

Making Friends for God: The Joy of Sharing in His Mission Unlimited Possibilities

Lesson #6 for August 8, 2020

Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 1:4-9; 12:7,11-12; Matthew 3:16-17; 25:14-30.

1. How would you like to be given what seems like an impossible task and then be told that you had a partner with unlimited abilities? God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, with all the holy angels have promised to be with us if we are willing to do God's will.
2. **The important thing to know about God and His calling us to action is that He does not call people who are already qualified; He qualifies those whom He calls.** The same God who offers salvation to everyone who chooses His way also is more than willing to give a variety of gifts to each of them to accomplish what needs to be done.

Acts 1:8: "But when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be filled with power, and you will be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Acts 1:8). New York: American Bible Society.[†]

Isaiah 43:10: "People of Israel, you are my witnesses; I chose you to be my servant, so that you would know me and believe in me and understand that I am the only God. Besides me there is no other god; there never was and never will be."—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

3. So, what kind of promises do we have from God?
Heavenly intelligences are waiting to co-operate with human instrumentalities, that they may reveal to the world what human beings may become, and what, through union with the Divine, may be accomplished for the saving of souls that are ready to perish. **There is no limit to the usefulness of one who, putting self aside, makes room for the working of the Holy Spirit upon his heart and lives a life wholly consecrated to God.** All who consecrate body, soul, and spirit to His service will be constantly receiving a new endowment of physical, mental, and spiritual power. The inexhaustible supplies of heaven are at their command. Christ gives them the breath of His own Spirit, the life of His own life. The Holy Spirit puts forth its highest energies to work in mind and heart. Through the grace given us we may achieve victories that because of our own erroneous and preconceived opinions, our defects of character, our smallness of faith, have seemed impossible.—Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing** 159.4.[†] Compare *The Desire of Ages* 250.4-251.0.
4. Are you ready to work with unlimited possibilities?
5. We know that the gift of the Holy Spirit was first given to those eleven disciples and their associates around about the time of Pentecost.
6. Review what you know about each of the disciples and other early church leaders. We know a fair amount about Peter, and much about John. We know a little bit about James, the brother of John. We know much less about James and Jude, the "half-brothers" of

Jesus. We know that Andrew was always ready to help others who had questions. He was a kind of “people person” and was always aware of what others around him were doing. Matthew had been a tax collector and was very precise, exact, and accurate in his details. Thomas got the name *doubting Thomas* because he was always ready to question. Simon, the Zealot or Patriot, wanted nothing more than to get rid of the Romans! We know very little about the other disciples. And yet, God took that motley crew and said He was going to turn the world upside down using them!

7. Did God intentionally choose this group of people with such a wide variety of backgrounds and abilities? What advantage would that be?
8. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-22. Paul recognized that like the human body with all of its different parts, the church needs people with different skills and different abilities. Thus, it should be clear to us that while some other church members may do things which seem strange or unusual to us, God can use them to reach people that we could not reach.
9. So, which part of the body do you think best describes you? How would the body (the church) get along without you? **What are you doing to promote the body of Christ?**

Romans 12:4: We have many parts in the one body, and all these parts have different functions.—*Good News Bible*.*

10. The human body has an incredible number of different parts. There are trillions of cells, all working together for their mutual benefit. If we did not have the tiny little bones in our ears, we could not hear. Without our eyelashes, we would probably fairly quickly get irritating things like dust in our eyes, and we would scratch our corneas and eventually go blind.
11. It is that way with the church also. The person who comes in on Fridays and cleans the church is doing an essential service although we may not even know his or her name. The person who comes in and starts the air conditioner or the heater at the appropriate time is essential even though not very well known. Some churches meet under trees!
12. So, what do you think God is asking you to do for His church? You do not have to be highly talented to serve God’s church; you need to recognize what God wants you to do and do it.
13. Each one of us has certain talents and abilities. Some of them may be inherited from our parents; others may just fit our personality. In 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and Romans 12, we read about the gifts that God particularly focuses on for the building up of the church. We need to recognize several things about these gifts; **the most important thing we must recognize is that all those gifts come from God.**

1 Corinthians 12:11,18: ¹¹But it is one and the same Spirit who does all this; as he wishes, he gives a different gift to each person.... ¹⁸As it is, however, God put every different part in the body just as he wanted it to be.—*Good News Bible*.*

Ephesians 4:7-8: ⁷ Each one of us has received a special gift in proportion to what Christ has given. ⁸As the scripture says:

“When he went up to the very heights,
he took many captives with him;
he gave gifts to people.”—*Good News Bible*.*

14. First Corinthians 12:11 tells us that God gives at least one gift to every person. Do you

know what your gift is? Do you know what God wants you to do? On December 2, 1903, Ellen White wrote the following letter to Dr. George Hare.

We are all members of God's family, all in a greater or less degree entrusted with God-given talents, for the use of which we are held responsible. Whether our talent be great or small, we are to use it in God's service, and we are to recognize the right of everyone else to use the gifts entrusted to them.

Never should we disparage the smallest physical, intellectual, or spiritual capital.—[from a letter to Dr. George A. Hare, written December 2, 1903, File H. 260-'03] *TDG** 345.4.†

15. Jesus is our Example for everything.

Matthew 3:16-17: ¹⁶ As soon as Jesus was baptized, he came up out of the water. Then heaven was opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God coming down like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷ Then a voice said from heaven, "This is my own dear Son, with whom I am pleased."—*Good News Bible*.*

16. Did Jesus have any outward evidence before His baptism that God was with Him?

The child Jesus did not receive instruction in the synagogue schools. His mother was His first human teacher. From her lips and from the scrolls of the prophets, He learned of heavenly things. The very words which He Himself had spoken to Moses for Israel He was now taught at His mother's knee. As He advanced from childhood to youth, He did not seek the schools of the rabbis. He needed not the education to be obtained from such sources; for God was His instructor.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 70.1.†

17. How did that happen? Think of what God knew was ahead for Jesus? What kind of relationship did Jesus have with His Father before He began His ministry on this earth?

18. Following the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, His disciples had an amazing awakening. When Pentecost came, Peter spoke up.

Acts 2:38-42: ³⁸ Peter said to them, "Each one of you must turn away from your sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven; and you will receive God's gift, the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For God's promise was made to you and your children, and to all who are far away—all whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

Peter made his appeal to them and with many other words he urged them, saying, "Save yourselves from the punishment coming on this wicked people!" ⁴¹ Many of them believed his message and were baptized, and about 3,000 people were added to the group that day. ⁴² They spent their time in learning from the apostles, taking part in the fellowship, and sharing in the fellowship meals and the prayers.—*Good News Bible*.*†

19. In light of what Peter said on that occasion, is it your understanding that God intends to give the Holy Spirit to every one of us if we are willing to cooperate with Him?

20. The obvious question that should arise in one's mind about the spiritual gifts is: "What is the reason for God giving us spiritual gifts?"

1 Corinthians 12:7: The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all.—*Good News Bible*.*

Ephesians 4:11-16: ¹¹It was he who “gave gifts”; he appointed some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, others to be pastors and teachers. ¹²**He did this to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service**, in order to build up the body of Christ. ¹³And so we shall all come together to that oneness in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God; **we shall become mature people, reaching to the very height of Christ's full stature.** ¹⁴**Then we shall no longer be children, carried by the waves and blown about by every shifting wind of the teaching of deceitful people, who lead others into error by the tricks they invent.** ¹⁵Instead, by speaking the truth in a spirit of love, we must grow up in every way to Christ, who is the head. ¹⁶Under his control all the different parts of the body fit together, and the whole body is held together by every joint with which it is provided. So when each separate part works as it should, the whole body grows and builds itself up through love.—*Good News Bible*.*†

21. Christians should not be like gullible children all of their lives. We/they need to grow up!
22. As you look around your church, do you recognize people who are gifted for ministering? Serving? Proclaiming? Teaching? Encouraging? And giving? What about being hospitable? Showing mercy? Being helpful and cheerful?
23. So, what is the relationship between these spiritual gifts promised by God and natural talents? If we have natural talents, does that mean that God cannot use those natural talents? Of course not.

The special gifts of the Spirit are not the only talents represented in the parable. **It includes all gifts and endowments, whether original or acquired, natural or spiritual. All are to be employed in Christ's service.** In becoming His disciples, we surrender ourselves to Him with all that we are and have. These gifts He returns to us purified and ennobled, to be used for His glory in blessing our fellow men.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons** 328.2.†

24. One of the things that is supposed to happen in the church is for the leadership to help us identify our spiritual gifts and show us how to use them. Is that happening in your church? Do you have natural talents that perhaps you have used for other purposes but which could be useful in the church to build it up?
25. Seventh-day Adventists are famous for their identification of “the seal of God” and “the mark of the beast.” Notice what these verses teach us about the seal of God.

2 Corinthians 1:20-22: ²⁰For it is he who is the “Yes” to all God's promises. This is why through Jesus Christ our “Amen” is said to the glory of God. ²¹It is God himself who makes us, together with you, sure of our life in union with Christ; it is God himself who has set us apart, ²²who has placed **his mark of ownership upon us**, and who has given us the Holy Spirit in our hearts as the guarantee of all that he has in store for us.—*Good News Bible*.*†

Ephesians 1:13: And you also became God's people when you heard the true message, the Good News that brought you salvation. You believed in Christ, and **God put his stamp of ownership on you by giving you the Holy**

Spirit he had promised.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

26. What would happen if we surrendered ourselves to Christ and were willing be used by Him? What happened to Paul? Peter? John?
27. Read Luke 11:13; James 1:5; and Matthew 7:7. What are we supposed to do to identify the gifts God has given each of us? God is more than willing to give the gifts. We should pray to God. If we ask in accordance with His will, He will show us what He wants us to do.
28. So, why doesn't that happen on a much larger scale in the church?

Not until through faith and prayer the disciples had surrendered themselves fully for His working was the outpouring of the Spirit received. Then in a special sense the goods of heaven were committed to the followers of Christ.... The gifts are already ours in Christ, but their actual possession depends upon our reception of the Spirit of God.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons** 327.2.

29. Notice these interesting ideas.

Spiritual gifts (see 1 Cor. 12:4-6) are qualities that God imparts so we can serve Him effectively. **Ministries** are the general areas we can express our gifts in, and **activities** are the specific events that allow us to use our gifts. Spiritual gifts do not come fully developed. As the Holy Spirit impresses you with some area of service, pray that He will lead you to a specific ministry to exercise your gift through an outreach activity.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Wednesday, August 5.^{†§}

30. As you think back over your relationships to the church and to God, have you identified one or more spiritual gifts that you have and which could be used in cooperation with the Holy Spirit to spread the gospel?
31. Read Matthew 25:14-30, the parable of the talents. Focus especially on verse 29.
32. Notice that the master gave to each servant talents according to his specific ability. They did not all receive the same quantity of gifts. Then, they had freedom to use the money they had received in an appropriate way. Notice that the point of the parable is not how many talents you were given at the beginning; it is how you used what you were given. It is the same with God. What matters is not what you have but rather what you do with what you have. **God has assured us that if we use our talents, they will grow.** As we use our talents, we will find ourselves bound more and more closely to God and the church.
33. There is a long chapter near the end of the book *Christ's Object Lessons* (pages 325-365) in which Ellen White described a variety of talents. The talents that God revealed to Ellen White in the that book included: **The Holy Spirit, mental faculties, speech, influence, time, health, strength, money, and kindly impulses and affections.** Notice that none of these "talents" are the ones mentioned in the Bible! (See 1 Corinthians 12:12-22; Romans 12:3-8; and Ephesians 4:7-16.)
34. So, what does God expect you to do with the talents or the spiritual gifts that He has given?

Every servant has some trust for which he is responsible; and the varied trusts are proportioned to our varied capabilities. In dispensing His gifts, God has not dealt with partiality. **He has distributed the talents according to the known powers of His servants, and He expects corresponding returns.**—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,* vol. 2, 282.0.[†]

35. Would you be willing to share with your Sabbath school class whatever you know about your spiritual gifts? Can you spell out some of the results of your using those spiritual gifts? Can you think of a spiritual gift used by another class member or someone else within the church that has been a blessing to you?
36. Do you still have vague ideas about what spiritual gifts really are? Are they only given to certain special people? Or, could they really be given to everyone? How can I discover my spiritual gifts?
37. We need to understand clearly that spiritual gifts are given for two purposes: (1) To build up the church and, thus, (2) To fulfill the mission of Christ in reaching the world with the gospel. The church is not just a club where we go to meet our friends once a week!
38. If you belong to a relatively small church where you know every other church member, you might be able to think of some spiritual gifts that other members have. If you belong to a much larger church where there are many members that you do not know personally, it might be more difficult. But, as we learned at the beginning of our lesson, having a variety of people in your church is a blessing, not a liability. The Holy Spirit knows what gifts should be given to each person.
39. Review again the spiritual gifts that are spelled out in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4. Do you feel a burden to reach out to the people around you by using your spiritual gifts? Remember that **you do not have any natural abilities, natural strengths, talents, or spiritual gifts that were not given to you by God.** Spiritual gifts are specifically for the purpose of benefitting the church. Thus, how they are used and where they are used may be different from natural talents. Natural talents are often used to earn a living, become wealthy, maybe even for self-glorification. But, the true use of spiritual gifts is very different.
40. It is God's plan that when someone is convinced of the truth and chooses to join the Seventh-day Adventist Church and be baptized, s/he should be taught immediately about spiritual gifts and how s/he can be used to further the gospel. S/he should join a class taking him/her through the Bible and explaining to him/her book by book what the Bible teaches. Then, s/he needs to understand how to share that information with others.
41. In light of what we have studied in this lesson, do you still have any questions about these words—some of which are quoted in Item #34 above?

To everyone there is given a work to do for the Master. To each of His servants are committed special gifts, or talents. "Unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability." Every servant has some trust for which he is responsible; and the varied trusts are proportioned to our varied capabilities. In dispensing His gifts, God has not dealt with partiality. He has distributed the talents according to the known powers of His servants, and He expects corresponding returns.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,* vol. 2, 281.3-282.0.†

42. Do you wish that you could choose your spiritual gift?
43. Think back to the time when you were a child. You might have dreamed of getting something special that you wanted as a birthday gift. But, when your birthday came, you got something probably far more useful from your parents. Are we willing to admit that the Holy Spirit might understand what gifts we can best use even better than we do?

The Holy Spirit distributes His gifts to believers in accordance with His knowledge of their capacities and the needs existing in the experience of each individual. It is not an arbitrary decision, but one based on supreme knowledge and understanding.—Article on 1 Corinthians 12:11, “As he will.” In F. D. Nichol (Ed.), *SDA Bible Commentary*,* vol. 6, 772.

44. It might be good to practice identifying some of the spiritual gifts in other members of the church. Here are some of the categories that are specifically mentioned: Apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists, pastors as well as others who demonstrate hospitality, liberality, helps, mercy, faith, and healing. It is important to notice that the word *apostle* in Greek is equal to *missionary* in Latin. Prophets are people who speak on behalf of God. They are not primarily for predicting the future.
45. But, we must first clearly understand what it is that the world needs to hear about God. Our spiritual gifts will not be used properly until we develop a genuine desire to build up the church.
46. In conclusion, let us talk about three things we can do to discover and use our spiritual gifts:
 1. Ask God to show you your spiritual gift(s) and how it/they can be used. (James 1:17; Matthew 7:7)
 2. Talk to your friends and counselors in the church who know you well, and ask them what skills or spiritual gifts they might have recognized in you.
 3. Begin using any and all gifts that you are able to identify. Remember that they are for the building up of the body of Christ, the church. Remember that many gifts do not come fully developed; we may need to take some time using the gift(s) to develop it/them to its/their full capacity.

He who will give himself fully to God will be guided by the divine hand. He may be lowly and apparently ungifted; yet if with a loving, trusting heart he obeys every intimation of God's will, his powers will be purified, ennobled, energized, and his capabilities will be increased.—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles** 283.3.

47. Are you ready to launch yourself into a work with unlimited possibilities?

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