

# What is in your hand?

*Ability, potential and gifting – an exploration!*

This paper is an introduction to this theme. Please do read it as that, and remember that this is the reflection on the theme, not an all-embracing statement. If you see something you are not sure about or disagree with, please do get in contact so we can discuss further.

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The topic of spiritual gifts is one that many people find difficult and troublesome. Even when the theory starts to make sense there is still the practical issue of knowing how this relates to the individual. We get stuck on a very simple question - "how does this apply to me?"

It is one thing to know that God has given each of us gifts and another to deal with the obvious problem of identifying those gifts.  
*Mattson, p37*

## **A. An example: Moses**

In Exodus chapter 3 we have the record of how Moses encountered God in a burning bush. From this encounter and conversation we can learn some important truths about Gifts and Calling.

### The importance of Timing

In the previous Chapter we have been told how Moses grew up in the Egyptian Court and how he had a concern for his own people, the Hebrews. In fact in Chapter 2 verse 14 we read how Moses was challenged as to his right to "rule" over the people. At that time Moses had run away in fear.

But in Chapter 3 the time has changed. Now it is God's time, and God instructs Moses to go back to lead the very same people.

### The importance of Surrendering your own ability

Notice in Chapter 4 verse 2 the question that is asked. What did Moses have in his hand? It was a staff / stick. Why? Because it was a tool of his trade: he was a shepherd. This was the same staff that was used to part the Red Sea and to bring water out of a rock. The shepherd who had led sheep round the desert, was to lead a "flock" of people round the same desert.

Our natural abilities and talents can be used by God only as we surrender them to God, as they become God's not ours.

### The importance of Divine Encounter

The transformation in Moses came about because of the encounter he had with God in the desert. The time at the burning bush was significant in changing his understanding of himself as a person and his purpose and destiny in life. Everyone needs that encounter with God where they hear from God what their purpose and destiny in life is all about.

Note chapter 3 verse 3, "I will go over and see this strange sight". God's appearing does not always come easy for us. It may require that we take a detour, go out of

our way, take some time out, so we can meet him. We may not understand it either: Moses did not understand what was happening until God explained it to him. So we need to be open to meet God in places we might not expect Him.

### The Importance of Divine Enabling

When God spoke to Moses he also equipped him for the task he was given. Moses was told how to perform miraculous signs, and when. This was a supernatural ability of God manifested through the person of Moses.

No matter how talented and gifted you may be, if you are to be effective in God's service there needs to be more. God wants to release His power through us, in a supernatural way.

### So what do we learn from Moses?

It is all about God and not about me. All my ability (or lack of) must be surrendered to God if I am to be useful to God. I must seek God's time, and God's empowering. All of this requires an encounter with the living God, something I must be open to, look for, and seek out. This is a spiritual encounter.

## **B. Natural Ability v Spiritual Endowment**

To many people there is much misunderstanding about the difference between our natural talents and abilities and the "supernatural" type gifting we read about in the Bible.

Psalm 139 tells us that God knows us, made us, and loves us. He created us as we are, in the full knowledge of all our physical strengths and weaknesses.

Jeremiah 1: 4-9, God tells Jeremiah that He made him and knows what he can and can't do!

If we are made by God, then every ability that came as part of our physical being, must come from God as well. So our ability to do certain things well is part of God's creation, it is from God himself. In one sense we can say that every good thing we can do is a gift from God.

The supernatural gifts we read about in 1 Corinthians appear to be different. And in one sense they are. 1 Corinthians 12: 7 tells us that these are a "manifestation of the Spirit". In other words, the Holy Spirit revealing Himself in and through us. The gifts talked about are given by the Holy Spirit, as He chooses (see verse 11).

In Romans 12:6-8 we have another description of various gifts and some of these are obviously Holy Spirit empowered, yet others could be natural abilities surrendered to the Holy Spirit for His use.

What can we conclude from this? First, any ability or gift that God calls you to use in His service must, first of all, be surrendered to Him, and under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Second, the Holy Spirit may give special abilities in addition to your natural abilities. In all cases, regardless of the gift, it should be surrendered to God and used under the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

NOTE: There is a danger in accepting a dualistic approach to life, which has its origin in Greek thinking not Hebraic. We must be careful not to separate the physical and the spiritual, seeing one as better than the other.

God intends mankind to live in an environment that he created, rather than an environment that is alien to God's purposes. The negative attitude to the material world stemming from both Greek and Hindu thought needs to be dispelled as we note that God himself sees his creation as "good".

*Gnanakan, p58*

### **C. What are my Gifts?**

You write that you are not very gifted. That does not matter. No one has so few gifts that he cannot be moved by God. What matters is that you use the gifts you *do* possess – that they are brought into movement by God. It is never a lack of gifts that is the problem, but a lack of readiness to be used by God.

*Arnold, p116*

Some questions for you to consider:

1. What have you already got?

This can apply to skills you have learnt (through college, university, employment etc), or experience gained through trying various activities.

2. What do others say?

In Galatians 2 verses 2 and 7-10 we see Paul consulting others about this gifting and ministry. We must avoid the danger of assuming we know the truth about ourselves and remember that "the heart is deceitful above all things" (Jer 17:9).

3. What do you want?

In 1 Corinthians 14 verse 1 we are told to "eagerly desire spiritual gifts". What is it that you desire? Remember Psalm 37 verse 4, "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart".

### **D. The Place to start**

In the notes above we have identified that an encounter with God, a surrendering to God, is the vital starting place in using our gifts and abilities for God. We have also noted the importance of being led by the Holy Spirit in the use of these gifts and abilities.

It seems only logical to point out that giving time for people to encounter God, to open up their lives to the Holy Spirit, to surrender again to God, is the place where we need to go.

This can include accepting God as your God, Jesus as your saviour – what we would call conversion.

This can include acknowledging you are not living how God wants you to live and choosing to turn back to God – what we would call rededication.

This can include the choice to open up your life afresh to God and invite the Holy Spirit to “manifest” His gifts in your life.

Or all of the above!

#### Bibliography

Arnold JH, *Discipleship* [Robertsbridge: Plough Publishing, 1994]

Gnanakan K, *Kingdom Concerns* [Leicester: IVP, 1993]

Mattson R, 'Identifying your gifts' p35-42, *The Career Starter Guide*, Ed. Alan McDonald [Leicester: Frameworks, 1990]

Please read the Kingsway statement on the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit. There is a reading list at the end of that paper.