

DUSTIN PETERSON



TALENTED

DISCOVERING AND USING
YOUR GOD-GIVEN TALENTS
TO FIND **MORE JOY** IN LIFE

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CHAPTER 1

That They Might Have Joy



“Jesus knew who he was and why he was here on this planet. That meant he could lead from strength rather than from uncertainty or weakness.”¹

—PRESIDENT SPENCER W. KIMBALL

You don’t know who you are.

You may think you know, but you don’t *really* know.

But you’re not alone. Most of us don’t fully comprehend who we are and what we are capable of.

Each of us came into this world with a unique set of abilities, traits, and talents given to us by our Heavenly Father—things that set us apart from other people. No two people were created with exactly the same abilities. All are unique. When we were born, we brought these gifts, talents, and abilities with us. We may recognize some of these gifts, or they may lie dormant within us. And yet, when asked to identify and describe these “gifts,” we are generally stumped.

This point was reaffirmed to me a number of years ago in an elders quorum meeting at church. The lesson was “Developing and Utilizing Talents,” and the teacher had chosen to open with a question. He asked the quorum to start off by sharing some of their talents.

“Raise your hand, if you will, and share a talent with the quorum—something that you feel is a talent for you.” Because of my research on this topic I sat up a little straighter in my chair, interested to hear the responses.

Silence.

The instructor shifted a bit, adjusting his notes, and patiently embraced the awkward silence. A few men began looking around while others stared at the floor. Some guy coughed to break the silence. Finally, one brother raised his hand. You could feel the pressure release from the room like pressing a valve on a tire tube.

Everyone turned to the man, waiting for his response. “I’m really good at being humble,” he said. “In fact, I’m the most humble person I know . . . It just comes naturally to me.” The group chuckled and the mood lightened. Another man raised his hand. “Can I share someone else’s talent? Lyle is a really good photographer and one of the more creative people I know,” he said, pointing to another of the men in the room.

The teacher affirmed this statement and then asked one last time. No one responded,

and so the instructor shared some of his talents. He said he was good at athletics and has always been a pretty competitive guy. He followed up this statement by saying something like, “I guess that’s a talent.” And then we moved on with the lesson. I felt empty. This was a room full of committed and faithful priesthood holders, and yet the only thing we could come up with for strengths was “photography” and “athleticism.” How was this possible? How could a room full of young-to-middle-aged men teeming with talent only generate a few responses? Was it fear? Lack of self-awareness? More important, if this group of thirty men felt this way, how did their wives and children feel about their own talents? Do people around the world know what their God-given gifts are and how to breathe life into them?

I say enough is enough. The Lord expects us to identify our talents, develop them, and put them to use. In *Jesus the Christ*, Elder James E. Talmage said, “Likewise, in the spiritual application, a man possessed of any good gift, such as musical ability, eloquence, skill in handicraft, or the like, ought to use that gift to the full, that he or others may be profited thereby; but should he be too neglectful to exercise his powers in independent service, he may assist others to profitable effort, by encouragement if by nothing more.”²

You should understand what your talents are and use them “to the full”! Or, at the very least, you should help other people identify theirs, including your husband or wife, son or daughter, counselor in your presidency, or your Primary children. This self-knowledge of talents is powerful. In fact, it is the key to immediately improving our lives in so many ways. I have seen this knowledge of talents pay huge dividends in choosing a career, leading an organization, parenting more effectively, or serving in the Church. I have also seen the dark side of not knowing who you are.

In 2004, I had just graduated from BYU–Idaho. Throughout my college career I had struggled to nail down my talents or a best-fit major, for that matter. Thus, after exploring and formally registering seven different majors over the course of five years (likely a record at BYU–Idaho), I landed in communications, specializing in public relations. After graduation, my wife and I relocated to Dallas, Texas, and I did exactly what society prescribes: got a job and became a breadwinner. I landed a job at a public relations firm and almost immediately began dreading work. My job was totally incongruent with me to the point that I began to fall into depression. I felt tired all the time. In fact, I was so down about my job that I had my morning routine planned out down to the minute so that I didn’t have to spend an additional second thinking about work. The alarm would go off at 7:45 a.m. and I’d pull the sheets over my head in denial (my wife called it “going into Dustin world”). I’d leap out of bed at 7:52 a.m., shower, and hit the door by 8:08 a.m. with breakfast in hand to put me in the office before 9 a.m.

I worked on the healthcare and hospitality team at the agency, meaning that I coordinated press releases and media requests for a hotel chain and our healthcare-related clients. I’ll never forget my first week on the job. I was brought into a meeting and told that we were launching a media campaign to generate attention for one of our big brands and I was going to take lead on calling media to pitch the idea of them covering our client. Big responsibility. Then they dropped the bomb. The client was Beano. Yes, *that* Beano—as in the pill people take to fight bloating and gas. My boss told me that I was being tasked with calling major media publications—think *Good Housekeeping* and *Oprah Magazine*—and announcing the release of a landmark research study showing that

more than 10 million Americans every year suffer from complex carbohydrate intolerance: when you eat beans you get gas. And Beano can help!

I thought for sure this was a joke. I looked around the table waiting for someone to crack, but all I got in return were serious looks. The mood in the room felt intense, like we were curing cancer or launching a spaceship to the moon. So, I did what any young, motivated employee would do. I dutifully accepted the assignment, grabbed my call list of around seventy-five major publications, and holed up in a call booth to conquer the world of mass media, one pitch at a time.

These calls drained my soul. Each call was met with rejection, mid-sentence hang-ups, and some choice words from a few executive editors. I didn't remember studying this aspect of public relations at BYU-Idaho. I must have been out that week.

Day after day I returned to my call booth to take a heavy dose of rejection. At the end of each day I reported my lack of success to my manager with true sadness. She would act surprised and encourage me to keep trying. Someone was bound to be interested in a story about gas.

Then I called Doug.

Doug was the executive editor of a major fitness publication. We're talking "industry leading." The stakes felt high. I made the call, listened to the ringing on the other end of the line, and sprang to life when he picked up the phone.

"This is Doug."

"Hi, Doug, I'm calling on behalf of Beano." I paused to wait for him to chew me out or hang up. Neither happened, so I continued. "Did you know that 10 million Americans suffer from complex carbohydrate intolerance every year? And Beano can help!" Again, I waited. A long, painful pause ensued. I could hear the low din of phones ringing and people working in the background. Then Doug spoke up.

"Dustin," he said, clearing his throat. "Are we talking about farts?"

I stumbled. "Uh . . . well, kind of . . . I mean . . ."

"Dustin," he said again, "do yourself a favor. Don't ever call me again. And go figure out something different to do with your life."

Click.

Now, I was used to rejection. I had served a mission for the Church and had taken my fair share of rejection over two years. But this one stung, likely because he was right.

What was I doing with my life? I had been isolated in a call booth for days—even weeks—trying to convince major media outlets to cover gas. Is this what I got a degree to do? Is this what God intended for me? Was this the plan?

Some of you may have felt this with your work, this incongruence that makes you feel tired, weak, de-energized, or lost. Others may feel it in their church assignment, volunteer activities, or even home life. You might ask, "What am I doing?" or "Why this?" or "Is this it? Is this what Father in Heaven has in store for me?"

At the time, I couldn't figure out why life felt so low. I remember thinking, "Man, why is this so painful? Why is this so hard for me? Why do I feel so sluggish and drained all the time?" I felt that inner tension between doing my duty as a breadwinner for my family and absolutely hating what I was doing day-in and day-out. I wondered if I should just buck up. Maybe this is what work was all about. Surely there were people doing worse things than this for work. Shouldn't I be grateful? Maybe I should just put my head down and press on.

I felt lost and in desperate need of some heavenly intervention. In the course of feeling this, I came across two passages of scripture that shaped my entire career. In fact, these scriptures changed my whole trajectory and set me on the path I'm on today. They form the foundation for this book and my discovery of talents.

I was sitting on the edge of the bed one morning reading the scriptures. I felt scattered in my personal study and decided just to flip open the scriptures and read wherever I landed. I turned to this first scripture and read 2 Nephi 2:25: "Adam fell that men might be; and **men are, that they might have joy**" (emphasis added).

This verse hit me to the core. I froze and stared up at the wall. I thought, "YES! Men are that they might have joy! Not "that they might have joy from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. and then again until work starts the next day." Or "that they might have joy on Saturday and Sunday but take a flogging the rest of the days." I realized that "men are that they might have joy" every day, even at work. So, if I'm miserable in my work, there's got to be something I can do about it. It's not meant to be this way!

A good friend of mine, Lindsey, made an interesting point in reference to this verse. She said, "I love this. It runs a little bit counter to what society would tell you. Like, I feel like there's pressure for people to prove how much hardship they've endured as if that makes them more legit humans. But this verse says nothing about that. It just says you exist; therefore, you may have joy." I felt the same when I read it fifteen years ago, and I feel it now. God intends for us to have joy, and I knew that day that His promise held true for me.

I sometimes hear people say things like, "It's called 'work' for a reason!" or "It's supposed to be hard." To be clear, I agree that work can be hard. Father Adam was told that "in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground" (Genesis 3:19). What I don't see in that verse is "through misery thou shalt eat bread" or "in pain, boredom, and disengagement shalt thou eat bread." Rather, I believe we can find joy in any circumstance, and I realized in the moment that I read these verses that this was God's intent for me.

But how? How can we love work or chores or the tedium of day-to-day life? How can we maximize the "9 to 5"? How can we find meaning, even in difficult circumstances?

On that same morning of scripture study, I cross-referenced "joy" over to these verses from Matthew 25:14–29, otherwise referred to as the parable of the talents, and found my answer to the previous question. I've bolded several statements that had tremendous impact on me:

For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.

And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; **to every man according to his several ability**; and straightway took his journey.

Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents.

And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.

But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.

After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.

And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, **I have gained beside them five talents more.**

His lord said unto him, **Well done, thou good and faithful servant:** thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: **enter thou into the joy of thy lord.**

He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.

His lord said unto him, **Well done, good and faithful servant;** thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: **enter thou into the joy of thy lord.**

Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed:

And **I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth:** lo, there thou hast that is thine.

His lord answered and said unto him, **Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed:**

Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.

Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.

For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

I read this parable and several things hit me:

1. He gave talents to “every man (and woman) according to his (or her) several ability.” Not most people—everyone! So, if you’re reading this book and aren’t yet convinced that you have talents, this parable is for you!
2. You can gain more talents. One of these servants gained five more and the other gained two.
3. Talents lead to the joy of the Lord. This is key. If “men are that they might have joy,” then how do I access that joy? At least one way lies in developing and maximizing your God-given talents. And what is the “joy of the Lord”? Long-term, it’s eternal life, the joy that comes from living together with our families in the presence of God. But in the short-term it’s the feelings of peace, contentment, happiness, energy, control, and confidence that come from aligning your will to His. It’s the sum total of goodness that comes from the Savior as a byproduct for using the talents He’s blessed us with to bring joy to those around us.
4. When we’re afraid, we tend to bury our talents and hide what we do best. We’ll discuss why later on, but for now it’s important to recognize that we can likely relate with and feel empathy for the servant who buried his talents, knowing the risk that would come with multiplying them.
5. If we don’t discover and use them, we lose them! This one makes my palms sweat. God has endowed us with talents that yield tremendous outcomes for us and those within our circle of influence. To bury them is to forsake the heavenly gift. God can’t have those gifts go for naught and so He will re-assign them where they’ll be most productively used. Use it or lose it!

So much packed into so few verses! And yet, more than anything on that morning

during those ten minutes of scripture study, I walked away thinking, “So . . . I must have talents, they must lead me to more joy if I use them, and I must be either burying them or ignoring them; otherwise I wouldn’t feel the way I feel.” I felt like the clouds had parted. The clear message was that I could have joy, even at work, and that joy came from identifying and using my talents. Moreover, I likely was not currently using my talents and was running a joy deficit as a result.

This passage was like a lightning bolt to my soul. I felt *compelled* to discover my talents and put them to use. I absolutely believed these talents would take me to a place of more joy in the Lord, and I was committed to do whatever it took to figure them out. I sat in the car on my commute that day with one big question on my mind: “What are my talents, and how do I discover them?”

The journey was long, and it would be several more years before I’d truly hone in on my talents and put them to use on a daily basis, but the results have been incredible. Since that day sixteen years ago, I’ve worked in more than a dozen jobs, completed a master’s degree, and built a business around leading executives to discover what they do best and do more of it. I’ve coached, taught, and trained thousands of individuals to identify and maximize their gifts through ThePurposeBlueprint.com. I’ve led in the Church and in my family. Most important, I’ve become more of who God intended for me to be, and I’ve felt the peace that comes with congruence and authenticity. I want to help you feel the same.

TAKE HEART AND HAVE COURAGE

You are meant to have joy! Like, today. Not in the future, not from sixty-five years old on, and certainly not only in the next life. And one source of joy is the use and magnification of talents.

It turns out, the core of figuring out what to do with your life is knowing who you are. This knowledge is integral to everything from parenting to fulfilling a calling. We can use what we know about ourselves to guide us in major decisions, to capitalize on opportunities the Lord puts in our path, and to find increased joy in life.

The irony is that for most of us this knowledge lies just out of reach. We have the ability to determine who we are and what we should be doing with our lives, and how we should be doing it, but we just don’t know how to access that knowledge or use that power.

Why is that? Why don’t we know our talents?

I have to believe—and frequently teach—that no one got left out of the talent lottery in the premortal life. Everyone has them. It’s not like we were lining up for talents before this life and you stepped out to grab a sandwich and got passed up.

Everyone has them.

Part of the reason we have a difficult time articulating our talents is that we don’t know what we are looking for. We tend to look at talents as tangible things. It’s easy to see a prolific basketball player, painter, musician, or dancer and recognize their tangible gift. It’s much more difficult to identify intangible gifts, even if the gifts are equally as important.

My wife asked our daughter one morning what talents she thought she had. After a long pause, my daughter said, “Playing the piano, I guess.” My wife prodded her to come

up with another one. “Dance?” My wife said that she thought Halle’s ability to make other people laugh was a talent.

I thought this was so indicative of each of us. We only see activities with tangible outputs as talents. And yet, Elder Marvin J. Ashton of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught this powerful principle in his talk entitled “There Are Many Gifts.” He said,

Let me mention a few gifts that are not always evident or noteworthy but that are very important. Among these may be your gifts—gifts not so evident but nevertheless real and valuable. Let us review some of these less-conspicuous gifts: the gift of asking; the gift of listening; the gift of hearing and using a still, small voice; the gift of being able to weep; the gift of avoiding contention; the gift of being agreeable; the gift of avoiding vain repetition; the gift of seeking that which is righteous; the gift of not passing judgment; the gift of looking to God for guidance; the gift of being a disciple; the gift of caring for others; the gift of being able to ponder; the gift of offering prayer; the gift of bearing a mighty testimony; and the gift of receiving the Holy Ghost.³

Can you feel the power of his statement? Not all gifts are easily observable and, therefore, easy to identify. But that certainly doesn’t mean they “don’t count.” Each of us has talents. Perhaps you even identified a few of yours in Elder Ashton’s quote. You may also have people come to mind who possess these gifts. I can think of people for each of them and the way they magnify those talents for the benefit of humankind.

And not only do we have these gifts, but we are expected to *use them*. It’s a commandment.

In June of 1965, a group of brethren in the Physical Facilities Department of the Church was doing some work outside the Hotel Utah apartment of President David O. McKay. As President McKay stopped to explain to them the importance of the work in which they were engaged, he paused and told them the following:

Let me assure you, Brethren, that someday you will have a personal priesthood interview with the Savior, Himself. If you are interested, I will tell you the order in which He will ask you to account for your earthly responsibilities.

First, He will request an accountability report about your relationship with your wife. Have you actively been engaged in making her happy and ensuring that her needs have been met as an individual?

Second, He will want an accountability report about each of your children individually. He will not attempt to have this for simply a family stewardship report but will request information about your relationship to each and every child.

Third, He will want to know what you personally have done with the talents you were given in the premortal world.

Whoa, stop there for a second. Third?! Like, right after wife and kids? Not callings or stewardship of resources or temple attendance? Not missionary work? *Talents?*

For those who are curious, I’ll finish the quote:

Fourth, He will want a summary of your activity in your Church assignments. He will not be necessarily interested in what assignments you have had, for in His eyes the home teacher and mission president are probably equals, but He will request a summary of how you have been of service to your fellowmen in your Church assignments.

Fifth, He will have no interest in how you earned your living, but if you were honest in

all your dealings.

Sixth, He will ask for an accountability on what you have done to contribute in a positive manner to your community, state, country, and the world.⁴

People often cite number five as a reason to just work a job for the sake of working. “God doesn’t really care what you do for a living.” But note that He *does* care about whether you maximized your talents, and your day-to-day work is certainly a place where that happens, regardless of what you do from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

So why *would* talents be number three? At least one reason may be that talents are the tools He’s given us to bless our lives and facilitate the journey home of all of His children. Reflecting on Elder Ashton’s quote above, who wouldn’t be benefited in their journey back to our Heavenly Parents by a friend or family member gifted in listening, caring, or not judging another? Which of us wouldn’t want to be surrounded by gifted empathizers, testifiers, or family members who are in tune with the Holy Ghost on our course back to our heavenly home?

It seems like it would be pretty important to figure these out. This is the goal of this book. I first want to address at length what talent is and why we don’t know our talents. We’ll then dive into three categories of talents and how to discover them. We’ll finish by talking about how to grow them, apply them, and help others discover them. Throughout the book, I’ll share examples, anecdotes, and activities to guide your discovery of talents. And the big promise of this book—my hope for you—is that you walk away more empowered to know who you are, what you do best, and how to do more of it to find more joy in life.

I’ve found three main challenges around talents:

1. We don’t know we even have them.
2. If we know we have them, we don’t know how to identify or articulate them.
3. Even if we’re willing and able to identify them, we won’t share them!

I received an email recently from a woman in Utah who had listened to a podcast I did for Leading Saints on “Leading with Your Talents.” She said:

I have learned more about myself and the talents I have over the last ten years but there were, and still are, times of feeling ‘talentless.’ I recognize that there are many women (and men!) who feel similarly, especially when a lot of personal pursuits can be put on hold for family. I recognize I have many talents I can and do use in raising my children, organizing and running my home, and cultivating a strong marriage. I believe Satan tries so hard to make mothers feel useless and talentless in fulfilling their role as a mother.

She’s right. The adversary actively attacks our identity and in particular those aspects of who we are that make us unique and special in the eyes of the Lord.

By the end of this book, my hope is that you discover your own uniqueness—your God-given talents—and that you have a clear path to develop them for the benefit of humankind. I hope to put a dent in the notion of being “talentless.”

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, “The Lord did not people the earth with a vibrant orchestra of personalities only to value the piccolos of the world. Every instrument is precious and adds to the complex beauty of the symphony. All of Heavenly Father’s children are different in some degree, yet each has

his own beautiful sound that adds depth and richness to the whole.”⁵

We all have them. Let’s figure them out.

NOTES

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