



# Shaped for Serving God

*Your hands shaped me and made me.*

Job 10:8 (NIV)

*The people I have shaped for myself  
will broadcast my praises.*

Isaiah 43:21 (NJB)

You were shaped to serve God.

God formed every creature on this planet with a special area of expertise. Some animals run, some hop, some swim, some burrow, and some fly. Each has a particular role to play, based on the way they were shaped by God. The same is true with humans. Each of us was uniquely designed, or “*shaped*,” to do certain things.

Before architects design any new building they first ask, “What will be its purpose? How will it be used?” The intended function always determines the form of the building. Before God created you, he decided what role he wanted you to play on earth. He planned exactly how he wanted you to serve him, and then he shaped you for those tasks. You are the way you are because you were made for a specific ministry.

The Bible says, *“We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.”*<sup>1</sup> Our English word *poem* comes from the Greek word translated “workmanship.” You are God’s handcrafted work of art. You are not an assembly-line product, mass produced without thought. You are a custom-designed, one-of-a-kind, original masterpiece.

God deliberately shaped and formed you to serve him in a way that makes your ministry unique. He carefully mixed the DNA cocktail that created you. David

praised God for this incredible personal attention to detail: *“You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother’s womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous.”*<sup>2</sup> As Ethel Waters said, “God doesn’t make junk.”

Not only did God shape you before your birth, he planned every day of your life to support his shaping process. David continues, *“Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.”*<sup>3</sup> This means that nothing that happens in your life is insignificant. God uses *all of it* to mold you for your ministry to others and shape you for your service to him.

God never wastes anything. He would not give you abilities, interests, talents, gifts, personality, and life experiences unless he intended to use them for his glory. By identifying and understanding these factors you can discover God’s will for your life.

The Bible says you are *“wonderfully complex.”* You are a combination of many different factors. To help you remember five of these factors, I have created a simple acrostic: SHAPE. In this chapter and the next we will look at these five factors, and following that, I will explain how to discover and use your shape.



*God never wastes anything.*

## How God Shapes You for Your Ministry

Whenever God gives us an assignment, he always equips us with what we need to accomplish it. This custom combination of capabilities is called your SHAPE:

Spiritual gifts

Heart

Abilities

Personality

Experience

### SHAPE: Unwrapping Your *Spiritual Gifts*

God gives every believer spiritual gifts to be used in ministry.<sup>4</sup> These are special God-empowered abilities for serving him that are given only to believers. The Bible says, “*Whoever does not have the Spirit cannot receive the gifts that come from God’s Spirit.*”<sup>5</sup>

You can’t earn your spiritual gifts or deserve them—that’s why they are called *gifts*! They are an expression of God’s grace to you. “*Christ has generously divided out his gifts to us.*”<sup>6</sup> Neither do you get to choose which gifts you’d like to have; God determines that. Paul explained, “*It is the one and only Holy Spirit who distributes these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.*”<sup>7</sup>

Because God loves variety and he wants us to be special, no single gift is given to everyone.<sup>8</sup> Also, no individual receives *all* the gifts. If you had them all, you’d have no need of anyone else, and that would defeat one of God’s purposes—to teach us to love and depend on each other.

DAY THIRTY:  
SHAPED  
FOR  
SERVING  
GOD

Your spiritual gifts were not given for your own benefit but for the benefit of *others*, just as other people were given gifts for your benefit. The Bible says, “*A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church.*”<sup>9</sup> God planned it this way so we would need each

other. When we use our gifts together, we all benefit. If others don't use their gifts, you get cheated, and if you don't use your gifts, they get cheated. This is why we're commanded to discover and develop our spiritual gifts. Have you taken the time to discover your spiritual gifts? An unopened gift is worthless.

Whenever we forget these basic truths about gifts, it always causes trouble in the church. Two common problems are “*gift-envy*” and “*gift-projection*.” The first occurs when we compare our gifts with others', feel dissatisfied with what God gave us, and become resentful or jealous of how God uses others. The second problem happens when we expect everyone else to have our gifts, do what we are called to do, and feel as passionate about it as we do. The Bible says, “*There are different kinds of service in the church, but it is the same Lord we are serving.*”<sup>10</sup>



An unopened gift  
is worthless.



Sometimes spiritual gifts are overemphasized to the neglect of the other factors God uses to shape you for service. Your gifts reveal one *key to discovering* God's will for your ministry, but your spiritual gifts are not the total picture. God has shaped you in four other ways, too.

## SHAPE: Listening to Your *Heart*

The Bible uses the term *heart* to describe the bundle of desires, hopes, interests, ambitions, dreams, and affections you have. Your heart represents the source of all your motivations—what you love to do and what you care about most. Even today we still use the word in this way when we say, “*I love you with all my heart.*”

The Bible says, “*As a face is reflected in water, so the heart reflects the person.*”<sup>11</sup> Your heart reveals the *real* you—what you truly are, not what others *think* you are or what circumstances force you to be. Your heart determines why you *say* the things

you do, why you *feel* the way you do, and why you *act* the way you do.<sup>12</sup>

Physically, each of us has a unique heartbeat. Just as we each have unique thumbprints, eye prints, and voice prints, our hearts beat in slightly different patterns. It's amazing that out of all the billions of people who have ever lived, no one has had a heartbeat exactly like yours.

In the same way, God has given each of us a unique *emotional* "heartbeat" that races when we think about the subjects, activities, or circumstances that interest us. We instinctively care about some things and not about others. These are clues to where you should be serving.

Another word for heart is *passion*. There are certain subjects you feel passionate about and others you couldn't care less about. Some experiences turn you on and capture your attention while others turn you off or bore you to tears. These reveal the nature of your heart.

When you were growing up, you may have discovered that you were intensely interested in some subjects that no one else in your family cared about. Where did those interests come from? They

came from God. God had a purpose in giving you these inborn interests. Your emotional heartbeat is the second key to understanding your shape for service.

Don't ignore your interests. Consider how they might be used for God's glory. There is a reason that you love to do these things.

Repeatedly the Bible says to "*serve the Lord with all your heart.*"<sup>13</sup> God wants you to serve him passionately, not dutifully. People rarely excel at tasks they don't enjoy doing or feel passionate about. God wants you to use your natural interests to serve him and others. Listening for inner promptings can point to the ministry God intends for you to have.

How do you know when you are serving God from your heart? The first telltale sign is *enthusiasm*. When you are doing what you

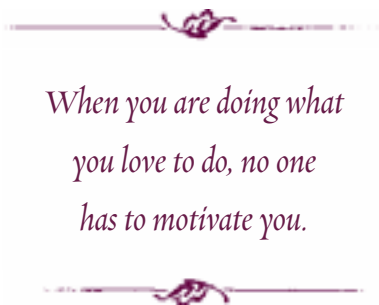


*love* to do, no one has to motivate you or challenge you or check up on you. You do it for the sheer enjoyment. You don't need rewards or applause or payment, because you love serving in this way. The opposite is also true: When you don't have a heart for what you're doing, you are easily discouraged.

The second characteristic of serving God from your heart is *effectiveness*. Whenever you do what God wired you to *love* to do, you get good at it. Passion drives perfection. If you don't care about a task, it is unlikely that you will excel at it. In contrast, the highest achievers in any field are those who do it because of passion, not duty or profit.

We have all heard people say, "I took a job I hate in order to make a lot of money, so someday I can quit and do what I love to do." That's a big mistake. Don't waste your life in a job that doesn't express your heart. Remember, the greatest things in life are not *things*. Meaning is far more important than money. The richest man in the world once said, "*A simple life in the fear-of-God is better than a rich life with a ton of headaches.*"<sup>14</sup>

Don't settle for just achieving "the good life," because the good life is not good enough. Ultimately it doesn't satisfy. You can have a lot to live *on* and still have nothing to live *for*. Aim instead for "*the better life*"—serving God in a way that expresses your heart. Figure out what you love to do—what God gave you a heart to do—and then do it for his glory.



*When you are doing what  
you love to do, no one  
has to motivate you.*

Day Thirty  
Thinking about My Purpose

**Point to Ponder:** I was shaped for serving God.

**Verse to Remember:** *“God works through different men in different ways, but it is the same God who achieves his purposes through them all.”*

1 Corinthians 12:6 (Ph)

**Question to Consider:** In what way can I see myself passionately serving others and loving it?



# Understanding Your Shape

*You shaped me first inside, then out;  
you formed me in my mother's womb.*

Psalm 139:13 (Msg)

Only you can be you.

God designed each of us so there would be no duplication in the world. No one has the exact same mix of factors that make you unique. That means no one else on earth will ever be able to play the role God planned for you. If you don't make your unique contribution to the Body of Christ, it won't be made. The Bible says, *"There are different kinds of spiritual gifts . . . different ways of serving . . . [and] different abilities to perform service."*<sup>1</sup> In the last chapter we looked at the first two of these: your spiritual gifts and your heart. Now we will look at the rest of your SHAPE for serving God.

## SHAPE: Applying Your *Abilities*

Your abilities are the natural talents you were born with. Some people have a natural ability with words: They came out of the



womb talking! Other people have natural athletic abilities, excelling in physical coordination. Still others are good at mathematics or music or mechanics.

When God wanted to create the Tabernacle and all the utensils for worship, he provided artists and craftsmen who were shaped with the *“skill, ability, and knowledge in all kinds of crafts to make artistic designs . . . and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship.”*<sup>2</sup> Today God still bestows these abilities and thousands of others, so people can serve him.

**All of our abilities come from God.** Even abilities used to sin are God-given; they are just being misused or abused. The Bible says, *“God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well.”*<sup>3</sup> Since your natural abilities are from God, they are just as important and as “spiritual” as your spiritual gifts. The only difference is that you were given them at birth.

One of the most common excuses people give for not serving is “I just don’t have any abilities to offer.” This is ludicrous. You have dozens, probably hundreds, of untapped, unrecognized, and unused abilities that are lying dormant inside you. Many studies have revealed that the average person possesses from 500 to 700 different skills and abilities—far more than you realize.

For instance, your brain can store 100 trillion facts. Your mind can handle 15,000 decisions a second, as is the case when your digestive system is working. Your nose can smell up to 10,000 different odors. Your touch can detect an item 1/25,000th of an inch thick, and your tongue can taste one part of quinine in 2 million parts of water. You are a bundle of incredible abilities, an amazing creation of God. Part of the church’s responsibility is to identify and release your abilities for serving God.

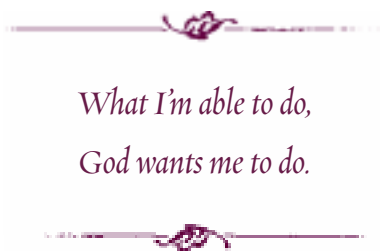
**Every ability can be used for God’s glory.** Paul said, *“Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”*<sup>4</sup> The Bible is filled with examples of different abilities that God uses for his glory. Here are just a few of those mentioned in Scripture: artistic ability, architectural ability, administering, baking, boat making,

candy making, debating, designing, embalming, embroidering, engraving, farming, fishing, gardening, leading, managing, masonry, making music, making weapons, needle work, painting, planting, philosophizing, machinability, inventing, carpentry, sailing, selling, being a soldier, tailoring, teaching, writing literature and poetry. The Bible says, *“There are different abilities to perform service, but the same God gives ability to all for their particular service.”*<sup>5</sup> God has a place in his church where your specialties can shine and you can make a difference. It’s up to you to find that place.

God gives some people the ability to make a lot of money. Moses told the Israelites, *“Remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.”*<sup>6</sup> People with this ability are good at building a business, making deals or sales, and reaping a profit. If you have this business ability, you should be using it for God’s glory. How? First, realize your ability came from God and give him the credit. Second, use your business to serve a need of others and to share your faith with unbelievers. Third, return at least a tithe (10 percent) of the profit to God as an act of worship.<sup>7</sup> Finally, make your goal to be a *Kingdom Builder* rather than just a *Wealth Builder*. I will explain this in chapter 34.

**What I’m able to do, God wants me to do.** You are the only person on earth who can use your abilities. No one else can play your role, because they don’t have the unique shape that God has given you. The Bible says that God equips you *“with all you need for doing his will.”*<sup>8</sup> To discover God’s will for your life, you should seriously examine what you are good at doing and what you’re not good at.

If God hasn’t given you the ability to carry a tune, he isn’t going to expect you to be an opera singer. God will never ask you



to dedicate your life to a task you have no talent for. On the other hand, the abilities you *do* have are a strong indication of what God wants you to do with your life. They are clues to knowing God's will for you. If you're good at designing or recruiting or drawing or organizing, it is a safe assumption that God's plan for your life includes that skill somehow. God doesn't waste abilities; he matches our calling and our capabilities.

DAY THIRTY-ONE:  
UNDERSTANDING  
YOUR SHAPE

Your abilities were not given just to make a living; God gave them to you for your ministry. Peter said, "*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.*"<sup>9</sup>

At this writing, nearly 7,000 people are using their abilities in ministry at Saddleback Church, providing every kind of service you could imagine: repairing donated cars to be given to the needy; finding the best deal for church purchases; landscaping; organizing files; designing art, programs, and buildings; providing health care; preparing meals; composing songs; teaching music; writing grant proposals; coaching teams; doing research for sermons or translating them; and hundreds of other specialized tasks. New members are told, "Whatever you're good at, you should be doing for your church!"

### SHAPE: Using Your *Personality*

We don't realize how truly unique each of us is. DNA molecules can unite in an infinite number of ways. The number is 10 to the 2,400,000,000th power. That number is the likelihood that you'd ever find somebody just like you. If you were to write out that number with each zero being one inch wide, you'd need a strip of paper 37,000 miles long!

To put this in perspective, some scientists have guessed that all the particles in the universe are probably less than 10 with 76 zeros behind it, far less than the possibilities of your DNA. Your

uniqueness is a scientific fact of life. When God made you, he broke the mold. There never has been, and never will be, anybody exactly like you.

It is obvious that God loves variety—just look around! He created each of us with a unique combination of personality traits. God made *introverts* and *extroverts*. He made people who love *routine* and those who love *variety*. He made some people “*thinkers*” and others “*feelers*.” Some people work best when given an individual assignment while others work better with a team. The Bible says, “*God works through different people in different ways, but it is the same God who achieves his purpose through them all.*”<sup>10</sup>

The Bible gives us plenty of proof that God uses all types of personalities. Peter was a *sanguine*. Paul was a *choleric*. Jeremiah was a *melancholy*. When you look at the personality differences in the twelve disciples, it’s easy to see why they sometimes had interpersonal conflict.

There is no “right” or “wrong” temperament for ministry. We need all kinds of personalities to balance the church and give it flavor. The world would be a very boring place if we were all plain vanilla. Fortunately, people come in more than thirty-one flavors.



Your personality will affect *how* and *where* you use your spiritual gifts and abilities. For instance, two people may have the same gift of evangelism, but if one is introverted and the other is extroverted, that gift will be expressed in different ways.

Woodworkers know that it’s easier to work with the grain rather than against it. In the same way, when you are forced to minister in a manner that is “out of character” for your temperament, it creates tension and discomfort, requires extra effort and energy, and produces less than the best results. This is why mimicking someone else’s ministry never works. You don’t have *their* personality. Besides, God made you to be you! You can *learn* from the examples of others, but you must filter what you

learn through your own *shape*. Today there are many books and tools that can help you understand your personality so you can determine how to use it for God.

Like stained glass, our different personalities reflect God's light in many colors and patterns. This blesses the family of God with depth and variety. It also blesses us personally. It *feels good* to do what God made you to do. When you minister in a manner consistent with the personality God gave you, you experience fulfillment, satisfaction, and fruitfulness.

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*It feels good to do what  
God made you to do.*

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## SHAPE: Employing Your *Experiences*

You have been shaped by your experiences in life, most of which were beyond your control. God allowed them for his purpose of molding you.<sup>11</sup> In determining your shape for serving God, you should examine at least six kinds of experiences from your past:

- *Family* experiences: What did you learn growing up in your family?
- *Educational* experiences: What were your favorite subjects in school?
- *Vocational* experiences: What jobs have you been most effective in and enjoyed most?
- *Spiritual* experiences: What have been your most meaningful times with God?
- *Ministry* experiences: How have you served God in the past?
- *Painful* experiences: What problems, hurts, thorns, and trials have you learned from?

It is this last category, *painful* experiences, that God uses the most to prepare you for ministry. *God never wastes a hurt!* In fact, your *greatest* ministry will most likely come out of your greatest

hurt. Who could better minister to the parents of a Down syndrome child than another couple who have a child afflicted in the same way? Who could better help an alcoholic recover than someone who fought that demon and found freedom? Who could better comfort a wife whose husband has left her for an affair than a woman who went through that agony herself?

God intentionally allows you to go through painful experiences to equip you for ministry to others. The Bible says, *“He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When others are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.”*<sup>12</sup>

If you really desire to be used by God, you *must* understand a powerful truth: The very experiences that you have resented or regretted most in life—the ones you’ve wanted to hide and forget—are the experiences God wants to use to help others. They *are* your ministry!

For God to use your painful experiences, you must be willing to share them. You have to stop covering them up, and you must honestly admit your faults, failures, and fears. Doing this will probably be your most effective ministry. People are always more encouraged when we share how God’s grace helped us in weakness than when we brag about our strengths.

Paul understood this truth, so he was honest about his bouts with depression. He admitted, *“I think you ought to know, dear brothers, about the hard time we went through in Asia. We were really crushed and overwhelmed, and feared we would never live through it. We felt we were doomed to die and saw how powerless we were to help ourselves; but that was good, for then we put everything into the hands of God, who alone could save us, for he can even raise the dead. And he did help us and saved us from a terrible death; yes, and we expect him to do it again and again.”*<sup>13</sup>



*For God to use your  
painful experiences, you must  
be willing to share them.*



If Paul had kept his experience of doubt and depression a secret, millions of people would never have benefited from it. Only shared experiences can help others. Aldous Huxley said, “Experience is not what happens to you. It is what you do with what happens to you.” What will you do with what you’ve been through? Don’t waste your pain; use it to help others.

As we’ve looked at these five ways God has shaped you for service, I hope you have a deeper appreciation for God’s sovereignty and a clearer idea of how he has prepared you for the purpose of serving him. Using your shape is the secret of both fruitfulness and fulfillment in ministry.<sup>14</sup> You will be most effective when you use your *spiritual gifts* and *abilities* in the area of your *heart’s desire*, and in a way that best expresses your *personality* and *experiences*. The better the fit, the more successful you will be.

Day Thirty-one  
Thinking about My Purpose

**Point to Ponder:** Nobody else can be me.

**Verse to Remember:** *“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)

**Question to Consider:** What God-given ability or personal experience can I offer to my church?

# Using What God Gave You

*Since we find ourselves fashioned into  
all these excellently formed and marvelously  
functioning parts in Christ's body, let's just  
go ahead and be what we were made to be.*

Romans 12:5 (Msg)

*What you are is God's gift to you;  
what you do with yourself is your gift to God.*

Danish proverb

God deserves your best.

He shaped you for a purpose, and he expects you to make the most of what you have been given. He doesn't want you to worry about or covet abilities you don't have. Instead he wants you to focus on talents he has given you to use.

When you attempt to serve God in ways you're not shaped to serve, it feels like forcing a square peg into a round hole. It's frustrating and produces limited results. It also wastes your time, your talent, and your energy. The best use of your life is to serve God out of your shape. To do this you must discover your shape, learn to accept and enjoy it, and then develop it to its fullest potential.



## Discover Your Shape

The Bible says, “*Don’t act thoughtlessly, but try to find out and do whatever the Lord wants you to.*”<sup>1</sup> Don’t let another day go by. Start finding out and clarifying what God intends for you to be and do.

**Begin by assessing your gifts and abilities.** Take a long, honest look at what you are good at and what you’re not good at. Paul advised, “*Try to have a sane estimate of your capabilities.*”<sup>2</sup> Make a list. Ask other people for their candid opinion. Tell them you’re searching for the truth, not fishing for a compliment. Spiritual gifts and natural abilities are always confirmed by others. If you think you are gifted to be a teacher or a singer and no one else agrees, guess what? If you want to know if you have the gift of leadership, just look over your shoulder! If no one is following you, you’re not a leader.

Ask questions like these: Where have I seen fruit in my life *that other people confirmed*? Where have I already been successful?

Spiritual gift tests and ability inventories can have some value, but they are limited in their usefulness.

In the first place, they are standardized, so they don’t take into account your uniqueness. Second, there are no definitions of the spiritual gifts given in the Bible,

so any definitions are arbitrary and usually represent a denominational bias. Another problem is that the more mature you become, the more likely you are to manifest the characteristics of a number of the gifts. You may be serving or teaching or giving generously out of maturity rather than because it is your spiritual gift.

The best way to discover your gifts and abilities is to *experiment* with different areas of service. I could have taken a hundred gift and ability tests as a young man and would have never discovered that I was gifted at teaching because I had never done it! It was only *after* I began accepting opportunities to speak that I saw the



results, received confirmation from others, and realized, “God has gifted me to do this!”

Many books get the discovery process backwards. They say, “Discover your spiritual gift and then you’ll know what ministry you’re supposed to have.” It actually works the exact opposite way. Just start serving, experimenting with different ministries, and then you’ll discover your gifts.


Until you’re actually involved in serving, you’re not going to know what you’re good at.

You have dozens of hidden abilities and gifts you don’t know you’ve got because you’ve never tried them out. So I encourage you to try doing some things you’ve never done before. No matter how old you are, I urge you to never stop experimenting. I have met many people who discovered hidden talents in their seventies and eighties. I know a woman in her nineties who runs and wins 10K races and didn’t discover that she enjoyed running until she was seventy-eight!

Don’t try to figure out your gifts before volunteering to serve somewhere. Just start serving. You discover your gifts by getting involved in ministry. Try teaching or leading or organizing or playing an instrument or working with teenagers. You will never know what you’re good at until you try. When it doesn’t work out, call it an “experiment,” not a failure. You will eventually learn what you’re good at.

**Consider your heart and your personality.** Paul advised, “*Make a careful exploration of who you are and the work you have been given, and then sink yourself into that.*”<sup>3</sup> Again, it helps to get feedback from those who know you best. Ask yourself questions: What do I really enjoy doing most? When do I feel the most fully alive? What am I doing when I lose track of time? Do I like routine or variety? Do I prefer serving with a team or by myself? Am I more introverted or extroverted? Am I

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*You will never know what you’re  
good at until you try.*



more a thinker or a feeler? Which do I enjoy more—competing or cooperating?

**Examine your experiences and extract the lessons you have learned.** Review your life and think about how it has shaped you. Moses told the Israelites, *“Remember today what you have learned about the Lord through your experiences with him.”*<sup>4</sup> Forgotten experiences are worthless; that’s a good reason to keep a spiritual journal. Paul worried that the believers in Galatia would waste the pain they had been through. He said, *“Were all your experiences wasted? I hope not!”*<sup>5</sup>

We rarely see God’s good purpose in pain or failure or embarrassment while it is happening. When Jesus washed Peter’s feet, he said, *“You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”*<sup>6</sup> Only in hindsight do we understand how God intended a problem for good.

Extracting the lessons from your experiences takes time. I recommend that you take an entire weekend for a *life review retreat*, where you pause to see how God has worked in the various defining moments of your life and consider how he wants to use those lessons to help others. There are resources that can help you do this.<sup>7</sup>

## Accept and Enjoy Your Shape

Since God knows what’s best for you, you should gratefully accept the way he has fashioned you. The Bible says, *“What right have you, a human being, to cross-examine God? The pot has no right to say to the potter: ‘Why did you make me this shape?’ Surely a potter can do what he likes with the clay!”*<sup>8</sup>

Your shape was sovereignly determined by God for *his* purpose, so you shouldn’t resent it or reject it. Instead of trying to reshape yourself to be like someone else, you should celebrate the shape God has given only to you. *“Christ has given each of us special abilities—whatever he wants us to have out of his rich storehouse of gifts.”*<sup>9</sup>

Part of accepting your shape is recognizing your limitations. Nobody is good at everything, and no one is called to be everything. We all have defined roles. Paul understood that his calling was not to accomplish everything or please everyone but to focus only on the particular ministry God had shaped him for.<sup>10</sup> He said, *“Our goal is to stay within the boundaries of God’s plan for us.”*<sup>11</sup>


The word *boundaries* refers to the fact that God assigns each of us a field or sphere of service. Your shape determines your specialty. When we try to overextend our ministry reach beyond what God shaped us for, we experience stress. Just as each runner in a race is given a different lane to run in, we must individually *“run with patience the particular race that God has set before us.”*<sup>12</sup> Don’t be envious of the runner in the lane next to you; just focus on finishing *your* race.

God wants you to enjoy using the shape he has given you. The Bible says, *“Be sure to do what you should, for then you will enjoy the personal satisfaction of having done your work well, and you won’t need to compare yourself to anyone else.”*<sup>13</sup> Satan will try to steal the joy of service from you in a couple of ways: by tempting you to *compare* your ministry with others, and by tempting you to *conform* your ministry to the expectations of others. Both are deadly traps that will distract you from serving in the ways God intended. Whenever you lose your joy in ministry, start by considering if either one of these temptations is the cause.

The Bible warns us never to compare ourselves with others: *“Do your own work well, and then you will have something to be proud of. But don’t compare yourself with others.”*<sup>14</sup>


There are two reasons why you should never compare your shape, ministry, or the results of your ministry with anyone else. First, you will always be able to find someone who seems to

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*God wants you to enjoy using  
the shape he has given you.*

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be doing a better job than you and you will become discouraged. Or you will always be able to find someone who doesn't seem as effective as you and you will get full of pride. Either attitude will take you out of service and rob you of your joy.

Paul said it is foolish to compare ourselves with others. He said, "*We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves*

*and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.*"<sup>15</sup> The Message paraphrase says, "*In all this comparing and grading and competing, they quite miss the point.*"<sup>16</sup>

DAY THIRTY-TWO:  
USING WHAT  
GOD GAVE  
YOU

You will find that people who do not understand your shape for ministry will criticize you and try to get you to conform to what *they* think you should be doing. Ignore them. Paul often had to deal with critics who misunderstood and maligned his service. His response was always the same: Avoid comparisons, resist exaggerations, and seek only God's commendation.<sup>17</sup>

One of the reasons Paul was used so greatly by God was that he refused to be distracted by criticism or by comparing his ministry with others or by being drawn into fruitless debates about his ministry. As John Bunyan said, "If my life is fruitless, it doesn't matter who praises me, and if my life is fruitful, it doesn't matter who criticizes me."

## Keep Developing your Shape

Jesus' parable of the talents illustrates that God expects us to make the most of what he gives us. We are to cultivate our gifts and abilities, keep our hearts aflame, grow our character and personality, and broaden our experiences so we will be increasingly more effective in our service. Paul told the Philippians to "*keep on growing in your knowledge and understanding,*"<sup>18</sup> and he reminded Timothy, "*Kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you.*"<sup>19</sup>

If you don't exercise your muscles, they weaken and atrophy. In the same way, if you don't utilize the abilities and skills God has given you, you will lose them. Jesus taught the parable of the talents to emphasize this truth. Referring to the servant who failed to use his one talent, the master said, *"Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents."*<sup>20</sup> Fail to use what you've been given and you'll lose it. Use the ability you've got and God will increase it. Paul told Timothy, *"Be sure to use the abilities God has given you. . . . Put these abilities to work."*<sup>21</sup>

Whatever gifts you have been given can be enlarged and developed through practice. For instance, no one gets the gift of teaching fully developed. But with study, feedback, and practice, a "good" teacher can become a *better* teacher, and with time, grow to be a *master* teacher. Don't settle for a half-developed gift. Stretch yourself and learn all you can. *"Concentrate on doing your best for God, work you won't be ashamed of."*<sup>22</sup> Take advantage of every training opportunity to develop your shape and sharpen your serving skills.

In heaven we are going to serve God forever. Right now, we can prepare for that eternal service by practicing on earth. Like athletes preparing for the Olympics, we keep training for that big day: *"They do it for a gold medal that tarnishes and fades. You're after one that's gold eternally."*<sup>23</sup>

We're getting ready for *eternal* responsibilities and rewards.



Day Thirty-two  
Thinking about My Purpose

**Point to Ponder:** God deserves my best.

**Verse to Remember:** *“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”*

2 Timothy 2:15 (NIV)

**Question to Consider:** How can I make the best use of what God has given me?