

“Shaped to Make a Difference: Using Your Abilities”

Today we continue this series “Shaped to Make a Difference.” As we get started I want to remind you of something I’ve said almost every week: 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.

God said before you were born I designed you, I thought you out. I have a purpose and a plan for your life and I have uniquely shaped you for a specific purpose.” In other words, God made you *you* so you could accomplish what he wants you to accomplish in the world. God doesn’t want you to be anybody else. He wants you to be you. The Bible says in Job 10:8 **“Your hands formed and shaped me” (Job 10:8, Good News).**

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 **heart** – 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 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. What do you need to know about your abilities? One key verse from the Bible is Romans 12:6 **“God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well” (Romans 12:6, NLT).** That means 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.

You have hundreds of abilities. Things that just come naturally to you. You don’t even think of them as abilities but you have that ability. Part of the job of the church 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.

But we all have **different** abilities and they’re all important. And God doesn’t want you comparing yourself to anybody else. 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 Pastor Mark--and some of us are shaped like ballerinas—like Pastor Ben! We all have different shapes. We have different abilities and they’re all important.

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 a kind of map to God’s will for your life. They point the direction. When you know what you’re good at, then you can know what God wants you to do with your life.

Let’s take a little time and look at some of the abilities mentioned in the Bible. If you were to read through the Bible cover to cover you’d find hundreds of abilities that God uses and blesses to do his will in the world. Here’s just very small list. It’s probably ten times that list but I’ll read you a few.

God gives uses athletic ability. That’s in the Bible. God also uses artistic ability. Architectural ability. There’s administering ability. Baking, boat-building, candy-making, carpentry, 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 ability. These are all in the Bible, needlework, painting, planning, (playing X-box! – thought I’d slip that one in there), sailing ability, selling, soldiering, tailoring, teaching, tent making, weapon-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 planet. God says, “I gave you your abilities and that gives you good direction of what to do with your life.”

Let’s look at some of the ways God expects you to use the abilities he’s given you. First, your abilities, whether embalming or embroidering, **they’re to be used to honor God.** The Bible says this **“Whatever you**

do, do it all for the glory of God.” (1 Corinthians 10:31, NIV). That means any of those abilities I just listed and any other one can be used for God’s glory. Whatever you do, do it for the glory of God. They’re all important. Carpentry is as important as teaching, and masonry is as important as preaching. Managing is as important as music. They’re all important. There are no unimportant abilities. That means you can honor God by repairing cars. You can honor God by balancing books. You can honor God by helping people find a home and sell it to them. You can honor God by making music or making meals or managing your office or a million other ways. Whatever you do, he says, do it for the Lord as if you’re doing it for God and not for man. He says do it for God’s honor.

I want to bring somebody up on the stage who I think has exemplified using an ability to glorify God. Her name is Becky Burress and she is our kitchen queen. She is an unpaid staff member here and doesn’t like standing up in front of people! How did you start cooking? When did you discover the ability to feed people? What’s it like to feed 400 to 500 people here on Wednesday nights? How does it feel to use that ability to honor God?

Whatever ability you have can be used to honor God. Use it.

But God says not only did I give you abilities to honor me but 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 help each other passing on to others God’s many kinds of blessings” (1 Peter 4:10, LB).** *“God has given each of you some special abilities. Be sure to use them...”* to make a ton of money and spend it on yourself! That’s the Reviled Substandard Perversion translation! So with your abilities you don’t just honor God you serve other people.

We’re always giving you opportunities to put your abilities to use and serve others around here, but I want to take a few minutes and highlight one of the local ministries that we partner with right here in Joplin. It’s called Watered Gardens and James Whitford is the founder and director. James has led WG as an unpaid director since its beginning. James, come on up. Interview with James...What’s the mission of Watered Gardens? How long has it been around? How have you see lives changed? What abilities might you need from our people to help those you are helping?

You see, we can use our abilities selfishly or unselfishly. When we use them to serve others, we are truly living, and we’re helping others to truly live and see God. You see, that’s one of the side-effects of using our abilities to serve others people get a glimpse of God, people can be led to an active faith in Jesus Christ.

So God says I expect you to use your abilities first to honor me and second to serve others. **God also says I gave you your abilities in order to make a living.** Scripture says if you can work you should work. Some people can’t because of disabilities, problems or circumstances. But if you can work you should. God says, “I want you to use your abilities to make a living. I want you to be self-supporting. I give you your abilities to make a living.”

But this goes beyond just making a living for yourself. God has commanded us to use our abilities to help those who cannot help themselves. The Apostle Paul wrote, **Begin using your hands for honest work and then give generously to others in need” (Ephesians 4:28, NLT).** We use our abilities to have money to share with people who can’t work--those who are poor for one reason or the other. Maybe they’ve had a crisis or a tragedy. God says, “At some point you have to decide materially when enough is enough for yourself.” How do you know when enough is enough? The key here is deciding, because if we don’t decide, then our surroundings will decide for us. In a consumer culture we’re taught that we never have enough, we never have the latest, the most fashionable. What if we decided that the kind of car we have and the size house we have, the lifestyle in general that we have is enough, so that if our incomes grow we have more to share? What if we chose not to buy into the philosophy that if I make more money, I have to spend more on myself? We if we chose not to buy into the philosophy of always longing for bigger, better, newer so that we can channel more of our resources toward people who have real basic needs? What if? Give generously to others in need. Generously fund the work of God’s kingdom. God has given you your abilities to make a living and help those who cannot help themselves.

One last reason that **God gives you your abilities is to build up the church.** What is the church? It's the Body of Christ. That means that the church is the physical presence of Jesus on the Earth. 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"**(Ephesians 4:12, LB). 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, to help your church family in some way. And not for the church's sake, not for the church to be big, but for the sake of the mission we're on. We exist to lead people to an active faith in Jesus Christ. Using our abilities for the church fuels that mission.

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 Saint Paul's." You're wrong. There is no ability that you have that could not be used in this church. A good negotiator? We need negotiators. Accountant? We need accountants. You know how to weave baskets? We need a basket!

There is no talent that you've got that could not be used in this church. In fact, God places specifically in each church the talent that he knows that church is going to need. Have you ever thought, "Why am I here?" Out of all the billions of people that God could have put in Saint Paul's 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.

Unless you come forward in volunteering some way we don't ever know. What happens? You get cheated, the church gets cheated, the world gets cheated. You get cheated of the rewards that God wants to give you. The church gets cheated because it can't live out its mission as fully, and the world gets cheated out of the way the church can impact the world. How can your abilities make a difference in this place?

Of these four things that God gives you your abilities to do – to honor him, to serve others, to make a living, and to build up the church – what if you don't use your ability these four ways?

Well, you lose. The world loses, the church loses. But you lose. 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 25:28 **"Take the talent from him [who didn't use it] and give it to the one who has ten talents."** (Matthew 25:28, NIV). 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. 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. That's why discovering your SHAPE is so important. That's why this series is so important—this is bedrock stuff. That's why we continuously offer SHAPE classes. So, in part, you can identify you're your abilities, cultivate them and dedicate them to Christ.

Let me cut to the chase 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? Did you use them to build up the church? 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 first. In Luke 12 Jesus said this *"When the Master comes back and he finds his servant doing his work, that servant will be blessed."* Will God find you doing what you were gifted and shaped and able to do? 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 ways that God

intended. That is really living. That is the life that really is life. You're shaped to make a difference. And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I thank Rev. Rick Warren, Senior Pastor at Saddleback Valley Community Church, for his resources for this message series and the accompanying small group resources.