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Presentation Transcript
Unlocking Your Full Potential – What Is Your Gift?
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March 6, 2014

Today we're continuing our series called *Unlocking Your Full Potential*. This one is the fifth in the series. Please remember that in the first presentation of this series, we said that unlocking our full potential was about asking the right questions.

There's an old joke – actually, it's an old, old joke – and I'm not telling it to you because it's funny or because you've never heard it before. I'm telling it to make a point. A man was thinning out the woodlands on his farm by cutting down the trees with an ax. His neighbor happened by and said, "That would go a lot faster if you'd buy a chain saw. So he went to the hardware store and he bought one. Three days later he returned it to the store and told the clerk that the saw was not a good tool. And he said, "I can cut wood much faster with my ax than with this saw." And the clerk said, "Well, let's see what's going on," and he pulled the starter cord and the saw immediately roared to life. And the farmer, with an alarmed look on his face, asked, "What's that noise?" So once he learned the answer to that question, it changed everything. Picture him cutting down trees with a chain saw that isn't running. Once he knew how to use the saw, it was the best thing he'd ever seen for cutting wood.

Many people today are just like that when it comes to their full potential. They struggle through life without pulling the starter cord or even knowing that they have one. They work, work, work, never understanding what they're for, and how they work, and what would truly fulfill them and add satisfaction to their lives. They work on unfulfilling things for unfulfilling goals. Of course, all this has to do with God and the purpose of our existence. So we have six questions to answer: Why were you born? What is your purpose? And how did God call you? That's two. What earthly mission has God assigned you? What is your gift or what resources has God provided you for your mission? That's the one we're working on today. What is your gift and the other resources to fulfill your mission?

The Bible teaches us that, when a person is converted, he or she, by the Holy Spirit, is given a special gift so that he or she can make a contribution to the church. We all have a way to fit into the church. And we are each important to the church. And we are each a unique being expressing our gift from God in a unique way. And that way is just what's needed. But that's not all. We also have talents and capabilities that we've had from birth. And we have, along the way, developed them in ways unique to us, making them even more special. We bring those gifts with us as well when we come to God.

Let's go to Ephesians 4:4 for a minute. It says:

Ephesians 4:4 – *There's one body, one Spirit, just as you are called into one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all. But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "When He ascended up on high, He led a host of captives and gave gifts to men."*

While there's one Father, and one Son and one Spirit, there's also a diversity of gifts distributed to God's people by the Holy Spirit. That's what it says. What's yours? Let's read more about it – 1 Corinthians 12:4.

1 Corinthians 12:4 – *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are varieties of service, but the same Lord. And there are varieties of activities, but it's the same God who empowers them all in everyone. Sound familiar? He's just saying again what he said before. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good – the common good – not to promote ourselves, but to benefit everybody. For to one is given, through the Spirit, the utterance of wisdom. It's always nice to have somebody that's wise on your planning committee, isn't it? And to another, the utterance of knowledge, according to the same Spirit.... I know this man that knows so much about the Bible. When he comes to a Bible study, he really adds to it, because he knows so much about it. He has knowledge. There are gifts that enable us to be good at various activities, in other words.*

Here's again the same thing in different words – Romans 12:4.

Romans 12:4 – *For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members of one another – since we're all a part of one body, but separate.*

So, each of us has a unique function in the body. And each of us comes to the church with a unique gift to use for a special function that God has assigned us. And unless we are functioning in our place – our mission in the body – we will never experience our full potential. I'm going to give you some examples of that, but a bit later. Of course, the trick here is to learn what our mission in the church is and to know what gifts, or resources, we

have to do our work. Otherwise, we will be like the guy cutting wood with an ax when he had a chain saw – or cutting wood with a chain saw without pulling the rip cord. Here's what the Bible has to say about it in 1 Corinthians 12:14.

1 Corinthians 12:14 – *For the body does not consist of one member, but many. If the foot should say, "Because I'm not a hand, I do not belong in the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I'm not an eye, I do not belong in the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. You know, sometimes we feel sorry for ourselves because we don't have the gifts other people have, and we think, "You know, I just don't fit in and I don't belong." Nonsense! Just because you don't know what your gift is, doesn't mean you're not a part of the body. It just means you don't know what you're supposed to be doing to fit in yet. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them as He chose. So, you're where you are because He put you there. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor, again, the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."*

You know that person you don't like very much that comes to church? She's in the body in the same way you are. And you know that person you think is a pain? Well, he's in the body the same way you are. You're all vital. We all are.

Continuing in verse 22 of 1 Corinthians 12:

V-12 – *On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. And on those parts of the body that we think less honorable, we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacks it, that there may be no division in the body, but that members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together. And, if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Do you ever get jealous because some people are ordained or they're given some kind of recognition and you're not? It's kind of sad, isn't it?*

I was talking to a lady in my private counseling practice some time ago who worked very hard, and saved up her money. And to treat herself for what she'd accomplished in her work, she bought herself a candy apple red Lexus IS250. She told me she was afraid to drive it to her parents' house, where her parents and siblings would see it, because she knew that they would give her a bad time about it. And she said, "I haven't figured out how to think about that." And I said, "Well, you know, if we love somebody, when good stuff happens to them, we're happy for them." And she looked at me, and she said, "That's right. When my kids get good things, I'm happy for them. So why don't my parents rejoice when

I have something good?” And I said, “Well, I think you probably know the answer to that.” Long story. Sad story.

But this passage... I just love it, because it shows us why and how we ought to respect and love each other. I think we shouldn't assume things about people. If they're in the body, then they have a place. I think it's pretty great that God, in His love for each of us, has graciously provided us each a place in the church and a unique skill set with which to be successful, but also to have a place in the body with all the other unique parts – to belong. When we use our God-given gifts to fulfill our God-given mission, we start to approach our full potential in this life.

Let's look now at some examples of spiritual gifts in the Bible. 1 Corinthians 12:27.

1 Corinthians 12:27 – *Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first, apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers; then miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? Well, the answer to all those questions is, “No.”*

There are eyes, ears, noses, mouths, feet, etc. Notice some of the gifts that are given by the Spirit. One skill set – an ordination – was given to an apostle. We don't have any of them left, because they were all the eye witnesses of Jesus. Information delivered from God to be delivered – that's a gift. That's a prophet. Paul said Jesus was through speaking to us directly for the time being – he said that in Hebrews 1:1 – so I don't have to worry about being a prophet and neither do you. Gifts of tongues were given when it was needed in the ancient world to spread the Word, but I doubt it would be needed very much now. Did you know that my phone can translate English into any language or any language into English? If God felt the gift of tongues or interpretation was needed today, however, I'm sure He would provide it again. And He would provide it to individuals. There are gifted teachers and administrators, both of which we desperately need in the church. Some people are gifted with healing. Others *think* they are and muck it up.

Do you know how you learn if you have a gift? It's not what *you* think or what *you* would like. Your gift is not about you. We already read that. It's about God. And when a lot of other brethren tell you that you've been a blessing to them, then you might begin to suspect that you've been given a gift. It's not about what we *want* to do. It's what gift we're given. But I will say that, usually, when God gives us a gift, it's really fun to use it, because we excel at it. I'll give you an example of what I think is a gift that I can see.

My wife, Elaine, sends out cards to people she doesn't know who are sick or in trial. She sometimes lets me read them before she mails them. And I look at them, and I say, “Well, that's really nice, Hon.” And they seem really sweet and caring to me. But I've noticed that

when she gets responses back from those she has written – and she gets a lot of them – they don't say, "That's sweet." They say, "Your words helped me. Your words strengthened me. Your words inspired me. Your words comforted me so much." Do you know how that happens? Well, we were talking about that recently, and she mentioned that she doesn't know what to say, so she asks God to provide the right words for each person's situation, and then she sits down and starts writing her cards. And He answers. I think that's her gift – or one of them. I don't have that gift. I have to know a person before I can be helpful. Nobody writes me back and says, "That really inspired me," when I send them a get-well card. But they do when she writes them.

What other gifts are mentioned in the Bible? Romans 12:5.

Romans 12:5 – *So we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another, having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us. Let us use them – if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.* Some of the previous gifts are mentioned here, but there are some new ones, like service and exhortation, contribution, leadership and mercy.

I looked up a couple of these words. The word for *exhort*, in Louw-Nida – *to cause someone to be encouraged or consoled*. So *exhortation* kind of has a strong sound to it, where we're really telling people how it is, but this really means to be encouraged or consoled by verbal or non-verbal means – *to encourage, to console; encouragement*. That's the literal meaning of it according to Louw-Nida. It's a gift! Barnabas was known for the gift of encouragement. How did he do it? Well, there are two things I see about him. He had good judgment and he was non-judgmental. When he went to Antioch to see what was going on – remember, the apostles sent him, because they heard a people – members – unordained people – were actually preaching – and not to Jews, but to Gentiles. And that was something that hadn't been done before – at least, in any measure. So he went to Antioch to see what was going on there. And he saw the members preaching the gospel to Gentiles, and, instead of saying, "Stop that right now. You don't have permission," he said, "I see that the Holy Spirit has opened another door." Wow! How do you think the brethren felt about that? They were seeing people become converted – a people outside of their own culture – so, an amazing thing for them.

Another word there is *leads*. From Louw-Nida: *to influence others as to cause them to follow a recommended course of action; to guide; to direct; to lead. He who takes the lead – now he's quoting Jesus – must be like the one who serves; or he who is the master must be like the one who serves*. So it's about setting a good example. Anybody can be a leader in the Church of God. All you have to do is know the right thing to do and do it. And people who want to do the right thing will recognize it and follow. So the Bible definition of leadership is to know what to do and do it – set a good example – lead the way in

following God. In the Bible, it's not those who preach about it, teach about it, talk about it, sing about it, but those who *do* it. They're leading the way. In fact, the Bible qualification in the scripture, clearly laid out, for a teacher or a preacher is one who sets an example of obedience.

So, it can be a gift to be a good example, to be enthusiastic, to be committed, to be generous, to be contributing, and to be merciful. But let's just stop for a minute and look at that one – mercy. It says we have to be cheerful when we extend mercy in the body of Christ. Do you know what that means? Why is cheerfulness linked with mercy there? Well, think about the other part of the body that you think is extremely narcissistic, for example. They think that, because they like to sing, everyone likes to listen to them. Or, they're always trying to promote themselves as a singer. Or, that person who wants to preach and, therefore, has turned a deaf ear to all the negative feedback he's received about his preaching. Yet, the Bible tells us that they have a place in the church. They just may not have found it yet. It's just that they church hasn't rubbed off the rough edges yet. So we have to be cheerful while continuing to give accurate feedback with respect and love to that person. You know, the ones that we kind of get under saddle, it's really hard to be cheerful with them as we extend mercy. It's hard to extend mercy, for that matter, but some people have a gift for it – to have patience for other people's faults, just as God is patient with all the faults we have that we don't see yet. You know, it says we're going to be judged like we judge, so we might all covet that gift.

Let's look now at other resources we may have at our disposal to fulfill our mission – resources *beside* the gift God has given us.

I watched a movie yesterday called *Fat, Sick and Almost Dead*. It's about an Australian guy named Joe, who was way overweight and who had a serious autoimmune situation going on. He had a rash all over himself. And he was on a whole bucket list of drugs for it – very potent drugs. And he decided to do something about it. He found a doctor that would supervise a juice fast. He went to America – a place he really liked to be – and he started a sixty day fast, in which he drank only the juice of fresh organic fruits or vegetables, as in having a battery-operated juicer in the back of his car. He felt really bad for a few days while he detoxed, and then his energy began to grow, and his weight began to drop, and his disease began to abate. Somewhere on his trip across the United States, he met a truck driver who had the same autoimmune disease he had. He told this man, whose name was Phil, what he was doing. And he told Phil that, if he ever wanted help to try what he was doing, to let him know. Well, Joe finished his fast, lost ninety pounds – or something like that – and then he went back to Australia. Sometime after he's returned and gotten back into his life, he got a call from Phil, who was depressed and wanting to start on the juice thing. Phil reminded him that he had promised to help. So Joe flew back to the United States and set Phil up at a resort by a lake for a ten day juice fast – at least...it doesn't really say he set him up, but I don't think Phil had the money to do that, but Joe did. So where did the money come from for all that? Well, earlier in the movie, Joe

mentioned that he made a truckload of money in commodities. So, sometimes, money can be a resource – not that we just give it away, but that we use it as leverage to help people *move*.

You know, I have a graduate degree in counseling. That's a resource. I know a man who has worked in TV. He uses his skill to produce excellent TV programs for his church. His experience is a resource. I've seen men in the church rebuild widows' homes and do all kinds of work projects – pour concrete, finished tile. Those are all skills. And we think those are kind of just what people do to make a living. They can all be put to a spiritual purpose. So, you know, our experience our experience is a resource.

I heard of a lady, once, who made really great pies. So she started bringing them to church potlucks and encouraged everybody. I know a man who, when he sings at church, he draws people closer emotionally to Christ – his voice, his personality, his past experience – they're all resources.

What are your resources? What can you do to help your congregation and God? Maybe your mission and your spiritual gifts are right there somewhere. Let's just think about all of that for a minute. I think I mentioned a man named Viktor Frankl, who wrote a book after he got out of a German concentration camp in World War II. It was called *Man's Search for Meaning*. He said his purpose in life – that he detected while he was in the camp – was to survive and so be a witness to what had happened. How did he know to do this? Well, he said he *detected* it. Someone had to survive to tell the story, and if not him, then who? Some of us are told what we are to do, like Paul on the Damascus Road, or the disciples, as Christ was leaving them – you know, He said, "Make disciples." Most of us learn our purpose for eternity with God – why was I born? – but then we have to detect what our mission in this life is. We can ask the questions: What am I good at? Where would I fit in using my gift? Where is there a need? We can consider and listen for feedback.

I received a card, some time back, from a former client. She said – now, you know, God gets the credit for this, right? – "I want to take time to let you know that I'm thinking about you and that I truly thank you for all that you have done for me. You're a kind and thoughtful person and I'm very glad to know you." I've said before that it's easier for me to be a kind and thoughtful person in the counseling room than anywhere else. So bear that in mind. And it's true that there are a lot of people who don't see me as kind and thoughtful in other places. So I don't have any grandiose illusions about it, but it is what it is. In that room, I was able to help her, and I believe that's all part of my calling, and that I have been given a gift for it – not from the education so much, but in my heart. So that lets me know that, while I'm not the best therapist – or perfect person – I am on the right track. I'm doing something for work that's helpful for other people. And I'm setting a good example for them, in a limited environment, for Jesus Christ. And I've extended that out in our church as well. Our website offers help. My website for my counseling practice offers help. When we are on the right track, we start getting feedback that points the way. So, I've had

good response from many members of the church about things I've said about where to find help that they could get locally.

Well, that's it for today. Check back in two weeks to see the next presentation on *Unlocking Your Full Potential*. We're going to pull all that we've covered so far together and consider how to accomplish the mission God has given us. If you want to subscribe to our channel – LifeResource Videos – you'll be notified every time we publish. If you want to know more about the latest with us, you can subscribe to our biweekly email at liferesource.org. There's a lot more information there than just on the subscription list for the LifeResource Videos. So I hope you'll sign up for our biweekly email.