Christians should not just wait for things to happen for them; they need to use their God-given abilities to advance the Kingdom.

Humans have also been given intelligence and aptitude to develop their abilities. It has been said that there are three areas a Christian needs to develop to be successful: character, communication, and competence. Each of these facets needs continual attention.

1. To develop godly character, we need the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit daily. If you have not been baptized in the Holy Spirit, with the initial physical evidence of speaking in tongues, you are missing a key ingredient in building and sustaining a Christlike character.

2. Communication strength is based on one's knowledge of a subject and one's inclusion of others in the subject. Communication is the exchange of information, ideas, and feelings. This can be oral, written, and sensed. Most people have to work hard at communicating effectively.
3. Competence suggests mastering God-given abilities, even to the point of excellence. Education, practice, and experience help to develop God-given gifts to their optimum. Sometimes, naturally talented individuals become content with their gifts. However, the Lord may require more from them. Most people can tell the difference between naturally talented singers and trained vocalists. Those who wish to excel in their gifts submit to the rigors of discipline.

Furthermore, even though you may not be naturally gifted in certain area, often you can develop great proficiency and even expertise in areas with determination and desire. Has the Lord put this need on your heart? Step out and try it! Do your best for Jesus. Let us not be satisfied with a little. God wants to do much through us.

Biblical Purpose of Gifts and Abilities

Objective 4:

Explain what the ultimate purpose is for our talents and gifts.

Why has God invested so much in us? What did God have in mind when He gave us those unique talents, gifts, and skills? The Bible is clear that humans were created to glorify God. The author of Hebrews wrote this powerful truth: "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (Hebrews 13:20–21).

God created humans to live in relationship with Him. In the Ten Commandments, God gave specific instructions for establishing and maintaining this relationship (see Exodus 20:1–17). Take some time right now to read the Ten Commandments. As you read through them, keep in mind that you have been created to worship God. The gifts, talents, and skills you possess have a definite purpose: God’s priorities. If God says something is important, you stop your activities and focus on His priorities. This is an important way to serve God.

A servant in the New Testament was “a male or female person who is under obligation to render obedience to a master” (Eerdmans 1987, 927). The most common Greek word for a slave is *doulos*. The slave owned nothing. Everything, including his or her talents and skills, belonged to the master. This dynamic between slave or servant and master is in some ways indicative of the believer’s relationship with God.

Many of the great Bible characters were called servants or slaves for God. Moses is often called the “servant of God” (1 Chronicles 6:49; Nehemiah 10:29; Daniel 9:11), and his life was a testimony for the Lord. The apostle Paul also was “a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God’s elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness” (Titus 1:1). James started his epistle with the words, “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (James 1:1).

All we have is for God’s honor and glory. Paul wrote, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10). We are not all alike, but we are all called to the same purpose. “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:4–7). Whatever

your gifts, give them to God. Make His priorities your priorities.

Identifying Your Personal Gifts and Abilities

Objective 5:

Indicate the talents and gifts God has given you.

In this section, we will help you identify the specific gifts, talents, and skills that God has given to you. Some of these gifts are inherited or God-given at birth. Others may be acquired with maturity, in spiritual experiences, or by dedicated personal development. The gifts of the Spirit, as discussed in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, are given to Spirit-filled believers who sincerely seek for them. Paul wrote, “Eagerly desire the greater gifts” (1 Corinthians 12:31). Take time to study the Word, and pray with intensity that the Lord will bless you with these precious gifts of the Spirit. Below are a few of the gifts for you to consider prayerfully:

<u>Gifts</u>	<u>Scripture Reference</u>
Gifts of the Spirit	1 Corinthians 12 and 14
Various gifts	Romans 12:3–8
Various gifts	Ephesians 4:11–16
Administration	1 Corinthians 12:28
Artistry	Exodus 31:1–11
Witnessing	Acts 2:36–40
Giving	2 Corinthians 9:6–15
Hospitality	Luke 10:38
Music	Psalms 96:1–9; 1 Samuel 16:14–23
Service	Philippians 2:19–23
Skilled craftsmanship	Exodus 30:1–6

So how can you discover your own personal gifts? Here is a suggested plan to follow:

- Begin by spending time in prayer and fasting before the Lord in order to acquire the mind of the Lord in your deliberations (Isaiah 58:6–8; Daniel 10:3; Matthew 6:16–18).
- Study the above list of biblical gifts (read the biblical references), and identify the gifts that best describe your present interests and skills.
- Prayerfully prioritize them in a manner where the most obvious gifts are listed as number one and then on down the priority scale.
- Show your findings to your spouse, close Christian friend, or pastor. Let them pray, comment, and add their observations.

Also, there are professional personality tests available through Christian counselors that may help you discover your talents, gifts, and skills. Never discount the fact that our all-powerful Lord can use anybody and anything to teach us. James affirms, “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17). Our mission is to pursue the good and perfect gifts God has for us. Are you willing to dedicate all to Jesus? Are you committed to place all you possess in the hands of the Father? If so, you can expect the blessing of God.

Suggested Scripture Verses to Memorize

Psalm 139:14

Matthew 6:21

Matthew 25:21

2 Corinthians 12:9

Colossians 2:3

James 1:7

James 4:10

SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each study question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct response for each question.

1. *Does God use our strengths or our weaknesses?*
 - a) *God primarily uses our strengths because He cannot tolerate our weaknesses.*
 - b) *God uses our weaknesses only.*
 - c) *God uses both our strengths and weaknesses.*
2. *The believer's gifts are intended to*
 - a) *advance God's kingdom.*
 - b) *make them rich.*
 - c) *be hidden.*
3. *The greatest gift God has given humanity is*
 - a) *the ability to read.*
 - b) *His only Son Jesus Christ.*
 - c) *the beauty of the earth.*
4. *Does everyone have a gift from God?*
 - a) *God has given everyone some gift to glorify Him.*
 - b) *Only preferred people have gifts from God.*
 - c) *We will never know for sure.*
5. *One truth the Parable of the Talents teaches is that*
 - a) *we are our own bosses.*
 - b) *God expects us to use what He has given us.*
 - c) *God understands our fear and will excuse us.*
6. *Jesus taught by using parables, which are*
 - a) *short stories.*
 - b) *miracles.*
 - c) *long, dreary sermons.*
7. *Which is not a basic necessity for human development?*
 - a) *The need for acceptance*
 - b) *The need to love and be loved*
 - c) *The need to eat three meals per day*

8. *In Scripture, who is not referred to as a "servant of God"?*
- a) *Moses*
 - b) *Judas Iscariot*
 - c) *James*
9. *The Bible indicates that*
- a) *all people are basically the same in talents and disposition.*
 - b) *humans and animals have similar gifts and skills.*
 - c) *each person is unique and matchless in creation.*
10. *The first step towards discovering your God-given talent is to*
- a) *attend a Gifts seminar at a local church or university.*
 - b) *pray and fast for God's desire in this area of your life.*
 - c) *visit a local psychologist and complete a series of personality tests.*

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

Note: If you answered a study question incorrectly, you can find the objective it was drawn from by looking at the reference in parenthesis.

1. *c* (7.1)
2. *a* (7.1)
3. *b* (7.1)
4. *a* (7.1)
5. *b* (7.2)
6. *a* (7.2)
7. *c* (7.3)
8. *b* (7.4)
9. *c* (7.4)
10. *b* (7.5)

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