Reflections on stewardship:  
Stewardship of talents

Giving Back Some of God's Gifts

Time  Talent  Treasure
Reflecting further on the Stewardship of Talents

Each of you has been blessed with one of God’s many wonderful gifts to be used in the service of others. So use your gift well.

(1 Peter 4:10—Contemporary English Version)

The Spirit has given each of us a special way of serving others.

(1 Corinthians 12:7—Contemporary English Version)

But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift. The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...

(Ephesians 4:7, 11–12—New Revised Standard Version)

There’s an old Christian tradition that God sends each person into this world with a special message to deliver, with a special song to sing for others, with a special act of love to bestow. No one else can speak my message, or sing my song, or offer my act of love. These are entrusted to me alone.

The difference between natural talents and spiritual gifts

A talent is a natural aptitude or skill, the ability to be good at something, especially without being taught. Every human being has certain talents—we just have to work out what ours are, and then learn to use them. And then there are spiritual gifts—special abilities given by the Holy Spirit to every Christian, to enable them to serve the body of Christ. Our abilities and talents are ‘spiritual’ when they are inspired, led and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Thus many people can have, for example, a talent for leadership, or be especially compassionate, but these are ‘spiritual gifts’ only in
Christians and when they are led by the Holy Spirit. A spiritual gift is an ability given by the Holy Spirit, energised or empowered for God’s service—to reach out to others, and/or to build up the body of Christ.

The Bible is quite clear: no one person has all the spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:29–30), but every Christian has at least one spiritual gift (1 Peter 4:10). This helps us to see why it’s so important for all believers to know what their gifts are and use them. It is never a one-person show! No Christian can even begin to do all that’s needed. Gifts are given to individuals, but there’s a sense in which they are given to a community as a whole—it’s the community that has the gifts and the community that is to use them. Everyone—all the baptised—is to serve according to their giftedness and God’s leading. One definition of ministry reminds us that ministry is living with the awareness of the presence, love and power of the risen Christ; using our person, gifts and skills to serve him in everything we do. And there are no ‘right or wrong’ spiritual gifts: none of them are better than any others.

There are many gifts, and the Bible lists them in several places. Not all of the lists are identical. For example:

- **Romans 12:6–8**—prophecy/preaching; serving; teaching; stimulating the faith of others; giving joyfully for the work of ministry, leading or coordinating others; empathy/mercy
- **1 Corinthians 12:8–11**—tongues; interpretation of tongues; prophecy; word of knowledge; word of wisdom; faith; discerning spirits; healing; working miracles
- **Ephesians 4:11–12**—apostleship; prophesying; evangelizing; pastoring; teaching.
Recognising our gifts and talents

**Reflection**

‘You are gifted!’ ‘You have talents!’

What’s your reaction and response to that statement?

My first response is to minimise that statement with a few ‘buts’: ‘I’ve got some gifts, but I’m not as gifted as you…I’m gifted, but I’m aware of my weaknesses…but they’re not big gifts…but they’re very ordinary gifts.’

The challenge that faces most of us isn’t about acquiring a whole lot of new gifts or talents, but of accepting and acknowledging what we already have—realising the gifts that we already possess. In other words, we can be far more than we are, by simply laying claim to what we already have and are.

As we read in Jesus’ Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14–30), sometimes people eagerly use the talents that they’ve been given, while others (or the same people at different times) bury their talents and don’t use them. That can happen because they doubt they’re any good at something, or they’re afraid to take the risk of using their talent—so they do what the third servant did in the parable – bury their gifts and talents and fail to use them.

What holds you back from acknowledging and utilising your gifts and talents?

**Reflection**

Which of the following resonate with you?

- I’m afraid of sticking my neck out.
- I don’t know enough.
- I’m afraid of failing.
- I’m too lazy.
- I’m too busy with other commitments.
- I’d feel too exposed and vulnerable.
- People may think I’m pushy or bigheaded.
• It’s risky.
• I’m afraid of opposition and criticism.
• I don’t know how to begin.
• I’m afraid of making a fool of myself.
• I would prefer to be asked.

Then there’s that unhelpful learning that many of us picked up from childhood: ‘Be humble, don’t boast’. But think about the comment made in the Book of Sirach/Ecclesiasticus: ‘My child, honour yourself with humility, and give yourself the esteem you deserve. Who will acquit those who condemn themselves? And who will honour those who dishonour themselves?’ (10:28-29)

**Reflection**

How does the comment from Sirach impact on how you see yourself?

Up to a point these reasons for hanging back are realistic. Ask anyone who has taken the step of using their gifts and they’ll probably say that there is truth in some of those statements. But do they regret using their gifts? My guess is that the vast majority will say “no!” They will speak about the fun they had; the satisfaction they gained; the sense of being alive; of being of use to God; of doing what they were born to do and be.

**Encouragement of others...**

Many of our reasons for not exercising our gifts and talents aren’t so much about our lack of ability and talent, as about the lack of affirmation and encouragement we receive. To be aware of our gifts, and to be willing to use them, requires acknowledgement of them from others. That’s why it’s important for us to affirm and encourage each other. Are we as ready to affirm and encourage, as we are to criticise and negate? Many gifts and talents lie dormant because we aren’t encouraged to take the risk to use them.
There’s the danger of overrating our gifts and deluding ourselves—thinking that we’re something that we aren’t, or what’s more common, thinking that we fit somewhere, when in fact we are better fitted somewhere else. That’s not a matter of denying gifts but of recognising where our gifts and strengths are best exercised and suited. And that can be a tough one. It’s why we need the guidance and feedback of others (such as a spiritual companion or director) and need to have trusting relationships where we can receive honest and caring feedback. However, we can all do this all for each other in ordinary, daily ways, for example, by letting someone know that they have done something well or that we appreciate a comment or action of their theirs. And by the way, when you do that, be specific.

**Be still for a few minutes... and then take action...**

**REFLECTION**

- Note down the things you really enjoy doing; that make you feel more alive and energised; that you’ve done and are proud of; that you feel good about.

*Be careful not to only identify things that happened many times— but consider those that may have happened perhaps just once or twice. They need not be things that others have valued or noticed— just things that gave you real satisfaction.*

- Choose two or three of these that you’re willing to share and talk about.

- What talents and gifts do you see in other members of this group?

We can only know what we love doing by dipping our toe into a variety of pools—by trying out various tasks and roles. If you have some idea of a gift or talent you might use, is there some step (however small) you need to take
towards it? Is there some task or activity that you would like to try, to see how you feel about it?

**A parable to think about**

Recognising and using our talents and gifts is a vital part of being good stewards of all that God has entrusted to us. Consider this parable:

> Each day the king sat in state hearing petitions and dispensing justice. Each day a holy man, dressed as a beggar, approached the king and without a word offered him a piece of very ripe fruit. Each day the king accepted the ‘present’ from the beggar and without a thought handed it to his treasurer who stood behind the throne. Each day the beggar, again without a word, withdrew and vanished into the crowd.

Year after year, this same ritual occurred every day the king sat in office. Then one day, some ten years after the holy man first appeared, something different happened. A tame monkey, having escaped from the women’s apartments in the inner palace, came bounding into the hall and leaped up on to the arm of the king’s throne. The beggar had just presented the king with his usual gift of fruit, but this time instead of passing it on to his treasurer, as was his usual custom, the king handed it over to the monkey. When the animal bit into it, a jewel dropped out and fell to the floor.

The king was amazed and quickly turned to his treasurer behind him. ‘What has become of all the others?’ he asked. But the treasurer had no answer. Over the years, he had simply thrown the unimpressive ‘gifts’ through a small window in the treasure house, not even bothering to unlock the door. So he excused himself and ran quickly to the vault. He opened it and hurried to the area beneath the little window. There, on the floor, lay a mass of rotten fruit in various stages of decay. But amidst this rubbish of many years lay a heap of precious stones.
REFLECTION

- What does that parable say to you?

A prayer

Christ of the new covenant,
give us the happiness to share,
with full measure, pressed down,
shaken together and running over,
all that you give us.

Gracious God, the giver of all good gifts,
you have given us skills and talents
with which to serve you:
help us to use those things,
that in the ministry which you have entrusted to us
we may be instruments of your love.
Help us to honour you with all our gifts. Amen