

Discovering Your God-Given Abilities Exodus 31:1-7 Sept. 28, 2014

The first time Larry Bird played basketball against Michael Jordan in the NBA, Jordan scored 63 points. After the game, when asked what he thought of Jordan, Bird replied, *He's God disguised in a basketball uniform.* Of course, I don't believe that and you don't either, but I do believe that God gave Michael Jordan his basketball talent. He gives others the ability to write or paint or to build and repair things.

God gave Mozart the gift of music. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart began giving piano concerts when he was six years old. He wrote his first opera when he was 14. By the time of his premature death at age 35, he had composed over 600 works--many acknowledged as some of the greatest music ever written.

Everybody is a "10" at something. I was a fairly good student in school. In my last year of high school (at the height of the Vietnam War), US Army recruiters came to our school and administered a test that measured mechanical intelligence to identify seniors who had gifts in this crucial area of the military. I got the lowest score in my class. This means that you don't want me to attempt to fix anything that is broken. Bradley Walker, whose grade average was near the bottom of our class, got the highest score. He was a mechanical genius.

Your NATURAL ABILITIES are one way that God shows you what He has made you to do for Him. These are different from your spiritual gifts. They are innate talents that you're born with, work skills that you learn, and areas of expertise and knowledge that you develop.

John Holland believes that there are basically six different broad categories of ability preferences. The first is ENTERPRISING. Persons with this ability are good with words. They can sell, influence, and lead people.

The second ability area is SOCIAL. These are individuals who are genuinely concerned about the welfare of others. They work well with others and have a capacity to care for others.

The third ability area is INVESTIGATIVE. These are people who are analytical and like intellectual challenges. They are thinkers, researchers, problem solvers; they do not like overly structured situations with lots of rules.

The fourth ability area is ARTISTIC. These are right-brained individuals who are creative and expressive in an artistic medium.

The fifth ability area is REALISTIC. These are practical people who tend to be doers more than thinkers. They don't like to work in an office. They can create and repair things with their hands. They prefer to deal with physical things more than ideas or people.

The sixth ability area is CONVENTIONAL. These are people who like to work in a structured environment with clear expectations and chain of command. They are dependable and capable workers in whatever they do, but do not like being leaders.

Now what I want you to see is that in life, in the real world, we need people in all of these categories. Any church or business that has all chiefs and no Indians will fail. Likewise, any organization that has all Indians and no chief will flounder. For Pleasant Hill Baptist Church to accomplish its mission, there will need to be people with all of these different skill sets, who step up and get involved and make a unique contribution to fulfilling your mission and vision.

Our scripture today in Exodus 31 says that it is God who gives individuals all of these differing talents, skills, and knowledge. In particular, we are told about a man named Bezalel, who lived during the time that the Old Testament people of God lived in the wilderness after their escape from slavery in Egypt and before their occupation of the Promised Land of Israel. Bezalel was a gifted craftsman who with the help of Oholiab and other unnamed workers built the Tabernacle, the portable sanctuary that the Hebrews carried with them in their wanderings through the wilderness. God gave Bezalel and others the skills to construct this place of worship (and all of its furnishings) for God's people.

Becky Evans and Al Robinson are using their information technology skills to develop a new, better website for Pleasant Hill Baptist Church. It will be more appealing and user-friendly. Over time the website will include videos, more effective social networking, and much more.

Folks, I cannot begin to tell you how important this is. New people in the community no longer look in the yellow pages to find a church; they go to the Internet. The church's website will communicate to them the church's mission, vision and core values, who you are, and what it's like to be part of this congregation. The expanded church website will be a 24/7 church office--an invaluable center of information, outreach, and dialogue for church members and prospective members alike.

How can YOU identify YOUR natural abilities and talents? There are multiple ways—through (1) study, (2) the feedback of others, (3) intelligence and ability tests; and (4) best of all, through experience—trying to serve God in different ways and learning what you do best. Your natural abilities, like your spiritual gifts, help you identify HOW God wants you to serve Him and others.

Please look at the insert you were given when you came into worship today. One side is entitled "26 specialized abilities." These are different innate

abilities that different people can have. They are not an exhaustive list. The other side of the sheet is a PERSONAL RESOURCES SURVEY. This week I want to encourage each of you to complete both sides of this sheet—checking or circling each skill, talent, ability, or area of knowledge that you believe you have. I cannot understate the importance of your homework and personal reflections each week following each sermon in this series. Remember the goal is to understand more clearly the unique purpose that God has for you.

I must tell you that there are people who will discourage and hinder your discovery and employment of your natural gifts. They will put you down and criticize what you do.

When I was a youth, my minister was H. Cowen Ellis, pastor of First Baptist Church in Charlottesville. He once told a true story that deeply moved me. Dr. Ellis was driving through a rural area, and his car broke down. He walked to a farm house and knocked. The farmer came to the door and invited him in, and my pastor told the farmer of his plight and need for assistance. About that time the farmer's teenage son came down the steps and asked what if he could help. His father told Dr. Ellis, "Don't mind him. He can't do much; he's not much of a worker; all he does is doodle and draw; he'll never amount to anything."

My pastor asked the boy if he could see some of his drawings. The boy invited him upstairs. Dr. Ellis recounted that lining the walls of the boy's bedroom were scores of some of the most intricate, incredible, intriguing pen and ink drawings he had ever seen (and Dr. Ellis had a passionate knowledge of art). He said some of the boy's works were absolutely outstanding, but the father couldn't appreciate the boy's talents. He was only interested in physical, mechanical, and business abilities that were needed on the farm.

One of my favorite movies of all time is *Chariots of Fire*; it tells the true story of Eric Liddell, a missionary to China, who was considered to be the fastest runner in the world coming into the 1924 Olympics in Paris. His sister berated him for leaving God's work in China to train and run races all over the world. Liddell replied to his sister, *I believe God made me fast and that it gives Him pleasure when I run.* He won a gold medal at the 1924 Olympics and in Paris gave public testimony to his Christian faith that was reported in media around the world.

Do you know why most church members just come and sit in worship and never really get involved in serving God in the church and community. It's LOW SELF-ESTEEM. They feel that they have no abilities or talents to offer.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. God gives each of us differing talents and natural abilities. He expects us use them for His glory and work in the world. Some people think they don't have any talents, but God doesn't make any no-talent people. Scientific studies have shown that the average person has around 500 innate abilities. The key is discovering and developing them and finding ways to use them.

God calls every one of us to do three things: (1) First, He calls you to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, who died on the cross to bring you into a saving relationship with your Creator ; (2) Second, God calls you to be an active part of His church, the community of faith; and (3) Third, He calls you to serve Him and others in the unique ways He has gifted and shaped you.

EVERY CHRISTIAN IS CALLED TO BE A MINISTER OF JESUS CHRIST—NOT to be a pastor, but to serve God and others in special ways that are different for every individual. I Peter 4:10 says, *As every one of you has received a gift, even so minister to one another.* Ephesians 4 says, *God called some to be pastors to equip all God's people for works of Christian service.*

The key is discovering ministries within the church and the community where your unique abilities and spiritual gifts are needed and best suited to serve God and others. Let me close with a prayer that I hope will be a commitment that each of us will make. I invite you now to pray this prayer silently with me:

LORD, I cannot do everything, but I can do something. What I can do, I ought to do; and what I ought to do--by the grace of God, I will do. AMEN!

INVITATION: All of us have three callings from God: (1) To trust and follow Jesus as the way of and to God, and (2) To participate actively in His church, and (3) To serve God and others.