

What are Our Spiritual Gifts?

As long as I can remember, I have always wanted to play the guitar. I remember watching Roy Rogers as a kid. He would be playing his guitar and singing around a campfire. Watching him play, sparked a desire in me also. My dad used to have a guitar when I was young. It was pretty battered, and missing strings, but I fondly remember holding it and strumming what few strings were there. Dad's guitar eventually was tossed in the trash as my baby sister, Sherry thought it was a potty chair, and used it the only way she new how. But with my dad's guitar gone, I still had a strong desire to have my own. I put a guitar on my Christmas list for several years to follow. My parents knew I was too young to play, so they never took my wish for a guitar seriously. When I was ten years old, I was able to pick cherries one summer. I earned \$25, and went to the local Western Auto and bought a guitar for \$24 and change. I walked out of the store with only pennies in my pocket, but my guitar in hand. My parents realized I was serious about this guitar playing, so they found a local guitar teacher to help me get started. Even he thought I was a bit to young to play, but I pleaded with him to give me a chance, so he agreed. It wasn't easy at first. My little fingers hurt so much, because there were no callouses on them to protect them from the constant pressure that was needed to apply to the strings. But there was always a push, a desire, a knowing that kept me persevering through the pain. I know now, that this was a spiritual blessing for me.

I have shared and used my gift of music my whole life, especially at work where I have gone into patients room, and played for them. Hopefully lifting their spirits a little higher than they were before I entered the room. Sometimes when I have met a person for the first time, I try to figure out a song that may resonate with them. I hesitate, and I wait, and I listen to my thoughts. I wait for a song to pop into my head. It is unbelievable how often the song I sing has a special meaning to them. I call that my God connection, and I know He is using me. I know I am blessed by His gift, and I am so very glad to be able to use it.

A gift is not a gift, unless you give it away, God blesses us with gifts and he charges us to use these gifts that he has given us. You see God has many gifts for us, as our scripture reading from Romans 12 states "We are to use our different gifts in accordance with the grace that God has given us. If our gift is to speak God's message, we should do it according to the faith that we have, if it is to serve, we should serve; if it is to teach, we should teach; if it is to encourage others we should do so. Whoever shares with others should do it generously; whoever has authority should work hard; whoever shows kindness to others should do it cheerfully. Love must be completely sincere. Hate what is evil, hold on to what is good. Love one another warmly as Christian brothers, and be eager to show respect for one another. Work hard and do not be lazy. Serve the Lord with a heart full of devotion. Let your hope keep you joyful, be patient in your troubles, and pray at all times. Share your belongings with your needy fellow Christians, and open

your homes to strangers.

The funny thing is these gifts from God don't come to us wrapped up like a beautiful package. They are not always an obvious God given natural talent, and it may have challenges in store for us. (like a ten year old painfully persevering as she learns to play the guitar.) As Seth mentioned in last weeks sermon, God gives us a spark of an idea, and sometimes we struggle with it, like Moses did with the burning bush. We argue with God a bit, saying we are not worthy, or just coming up with many excuses why we might fail. But as Seth mentioned last week, God is with us along the way and whether we succeed or fail at the task he is there to support us.

For those of you who know my dad, you know he loves planes. He even has a real plane he is building, in his garage. His garage is almost as big as the house. I remember a necklace that my dad used to wear when I was young. There was a round shaped silver medalion with a picture of Jesus on one side and on the back it said "Jesus is my co-pilot". Jesus is our co-pilot. He is always with us guiding us, supporting us. He is there, and He wants us to use these gifts that He has given.

But how do we recognize these gifts? Sometimes we don't even realize what they are. Many of you may remember the story of Grandma Moses who only started painting in her 80's. It took her a while before she realized her gift, and now there is a museum in Vermont that houses many of her famous paintings. I have a friend who lives in Newark, Bev Owens. She is a hairdresser by day, and does energy work on the side. A few years ago she started to help Mark out with his mural projects. She had never really painted before, but discovered that she had an artistic talent as well, and now she does paintings all the time. What a true blessing from God.

A really good friend of mine, who resided in the Nursing Home, Melva Burnett, also discovered her "gift" at the young age of 88. In the nursing home, we were doing craft projects with a clay that hardens when you bake it. It is called sculpey. Melva took a liking to this and decided she would make Christmas ornaments for her family and friends with it. One of the ornaments that she perfected was a small candle. About the same time, Mark was starting work on the Trail of Hope. Mark wanted me to bring residents to the dedication ceremony, so Melva came along. She had no idea what this Trail of Hope was, but Melva liked to go on outings, and it was a chance to get her out of the Nursing Home for a bit, so she came along. She became so excited about the project she wanted to help out. She felt that she really couldn't do that much, being in a nursing home, but she decided that she would donate \$20 to the project. Now money is very tight for nursing home residents. They are allotted \$50 a month, which has to pay for the extras like getting your hair done, or toiletries, etc. So a gift of \$20 was a huge donation as well as a sacrifice for Melva. Mark, in turn decided to buy flower seeds with it so that he could grow them and use this "seed" money to help with flowers for the future gardens. Mark wrote Melva a thank you and told her what he was doing with the money. That made Melva want to do even more to help out, but how could she do this. She came up with the idea of making these candles with the "Light of Hope" to be used as a fundraiser to raise more money for the Trail. Melva made hundreds if not

thousands of these candles. Last December, Melva past away, but she is not forgotten. Her legacy lives on. In her last months, she knew her days were numbered, but continued to make these candles so that there would be plenty to share even after she was gone. Her "Gift" gave a renewed meaning in her life. It became her passion a rhyme and a reason for being!

Another gift from Melva was a poem she wrote. She used to take it out and read it when she was discouraged. She shared this with me, and I put it to music. I would like to share that with you now.

I Love You Friend

Come sit with me Lord Jesus, and hold me by the hand.
Sometimes you feel so far away in your distant holy land.
Although I am quite certain, you know what's in my heart.
Today I need to talk with you, But I'm not sure where to start.

I know I've sinned so many times, against your Holy laws,
But I'm trying dear Lord Jesus, to take more time and pause.
You've always taken care of me, since I can't remember when
All my needs have been provided and so thankful I have been.

Sometimes I feel so all alone, and then I talk to you,
And you would help me understand, You were there to help me through
So many ways you've blessed me with family and friends so dear,
Who fill your life with love and joy whenever they are near.

I know you're always with me, You have been from the start.
You know what I've been thinking and you know what's in my Heart.
I just want to say Lord Jesus, how grateful I have been,
And thank you in my humble way and say I love you friend.

Today we are recognizing the gifts and talents of the many people who have shared them with the church. God Bless you all, and God bless you for sharing your gifts. How is God using you? As the Bible says: if your gifts are to teach, then teach; if it is to serve then serve; if our gifts are to be kind then do it cheerfully; if our gifts are to share, then do it generously. You get the idea, now.... just go out and do it! Amen