

USING YOUR ABILITIES
Shaped To Make A Difference
Part 5
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We're going to continue in this series "Shaped to Make a Difference." We're in this for about five weeks now. Every week I've said the same thing at the start. God has never made copies of anything. He only makes originals. He's never made a copy of a tree. Never made a copy of a plant. Never made a copy of an animal. Never made a copy of a human being. You are unique. There's nobody else in the world like you. There never has been, never will be. God uniquely designed you as an original. Why? Because originals are always worth more than copies.

The Bible says in Job 10:8 "*God's hand shaped me and made me.*" God planned you for a purpose and He shaped you.

We use this little acrostic SHAPE to represent the five things that make you *you*. Five things that make you different from everybody else. First you have Spiritual gifts and we looked at that a couple weeks ago. What am I gifted to do? Then God has put in you a unique heartbeat – what do I love to do. Today we're going to look at your abilities – What am I naturally able to do? What are my natural abilities? Next week we're going to

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look at your personality. Then the following week we're going to look at your experiences – good, bad, positive, negative – how God uses them all to shape you for His purpose. Today we're going to look at this one called Abilities

This Fourth of July let me ask you-have you seen the new Jeep Grand Cherokee commercial? It is one of the most patriotic adds I have ever seen. Here is what the adds say; The things that make us Americans are the things we make. This has always been a nation of builders, craftsmen, men and women for whom straight stitches and clean welds were matters of personal pride. They made the skyscrapers and the cotton gins, colt revolvers, Jeep 4x4s. These things make us who we are. As a people, we do well when we make good things and not so well when we don't. The good news is – this can be put right. We just have to do it. And so we did. This – our newest Son – was imagined, drawn, carved, stamped, hued, and forged here in America. It is well made and it is designed to work. This was once a country where people made things – beautiful things – and so it is again. The new Jeep Grand Cherokee.

I believe we are a great nation because our rule encourages us

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to use our natural abilities. I love the line. . .As a people, we do well when we make good things and not so well when we don't. That is not only true for the nation I know it is also true of the church!

So what we're going to do today is I'm going to give you an overview of what the Bible says, what God says about your natural abilities and how and why He wants you to use them.

What do you need to know about your abilities? First there are two important verses. The first, Romans 12:6 "*God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well.*" That's obvious. What it says there is that there are no, no talent people. You may say, "I don't have any talents." You're wrong. Or "I don't have any abilities." You're wrong.

The problem with you is you know what you're not good at better than you know what you're good at. If I were to say to you, "Give me fifty things you're not good at," you could come up with a list pretty quickly. If I said, "Give me fifty things you're good at," you'd have a hard time doing it. The average human being has between five hundred and eight hundred abilities. Study

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after study after study has shown this. You have at least five hundred different abilities in your body, most of them you don't even know you've got. They just come naturally to you. You don't even think of them as abilities but you have that ability. Part of my job as your pastor is to help you discover talents that you don't even know you've got, abilities that you don't even know you've got and help you put them into service for God and for good in the world. So there are no no-talent people.

Everybody has abilities. Hundreds and hundreds of them.

But we all have different abilities. We all have a different SHAPE.

You've noticed that physically haven't you? Just look around.

We're all shaped differently. Some of you are shaped like basketball players and some of you are shaped like racehorse jockeys. Some of us are shaped like body builders – like me – and some of us are shaped like ballerinas – like Thirston. We all have different shapes.

The problem is when you go to school, they treat us all the same way. We don't learn the same way, we don't look the same way, we don't have the same abilities, interests, heart, shape – all these things. So we all take these standardized tests like SAT or

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ACT or PSAT. Those things only judge one form of intelligence.

We now know that there are at least eight or nine different forms of intelligence. As a result they try to force us all to learn the same way and we don't learn the same way. And we don't have the same abilities. We have different abilities and they're all important.

Once upon a time there were some animals who decided to start a school for animals. They decided the courses would include running, climbing, swimming and flying. Then they decided that all of the animals should take all of the courses. That's where the problem started. The duck was better than his teacher at swimming. But he only made passing grades in flying and was very poor in running. So they made him drop swimming and stay after school to practice running. This caused his web feet to be badly worn and his grade dropped to average in swimming. But everybody felt less threatened and more comfortable with that – except the duck. The rabbit started at the top of his class in running but because of so much make up work in swimming he caught pneumonia and had to drop out of

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school. The squirrel showed outstanding ability in climbing but he was extremely frustrated in flying class because the teacher insisted that he start from the ground up rather than the treetop down. He developed Charlie horses from over extension so he only got a C in climbing and a D in running. The eagle was the problem student and was disciplined for being a nonconformist. For instance in climbing classes he beat all the others to the top of the tree but he insisted on using his own way to get there. Finally because he refused to participate in swimming class he was expelled.

The point is that God has designed specific animals to excel in specific areas and He doesn't expect them all to do all the other things. When you expect everybody to fit in the same mold all you're going to get is frustration, discouragement, mediocrity, and failure. A duck is made to be a duck. Not made to be something else.

And you were made to be you. God has given you unique abilities and He wants you to use them for what He intended for you to use them.

Your abilities are the map to God's will for your life. It points the

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direction. When you know what you're good at, then you can know what God wants you to do with your life.

"God will equip you with all you need for doing His will." Notice it doesn't say that God will give you all the abilities you want that other people have. Sing like *her* and look like *him* and bake like *her*. God doesn't say you can have any old ability. No. He pre-planned the abilities you were given and He wants you to be you. If He didn't want you to be you, He wouldn't have made you. So He doesn't want you comparing with anybody else and trying to be somebody else. You give Him pleasure, you give Him glory, and you make God smile when you use the gifts He gave you in the way He gave them to you.

The Bible says, "I will give you all you need for doing His will." God does not give you abilities to do something He doesn't ask you to do. On the other hand if He asks you to do something, He always gives you the ability to do it. So how do you decide what you're supposed to do with your life? What classes should I take in school? Who should I marry? What kind of career? You look at your SHAPE. What has God wired me to be and to do? It

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points you in the right direction. Because as I said every ability is from God. All of them are important. It's not an accident. He intentionally picked them.

I went through the scriptures one time and I read through the entire Bible making a list of all the abilities God says I use for My will and I bless in the world. Here's just very small list. It's probably ten times that list but I'll read you a few.

God says I give honor to athletic ability. That's in the Bible. Through artistic ability. Architectural ability. God says I use in the world administering ability. Baking, boat building, candy making, debating, designing, embalming, embroidering, engraving. God says, I use poetic ability – people who write poems. Farming, fishing, gardening, leading, managing is an ability He gives to people. Masonry, molding, musical. These are all in the Bible, making weapons, needlework, painting, planning, philosophizing, (playing X-box! – thought I'd slip that one in there), inventing ability, carpentry, sailing ability, selling, soldiering, tailoring, teaching, tent making, writing and on and on. All of these abilities came from God. All of these abilities can be used by God. And all of these abilities have a purpose on this

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planet. God says I gave you your abilities and that gives you good direction.

My abilities match my call. There are some people you hear say, "I'm called of God into ministry." Every believer, every person is called by God into ministry. Some people think calling is something you do if you're going to be a priest or a nun or if you're going to be a minister or a missionary. That God gives you a call. Every person is called by God. First we're called to salvation and second we're called to service. You have a calling on your life. You have a vocation. You have a life mission and a life message and a life goal and a life purpose. That's your calling in life.

How do you know what your calling is? Look at your shape – your spiritual gifts, your heart, your abilities. In other words what I'm able to do God wants me to do with my life.

God expects you to use the God given abilities He's given you in six ways. These are what God wants you to do with the ability He's given you. He didn't give you ability just to use on yourself. There are Three reasons and six things He wants you to do with

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your abilities.

1. To serve others

Your abilities are for the benefit of other people. God says they're not just for your benefit. 1 Peter 4:10 says this "*God has given each of you some special abilities. Be sure to use them...*"

to make a ton of money. That's the Reviled Substandard Perversion translation! "*God has given each of you some special abilities. Be sure to use them to help each other [circle "help each other"] passing on to others God's many kinds of blessings.*"

So with your abilities you don't just honor God you serve other people.

Nobody is good at everything. What that means is you need me and I need you. You need the person setting next to you. They need you and other people. Nobody has every talent. There are no superstar perfection people who can say to the world, I don't need anybody else. The person who says that doesn't realize how needy they are. We need each other.

Let me give you a second rule of success: team up with people who are good at what you're not good at. Team up with people who compliment you. Nobody has it all together. We need each

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other.

This, by the way, is one of the purposes of marriage. In marriage we're put together to compliment each other's strength and to compensate for each other's weaknesses. What happens is we don't compensate for each other's weaknesses? We criticize each other's weaknesses. That's not what marriage is for. You married a sinner, she married a bigger one. You put two sinners together how can you have a perfect relationship? There are no perfect relationships. Everybody's got weaknesses. In a marriage you compliment each other's strength and you compensate for each other's weaknesses.

So God says I expect you to use your abilities first to serve others.

2. To make a living.

God says I gave you your abilities in order to make a living. I don't want you mooching off other people. I want you to be self-supporting. I don't want you to be a parasite. Not depending on other people. God says if you can work you should work. Some people can't because of disabilities, problems or circumstances.

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But if you can work you should. He says I want you to use your abilities to make a living.

You need to realize that in the twenty-first century people are going to live a whole lot longer than their parents did. Which means in all likelihood you're going to have at least two careers in your lifetime. A lot of times people only had one career because they died when they were in their forties or even their thirties. For centuries. But now people are living longer and longer. In all likelihood you're going to have at least two different careers in your lifetime. So He says I want you to make a living.

Deuteronomy 8:18 says this "*Remember the Lord your God for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth.*" Producing wealth is an ability. Some of you are really good at this. You have a natural ability. God has gifted you with a great business sense and you are just naturally good at making money. That is your ability. Can you make money to the glory of God? Of course you can. You can do anything to the glory of God. You can make money to the glory of God. If you're honoring Him, if you're grateful to Him, you're tithing, you're living ethically,

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you're doing it for His glory. God has given some of you amazing business skills because He wants you to fund kingdom projects at ECC and around the world. That's why He's given you that ability.

3. To build up the church.

That's the third reason for your abilities. To build up the church. What is the church? It's the family of God. Ephesians 4 says this *"Why is it that God gives us these special abilities to do certain things best? It is that God's people will be equipped to do better work for Him. Building up the church, the body of Christ, to a position of strength and maturity."* Did you know that God expects you to use your abilities to help your church family? I don't know if you're doing that or not but God expects you, it's one of the six reasons He gave you abilities – to help your church family in some way.

I know some of you are thinking, I don't know how to give help. The abilities that I use in my work I don't think are needed or necessary at church. You're wrong.

There is no talent that you've got that could not be used in this

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church. In fact, God places specifically in each church the talent that He knows that church is going to need. Have you ever thought about why am I here? Out of all the people that God could have put in Elbert Christian church He put you here. Why? Because you have that something to offer that this church family – *your* church family – needs. Nobody else can offer it like you can. He knows exactly who's here because He knows exactly what He wants to do through this particular church.

Of these Three things that God gives you your abilities to do – to serve others, to make a living, and to help your church grow – what if you don't use your ability these three ways?

You lose. The world loses, the church loses. But you lose. You not only lose reward in heaven, you could lose your talent.

There's a universal law of life that says if you don't use it, you lose it. Jesus said it like this in Matthew 20:5 "*Take the talent from him who didn't use it and give it to the one who has ten talents.*" God has the right to take back anything that I don't use properly. If I don't use what He's given me in the right way for the right reason, He can take it back. Jesus said, "*To who much*

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is given much is required.” This universal law is this, if I don’t use them – my talents – then I lose them. That’s true in every area of life. If you don’t use a muscle in exercise, you lose your muscle. If you don’t use your talent in practice and keep it up, you lose your talent. If you don’t use your mind, keep it going, keep it active, your mind goes dull and you lose mental capacity. If you don’t use it, you lose it. Employers, if you don’t use the talent of the people at work you lose those people. They’re not going to hang out in a place that doesn’t use their talent. All of us have unused abilities – you do, I do, everybody does. Let’s look real quickly at using your abilities. Three things, how do you use your abilities the way God wants you to use them? You estimate, you dedicate and you cultivate.

1. You estimate them.

Romans 12:3 *“Try to have a sane estimate of your capabilities by the light of the faith God has given you.”* That means do an assessment of your life. What am I good at? We talk about this every week. Do an audit of your abilities. Make a list. If there’s one thing I could say to young people today if you want to

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prepare for the future, here it is: know your strengths. You know your weaknesses. You need to know your strengths. If you're going to be effective in the twenty-first century you've got to know your strengths. Use them. Estimate your capabilities by the light of faith God has given you.

Parents, this is one of the key goals of parenting. Help your kids understand their SHAPE, what they're good at. There's a myth that you're aware of all your abilities. You're not. You are only aware of some of your abilities. You have far more abilities than you think you have. You don't even know them. Many talents. If you're a good manager the trait of a good manager is the ability to recognize ability. That makes a good manager. The ability to recognize ability. If you're a parent look for the abilities of your kids and point them out.

2. Dedicate them.

Dedicate them back to God. Commit them to God for the use He intended. Romans 12:1 says "*Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to His service and pleasing to Him.*" You say, "God, You gave me these abilities. Now I'm going to give them back to You. I want to use them for the six reasons

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You gave them to me. 2 Timothy 2:21 *"If you stay away from sin Christ Himself can use you for His highest purposes."*

God given abilities can be used for the wrong purpose. A God given ability can be used for the wrong reason. You can be a brilliant organizer and you can either organize a rescue or organize a robbery. There are all these brilliant criminals – they're using God given abilities. God gave them that ability to think through things, how to solve things. They're just using them for selfish purposes. So sharpening your skill is an important thing. Don't use them for selfish reasons but unselfish reasons.

If you want a good example of this there's a guy in the Bible called Samson, the guy with the long hair. Probably the most talented guy in the Bible. Wasted his life. Wasted his abilities. Blew it, really, because of sex.

3. Cultivate them.

Cultivate your abilities. That means practice, improve, sharpen, develop, cultivate. Any ability that God has given you can be increased with use and practiced. The Bible says in Ecclesiastes

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10:10 *"If the ax is dull and its edge is unsharpened more strength is needed. But skill will bring success."*

You want to be successful it takes skill? How do you get skill?

Practice. He says you need to sharpen your ax. A dull ax takes more energy. He says work smarter not harder. Sharpen your ax and then you can be more successful in life. Sharpening your abilities – your aptitudes, your skills – is a spiritual responsibility.

Let me cut to the bottom line on this. God has made an enormous investment in you. First He created you. Second He shaped you and put spiritual gifts, personality and all these things, He put it in you. Then He sent Jesus to die for you. God has made an incredible investment in your life. He expects a return on the investment. He's going to ask you one day "What did you do with what you were given? Did you use your abilities to honor Me, to serve others, to make a living, to be an example? Did you use them to help other people? Did you use them to help the church? Did you use them to make money to give away? What did you do with what you were given?"

God expects a return on His investment. One day Jesus is going to call you home. You're going to die or He's going to come back

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first. In Luke 12 Jesus said this "*When the Master comes back and he finds his servant doing his work, [In other words what you were gifted and shaped and able to do] that servant will be blessed.*" I want you to have that blessing.

When that time comes in your life I don't want God to find you lounging around wasting your talent. I want Him finding you using your abilities in the way that God intended.

Prayer:

I want you to thank God right now. Thank God for the abilities He's given you. Say, "God I don't even know all the abilities I've got but I thank You for them. Help me to discover them. Today I dedicate them back to You. I want to use what You've given me for Your purposes. I want to cultivate them. I want to get better at what I'm doing. I want to honor You by being the best I can be. I want to use my abilities to honor You, to serve others, to make a living, to be an example. I want to use my abilities to have money to share with those who are poor and to help my church grow and reach out. I pray this in Your name. Amen.