USING YOUR ABILITIES

God created us to be unique, He has given us gifts, heart and abilities that different from the people around us. One of the problems I see all the time is that we tend to overvalue the ability of others and we tend to undervalue our own abilities. We say, "If I could just… decorate my home like she does. … If I could just sell stuff like he does…. If I could just … " We are always comparing ourselves with others. The grass always seems greener for others. If you want to have satisfaction and success in life I would suggest you stop saying, "What's wrong with me?" and start asking "What do I do right? What do I do well?" Figure out what you're good at and focus on that and don't worry about what you're not good at. E.g. the car salesman.

Every high achiever in life gets there by specializing. Every Olympic athlete – the guy who swims the 200-meter doesn't go around saying, "I wish I could pole vault!" No, they specialize. They find out what are they really good at and they focus on that. If you are constantly saying, "I don't like the way God made me," you're in essence rejecting God and that means you're listening to the devil. When you say, "There is nothing I am good at… I don't have enough this or that…" you're basically saying, "God, you blew it."

We are continuing our series looking at SHAPE. Today we are looking at the A which means ABILITIES. Just like God has given us a heart that is tuned in a certain way he has also given us natural abilities that are just a natural part of who we were created.

1 Cor 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

There are some things that God has GIFTED you to do. There are other things that you ENJOY doing. Abilities point to things you NATURALLY do well. Not things you get when you are born again but when you are born. What are the things that you do well? Most people do not know themselves. If I were to say to you, "Give me fifty things you're not good at," you could come up with a list pretty quickly. If I said, "Give me fifty things you're good at," you'd have a hard time doing it.

The average human being has between five hundred to eight hundred abilities. Study after study after study has shown this. All of us have at least five hundred different natural abilities we can do with our bodies, most of them we don't even know we have them. They just come naturally to us. You don't even think of them as abilities but you have that ability.

We all have different abilities because physically we all have different shapes. Some of you are shaped like basketball players and some of you are shaped like racehorse jockeys. Some are shaped like body builders and some are shaped like ballerinas. We are all different.

The problem is when you go to school, everyone is treated in the same way. Even though we don't learn the same way, or look the same way, or have the same abilities, interests, and heart we all are judged the same. People look at standardized tests and think this is the only way to judge intelligence. However, studies show there are at least eight or nine different forms of intelligence. As a result, everyone is forced to learn the same way. However, we don't learn the same way. And we don't have the same abilities. You were made to be you. God has given you unique abilities to use for what He intended you to do.

Your abilities are a good map to find God's will for your life. When you know what you're good at, then you have a direction to follow. So, let me ask the question, what are you good at?

The Bible is full of stories of people who took what they were good at and used it for God's glory. My abilities match my call. Every person is called by God. You have a calling on your life. You have a vocation. You have a life mission and a life message and a life goal and a life purpose. God expects you to use the God given abilities He's given you in five ways.

1. My abilities HONOR GOD – recognizing the source

First, your abilities should be used to honor God. That means that any ability can be used for God's glory. Whatever you do, do it for the glory of God. Every ability is important. Carpentry is as important as teaching and masonry is as important as preaching. There are no unimportant abilities.

Too often we as Christians categorize life into either secular or sacred. We see going to church or youth group or prayer meeting as being sacred - it involves God. Unfortunately, we see the rest of the week; working, school, and recreation as being secular – it does not involve God. This is a huge mistake. All of life is sacred. Everything comes FROM HIM and is FOR HIM.

I have people say to me before that it must be nice being a pastor because I don't have to go to work. I just get to hang around the church all day. Your vocation is your mission field. If you are a mechanic then the garage is your cathedral. If you are a teacher then your classroom is your congregation. For stay-at-home moms vacuuming and the dirty laundry is your expression of worship.

Whatever you do, you're doing it for God and not for man. John Calvin said a milk maid can milk cows for the glory of God. Whatever you do give it to Jesus and it becomes an act of worship, a way of honoring God.

2. My abilities SERVE OTHERS - recognizing the purpose

1 Pet 4:10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

While this passage speaks of spiritual gifts it is also true of abilities. Your abilities are for the benefit of other people and not just yourself. Nobody is good at everything. What that means is that you need me and I need you. Nobody has every talent so no one can say to the world, I don't need anybody else. That's why you need a small group and why you need a church family. That's why it works good in teams. We need each other.

The first rule of success is to build on your strengths so that your weaknesses become irrelevant. Every successful person does this. That means you work on what you're good at and just make it better. Focus on your strengths and develop them.

The second rule of success is to team up with people who are good at what you're not good at. Work with people who compliment you. Cover your weaknesses through the involvement of others.

This is also the key to a successful marriage. Find someone who compliment your strengths and compensate for your weaknesses. If you don't compensate for each other's weaknesses you will begin to criticize them. There are no perfect relationships. Everybody's got weaknesses. Try to cover your weaknesses with each other's strengths.

In your house who does the bills and budgeting? Hopefully the one who is better at it! For most couples one is a spender and one is a saver. Make sure the saver is the one who handles your money! One is usually the disciplinarian and one the push-over. Just ask my kids which one I am. We will look at this in more detail next week when we talk about temperaments.

This also works in your business. If you want your company to be effective, find out what people's shape is and put them in the position that they're good at. When you do that then you don't have to manage them as much because they're doing what they love to do and they're good at it.

3. My abilities MAKE A LIVING - recognizing the value

One of the reasons we have abilities is to make a contribution to society around us. Our abilities help us to earn a living.

2 Thess 3:7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, 8 nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. 9 We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. 10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."

Paul grew up making tents and sails in Tarsus. He used that ability to support himself in ministry. God says if you can work than you should work. The money we live on comes from people paying us for our time and the use of our abilities. We must remember that even our health and physical strength is dependent upon God:

Deut 8:17 You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." 18 But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth

Producing wealth is an ability. Some of you are really good at this and you have a natural ability and great business sense. Making money glories God if you honor Him for what you have and give it back to Him. Hold everything you make with an open hand.

4. My abilities are an EXAMPLE TO OTHERS - recognizing the witness

When we use our abilities and recognize their source, purpose and value then God gets the glory. God wants to use our abilities to point people to Him. Every day we have to decide whether to take the credit for our abilities or give God the credit for them.

CS Lewis once wrote: Every faculty you have, your power of thinking or of moving your limbs from moment to moment, is given to you by God. If you devoted every moment of your whole life exclusively to His service you could not give Him anything that was not in a sense His own already. So that when we talk of a man doing anything for God or giving anything to God, I will tell you what it is really like. It is like a small child going to his father and saying, 'Daddy, give me sixpence to buy you a birthday present.' Of course, the father does, and he is pleased with the child's present. It is all very nice and proper, but only an idiot would think that the father is sixpence to the good on the transaction. When a man has made these two discoveries, God can really get to work. It is after this that real life begins. The man is awake now...

This is the story behind the band Sixpence None the Richer. Years ago they had the opportunity to perform on "The Late Show with David Letterman." Leigh Nash, the lead singer was given the rare chance to be interviewed by Letterman after the band performed. When asked about their name Nash used the opportunity to share this C.S. Lewis story. She said "The analogy is to God who gives gifts for us to glorify him. He is not richer because of our presentation since he originally gave the gift."

1 Tim 4:15 Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress.

While again this passage speaks more about Spiritual Gifts the context is true. God wants people to see His handiwork in us. He wants us to develop and use the talents we have received and to use them as ways to promote His Kingdom. There is a big difference between a Christian musician and a musician who is Christian. It is one thing to be talented and to claim you are a follower of Christ. It is another to understand the talent you have is a gift from God and to dedicate your life and talent to service for HIM. E.g. Academy Awards – thanking God first.

I once heard Steward Brisco talking about attending a small group. Everyone went around the room and introduced themselves, "Hi, my name is so-and-so and I am a so-and-so". They came to one man who said "My name is so-and-so and I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, cleverly disguised as a car mechanic"

5. My abilities BUILD UP THE CHURCH - recognizing the fruit

God also uses our abilities to build up the church. The church means the family of God.

Eph 4:11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up

When we use our Spiritual Gifts, the body is built up. The same is true of our natural abilities. When we use them in the body the church is built up. There is no talent that you have 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.

It is frustrating as a pastor to see when talent is wasted. I know every week people come to church and then leave without making a contribution with their God given abilities. When an individual fails to use their abilities, the result is that you get cheated, the church gets cheated, the world gets cheated.

There's a universal law of life that says if you don't use it, you lose it.

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. That's true in every area of life. 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. 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. How do you use your abilities the way God wants you to use them? You estimate, you dedicate and you cultivate.

a. ESTIMATE THEM

That means do an assessment of your life. What am I good at? Make a list of your abilities. What are your strengths? If you're going to be effective in the twenty-first century you've got to know your strengths and use them. Estimate your capabilities in light of the faith that God has given you.

Parents, this is one of the key goals of parenting. Help your kids understand their SHAPE, what they're good at. Most people grow up unaware of their abilities. They are aware of some but not most. You have far more abilities than you think you have. If you're a parent look for the abilities of your kids and point them out.

b. DEDICATE THEM

Dedicate them back to God. Commit them to God for the use He intended. God given abilities can be used for the wrong purpose. You can be a brilliant organizer and you can either organize a rescue or organize a robbery. There are all these brilliant criminals. Abilities can be used for selfish purposes. If you want a good example of this there's a guy in the Bible called Samson. He was one of the most talented people in the Bible but he wasted his life and wasted his abilities.

c. CULTIVATE THEM

Cultivate your abilities. That means you practice, improve, sharpen and develop them. Any ability that God has given you can be increased with use and practiced.

Eccl 10:10 If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed but skill will bring success.

Skill comes through practice. It is the same as sharpening an axe. A dull axe takes more energy. Sharpening your abilities makes them more effective. This is a spiritual responsibility.

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 into 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, to be an example? Did you use them to help other people? Did you use them to help the church? Did you use them to make money to give away? What did you do with what you were given?"

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 five ways that God intended.

A poor Scottish farmer by the name of Fleming was working in his field one day when he heard a cry coming from a nearby bog. Immediately he dropped his tools and rushed toward the sound of the cries. When he got to the bog, he saw a terrified young boy trying to fight his way out of the thick black muck, with very little success. Farmer Fleming waded into the bog, grabbed the young boy, and saved him from what would have been a slow and painful death. The next day, a fancy carriage pulled up to the Fleming's small, rundown farmhouse. An elegantly dressed nobleman stepped out and introduced himself as the father of the boy Farmer Fleming had saved. "I want to repay you," said the nobleman. "You saved my son's life." "No, I can't accept payment for what I did," Fleming replied.

At that moment, a young boy came to the door of the farmhouse. "Is that your son?" the nobleman asked. "Yes," replied the farmer. "I have a proposition for you," the nobleman continued. "Let me take your son with me and give him a good education. If the lad is anything like his father, he will grow to be a man you can be proud of." Knowing what an expensive education could mean for his son, Farmer Fleming accepted the offer.

In time, his son graduated from St. Mary's Hospital Medical School in London and became known throughout the world as Sir Alexander Fleming, the discoverer of penicillin. But that's not the end of the story. Many years later, that nobleman's son (who had been stuck in the bog years before) was stricken with pneumonia. His life was saved by...penicillin. The nobleman's name was Lord Randolf Churchill. His son's name was Winston Churchill.