“Use Your God-given Gifts” 7/18/2017

I Corinthians 3:1-9

Please take your Bible with me and open to Acts 18.

Rome was once the largest world empire. And the largest cities inside the first century Roman Empire were Rome with a population of one million; Alexandria, Egypt with 600,000 people and the city of Antioch with 500,000. The fourth largest city was Ephesus with 250,000.

Today’s sermon revolves around a man who was born into a Jewish home in the city of Alexandria, who moved to the city of Ephesus, was saved and then served the LORD with his God-given gifts in the city of Ephesus.

I’ve titled today’s sermon “Use Your God-given Gifts.” Shall we pray?

Everyone here is gifted. You have your own particular gift by virtue of the fact that you have been created by the LORD of the universe. He gave to you abilities and talents that, although others may also have given these same talents, yours are *yours* by His design. And you can and should be using them as you go about your daily life.

As I proceed through today’s sermon, I’d like to ask you to consider this. What are you doing with those gifts God has placed within *you*?

Before I read for you the story of a gifted Jew from Acts 18, here are a few reminders of what God wants you to do with your abilities and gifts. Romans 12:6 *“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us …”*

I Peter 4:10 *“As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”*

One of the great servants of the LORD was a man named Hudson Taylor. Listen with me to his approach to God-given gifts. “A little thing is a little thing, but faithfulness in little things is a great thing.” [Found in A.J. Broomhall’s *Hudson Taylor and China’s Open Century, Book Four: Survivors’ Pact*. London: Hodder and Stoughton and Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1984, page 154.)

And he also said this “And he who in all things recog-nizes himself as the servant of GOD may count on a suffic-iency from GOD for all manner of need, and look with con-fident expectation to GOD to really prosper him in whatever he does.” [Found in (J. Hudson Taylor. *A Ribband of Blue and Other Bible Studies*. London: China Inland Mission, n. d., page 49.]

So, as I begin today, let me make sure you know this. It doesn’t matter how small your God-given gift is.

Here’s what Jesus said about it. Luke 16:10 *“He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.”*

You see, it doesn’t even matter how small you perceive your gifts to be. What will matter in the end is whether or not you surrendered yourself to God and asked Him to use you and the gifts He has given to you for His glory in this world.

Now, go with me to Acts 18. Paul is in Corinth. You’ll see him here traveling on to Ephesus and then on to Jerusalem. He will leave two friends in Ephesus and notice what these two friends do; Acts 18:18.

 Acts 18:18 *“And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.* *(19) And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.*

*(20) When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; (21) But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus. (22) And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch.*

*(23) And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples. (24) And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus.*

*(25) This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. (26) And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.*

*(27) And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: (28) For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.”*

The year is 51 or maybe 52 A.D. Paul had come into contact with the husband and wife team of Aquila and Priscilla during the 18 months he had spent in the city of Corinth (see Acts 18:11). You see, Paul and Aquila were tent-makers. Paul moved in with Aquila and his family while he was in Corinth. And they, like himself, were Jewish men who had converted to Christ.

Paul then takes Aquila and his wife with him to his next missionary endeavor, Ephesus, the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire, where they minister together. And, from there, upon leaving for Jerusalem, he asks Aquila and Priscilla to remain in Ephesus to follow up on the new converts. And while there, they meet the man Apollos. He’s also Jewish; having been born and raised in Alexandria, Egypt. And he’s also converted to Christ.

So, Apollos, he’s the one that I’d like to focus on today.

First, you have gifts that have been given to you directly from the LORD. We call them God-given gifts.

Now, let me say a word about Apollos first. He, just like you and me, was gifted. Look with me at the twenty-fourth verse. The man who wrote the Book of Acts, Dr. Luke, uses very descriptive language when he writes about him. He presents him like this. Acts 18:24 *“And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. (25) This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. (26) And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue…”*

I want you to see Apollos as he really was. But, I especially want you to see him as an ordinary man; someone who is just like you. We know he had at least one God-given gift. The Bible says he was an eloquent man. I imagine everyone knew Apollos to be what Luke calls him; eloquent.

Now, what makes one man eloquent and another man inarticulate is simple. Some people have both the desire and the ability to speak in front of other people. So, what does it mean to be eloquent? It means that Apollos had a natural ability to speak publicly.

He was likely both a student and a teacher. He was born and raised, by the way, in Alexandria, Egypt. And in Alex-andria was the largest library in the known world at the time. It was begun under Alexander the Great in 334 B.C. It contained as many as 400,000 books (scrolls) and almost everything in the Library at Alexandria was written in Greek, including a copy of the Bible, which *we* know as the Septuagint, the Greek copy of the Hebrew Bible.

And, just for information, this Library at Alexandria was destroyed by fire sometime, possibly before the first century A.D.

So, with a vast library comes education. Apollos was, likely, well-educated. And his particular God-given gift was eloquence. He was, as some would say, a silver-tongued orator. He could teach and preach.

And we are even told what it was that Apollos taught. Look again with me at your Bible in Acts 18:25 *“This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. (26) And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue…”*

At some time in his travels Apollos arrived in the Middle East and, very likely, Jerusalem. And he’d heard about John the Baptist and he’d heard about the Jewish Messiah, Jesus. And he had been baptized just as John the Baptist had taught.

And with what the knowledge he had of John’s teachings about Jesus, Apollos became a teacher. He taught the things that John, the Baptist had taught. So, yes, he knew about Jesus. But, at this stage, he was probably not saved. Yet, he learned the Bible. And coming to Ephesus, Apollos spoke the messages of the Bible boldly in the synagogue.

Now, it will take another Jewish/Christian couple, Aquila and Priscilla, to bring him more clear teachings of the Gospel.

Folks, it’s not only important that you see that it’s the LORD Who has gifted you. It’s also necessary to see it. He made you. He gave you desires in certain areas and vocations. You’ve been given specific gifts directly from the LORD’s heart to yours.

Here’s what we find in the Book of I Corinthians about gifts. I Corinthians 12:3 *“Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. (4) Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.*

*(5) And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. (6) And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. (7) But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.”*

Paul says “differences, differences, differences.” But then he adds this; *“the same Spirit,” “the same LORD,” “the same God which worketh all in all.”*

So, you are gifted. But so is your neighbor. And your gifts are different than the person sitting next to you. Yet, Who is the One Who has given you those abilities and strengths and desires to do what you do? It’s the LORD. And, whether they are large or small gifts, they are the ones God has given to you.

Now, I’ve already said to you that you have been blessed of God. You have your God-given gifts. I have mine. So, that’s the first thing to see in the life of this man Apollos.

First, you have gifts that have been given to you directly from the LORD.

Second, your gifts are not a call to laziness.

Here’s what I want to say about your God-given gifts.

Just because you have a God-given gift, that is no call for you to be lazy and not exercise your gift or gifts. Rather, no matter how gifted you are, you still must develop your gifts by use and practice.

Who here thinks that Apollos didn’t practice public speaking? Who here thinks he didn’t improve as he used that gift? Let’s say you are gifted musically. Isn’t it true that every single musician must practice? Let’s say you are gifted in the field of medicine. Who here thinks it’s ok to do surgery without practice? Whatever your gift is, you are to exercise yourself in that gift.

Here’s the Apostle Peter again. I Peter 4:10 *“As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”*

You are the LORD’s steward. Your gifts are really *His* gifts to you to be used as a steward; as someone who is taking care of someone else’s things.

God had given this gift of eloquence to Apollos. And he used it.

You certainly have abilities and strengths, even musical; possibly business abilities or administrative abilities. Maybe you have the ability to speak in public like Apollos. But if you don’t use those God-given abilities; if you don’t work hard; if you don’t practice; if you waste those abilities, you won’t be productive in them. Apollos is an example of someone who was gifted by God and he applied himself in the exercise of those gifts.

Let me illustrate this matter of having a God-given gift. Some of you are aware that Grace Storm is an artist. How could she possibly be the artist she is today if she hasn’t practiced until she has perfected her ability?

So, yes, the LORD has gifted you, as He did Apollos. But having a gift is no indication that you can be lazy with it.

First, you have gifts that have been given to you directly from the LORD.

Second, your gifts are not a call to laziness.

Third, your gift is best used when you let the LORD change your character.

Look again at the Bible at verse twenty-five. Acts 18:25 “*This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. (26) And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.”*

Folks, it’s one thing to be eloquent. It’s quite another to develop your character. Look at everything else Dr. Luke tells us about Apollos and you will see that everything else is a matter of what he was really like. What are the traits people saw in this man? He was a humble man, instructed in the way of the LORD.

Can you agree with me that Apollos was teachable? And what about his fervency of spirit? And what about his diligence? And when he had some things explained to him by Paul’s friends Aquila and Priscilla, didn’t’ he listen to them?

How many times have you met people who are highly blessed with abilities and talents way beyond you? Yet, their character flaws are widely visible.

You can go to school in Alexandria, Egypt. But, if you aren’t humble and teachable and willing to learn from others, your pride will keep you down.

The qualities in Apollos weren’t gifts. What they are are the life changes he knew he needed. You and I need that same approach because what you see in a person is much more than their gifts. Apollos was the man he became in his character and in the things he did with his life. He had very wisely joined his life and gifts to the Book he was studying and teaching.

 Look again with me at verse twenty-four. Acts 18:24 *“And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and* ***mighty in the scriptures****, came to Ephesus.”*

Remember, though, that very few people had their own copy of the Bible. Yet, this man, a Jew, found a way to get a copy of God’s word, study it; learn it; memorize and meditate on it. And then, in applying it, he spoke to others about what he found in it. And he was a teacher of the Scriptures and very persuasive.

How much of God’s word do you know? Is it just a smattering? Is it a little? Is it a lot? How much of it have you committed to memory? How much of it are you obeying?

You see, you could, very well, be the most talented or the best in your field. But if you neglect to apply the Scriptures to your character and your lifestyle, it will be for nothing.

Listen with me to what he LORD says about it. I Corinthians 3:11 *“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (12) Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; (13) Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.*

*(14) If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. (15) If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.”*

So, what are your gifts? Do you see them as the Bible presents them; as having come from the LORD? And what about the hard work of exercise when it comes to using that gift in your life? And then, is your character becoming more and more a reflection of the LORD?

Folks, the foundation for your life is a Person. His name is Jesus Christ. He’s the Creator of the universe. And He made you. He gives you breath each day. He provides all your needs.

So, are you building on that Person? You see, He’s the Solid Foundation.

Jesus taught this very powerful lesson as He concluded His Sermon on the Mount. And I’ll share it with you as I conclude my sermon.

Here’s what He said. Matthew 7:24 *“Therefore* ***whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them****, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: (25) And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.*

*(26) And* ***every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not****, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: (27) And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”*

How can you truly society succeed if you don’t take the time to learn your Bible? Apart from the Truth, the Person of Christ, you will not be founded upon a Solid Foundation. And, when the storms of life descend and the floods arrive and the harsh winds blow into our lives, our houses will fall.

Today, more than ever, we need to:

First, recognize that your gifts that have been given to you directly from the LORD.

Second, that your gifts are not a call to laziness.

And third, that your gift is best used when you let the LORD change your character.

In conclusion, who here will surrender themselves and say to the LORD the following? *“LORD, I surrender myself for Your service. I submit all I am to you, including the gifts you have blessed me with. Use me as You please. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

Go out this week with the realization that His gifts in you are to be His gifts through you.

And, last, if you haven’t received Christ as your Savior, today is the day you need to repent of your sin and receive Jesus Christ as your LORD and Savior. Today, He will be not only the One Who has given you the gifts He has given; but He will become your Father. Today is the Day of Salvation. Today you need to Repent and to Believe.

* To Repent = I change my mind about God, Christ, my sin, and God’s free gift of salvation.
* To Believe = I simply trust Jesus Christ alone as the One Who paid the entire penalty for my sins.

Salvation Prayer*. “LORD, I admit that I am a sinner and deserve judgment for my sins. I believe Jesus died in my place on the Cross. Please save me today. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.”*

Shall we pray?

Hymn # 630 “What A Friend”