

Short & Sweet: 2 Ways to Grow Your Gifts



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One of my constant prayer requests is for God to expand my gifts.

I continually ask Him to *gift me greatly* so He can use me deeply. Recently I discovered we have a responsibility in growing our gifts—it's not all up to God. There are two things we can do to help grow our gifts.

1. Use them.
2. Give them.

While both methods closely related, they have subtle differences. Using your gifts requires planning and training, while giving your gifts requires responsiveness and obedience.

Use your gifts.

14 *"For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods*

to them. 15 And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. 16 Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. 17 And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. 18 But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money."

When the man returned from his travels, he rewarded those who used their gifts, but to the last servant the master said, " 'You wicked and lazy servant ... take the talent from him, and give *it* to him who has ten talents.

29 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.' " Matthew 25

What happened when the two servants used their gifts?

They were doubled. Wow! Who wouldn't want to double gifts? I know I do. Imagine being twice as good teacher/speaker/writer/principal/secretary/designer/builder than you are now. We can grow our gifts by *using* them. Saving or burying our gifts and talents keeps us small, dark and cold. Only dead things are buried.

Use or lose.

What about the last servant? He lost what he would not give.

As modern Christians we neglect our gifts when we *bury* ourselves in fear, busyness, apathy and laziness. Don't wait until you *feel* ready and don't give up when the going gets tough. God wants us to push through negative emotions. The start of a new project is very exciting! But bumps in the road are bound to come and discouragement can set in. Set backs do not mean God's calling has been revoked—quite the opposite is true. When passion and motivation dwindle, disregard the

lassitude and continue working. Take a step of faith and get busy.

People need what you have to give.

Give and gain!

4 Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near. 5 Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" Phillip answered, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?"

10 Then Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. 11 And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted." John 6

Feast or Famine.

Compared to the size of the need, how big was the boy's lunch? Did the size of his gift stop him from using it? What happened when the little guy gave his lunch? Jesus multiplied it—exponentially. Having raised two hungry sons, the fact the boy gave his lunch is a miracle itself. Giving always requires sacrifice. Like the boy, we have a choice.

1. Keep gift for self. Small. Safe. Unfulfilled. One person benefits.
2. Give gift to others. Big. Scary. Amazing. Everyone is filled. Leftovers!

If we keep our gifts, others will go hungry.

Give your gifts large or small, no matter the size and watch them grow. Your gifts may be small, but your Savior is huge.

Give what you have and watch your gifts grow! Use and give.

Action Points:

1. **Risk!** Admit it. There is something you've been waiting to give, but you think it's too small. Walk by faith and give it today.
2. **Look!** See it. Ask God to make you hyper-aware of opportunities to give today. A kind word, \$2.00, a single flower, a short note. They are not too small. Do it.
3. **Unbury!** Face it. You have some buried gifts, dreams, skills that need exhuming. Take a step today to dig them up and use them for God's glory.

Pray

Father, we give You our talents (Matt. 25), our widow's mites (Luke 21), our last drop of oil (1 Kings 17), and our brown-bag lunch (John 6). Please help us to use what You have given us and give what you have entrusted to us so we may greatly impact our world for Christ.

Amen.

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Short & Sweet: an old prayer

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9 In this manner, therefore, pray:

*Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.*

10 Your kingdom come.

Your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

11 Give us this day our daily bread.

12 And forgive us our debts,

As we forgive our debtors.

*13 And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the
evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the
glory forever. Amen.*

Matthew 6:9-13

Our Father who art in heaven ...

When I was a little girl, I had the privilege of attending a church that valued the Lord's Prayer. We said it. We prayed it. We believed it. I can't remember a time when I did not know the Lord's Prayer by heart. While there is great value in committing Scripture to memory, like a well-loved song, words memorized often become words overlooked. With memorization can come a false sense of **knowing** a portion of scripture.

Like a wet towel wrung dry, I thought I had squeezed out every last drop of meaning from the Lord's Prayer. Because the words were so familiar in my head, I no longer listened with my heart. After 48 years of *knowing* the Lord's Prayer, what else could I learn from it?

The unfolding of His word.

God is eternal, therefore His word is eternal—it continuously delivers. Meaning upon meaning, deep upon deep, precept upon precept endlessly opens to those who seek with all their heart. In a recent Bible study, *Looking For Lovely* by Annie Downs, God downloaded fresh meaning from the Lord's Prayer straight to my soul.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.

First, God showed me the heart or key motivation of all prayer. It's found in verse 10. Read it again.

Thy kingdom come.

How is God's kingdom established on earth? By prayer. Ponder this for a moment. Prayer establishes God's kingdom on earth. This leads to a question: What should we be praying for? Not my will. Not your will. God's will. God's will and God's kingdom are connected by prayer. Prayer is not about us being happy, getting our way or being comfortable. The goal of every

prayer is for God's will to happen.

Every prayer. Every time. Period.

Second, God showed me as Christians we play a vital role in establishing God's kingdom on earth. We are able to focus on this valuable work by praying for God to supply three basic needs:

1. Food: Our daily bread (physical and spiritual)
2. Forgiveness: Our forgiveness (salvation) and the grace we need to forgive others
3. Focus: Our purpose (keeping our mind focused on Him not our temptations)

When we are not overly consumed with worry about obtaining our daily bread, earning our salvation or creating meaning and purpose for our lives, we can focus on establishing God's kingdom on earth. God confirms this later in Matthew 6:33,

"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

The Lord's prayer is not a *formula*: say this and you will get this. It is a *model* for how to pray and for what to pray. We focus on His will and He'll provide for our welfare. All of this is accomplished through prayer. And when His kingdom is establish in this world, it will be heaven on earth.

Action Points:

1. **Pray.** No matter how little, insignificant or unimportant, take everything to God in prayer. Prayer changes things.
2. **Pray God's will.** This one can hurt. No matter how much you want the job, the house, the boyfriend, the car, ask for God to work your situation according to HIS will.
3. **Pray for God's Kingdom.** A kingdom is territory ruled by a king. Since the Fall, we have given Satan a foothold

on this earth. We take down the enemy and reclaim our schools, neighborhoods and communities one prayer at a time.

His kingdom come. His will be done.

Life is sweet. Pray!

Mary Kane

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Short & Sweet: The Book



8 Then Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, "I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD." And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. 9 So Shaphan the scribe went to the king, bringing the king word, saying, "Your servants have gathered the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of those who do the work, who oversee the house of the LORD." 10 Then Shaphan the

scribe showed the king, saying, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read it before the king. 2 Kings 22:8-10

I found it crammed in a dusty corner of my bookcase.

I had lost books before, but this incident took my library crimes to a whole new level. My stomach churned and my hands shook when I unearthed a library book. I blew away the dust, opened the cover and discovered it was overdue. Not just *overdue* but OVERDUE – by about 5 years. The penalty would probably be huge. Probably jail time. Orange suit. Shackles. I'd most likely *get out* about the time I'd be ready to enter high school.

They found the Book of the Lord.

After years of neglect and idolatry, Israel has a good king; one who follows God with all his heart. Repairs were being made in the temple, a biblical "Fixer Upper." Suddenly, Hilkiah discovers the Book of the Law. The high priest gives the Book to Shaphan who reads it to King Josiah. And a nation is turned upside down.

I found the book of the Lord.

I remember very vividly, many years ago, the night I found the Book. The evening I became a Christian, in my bed with a flashlight, I opened my heart to God and He opened my eyes to His word. I wish I could say I had never lost the Book since that time, but there have been seasons when His word lay in a dusty corner under the rubble of my broken life. Then God sent His worker, a "Hilkiah" to help me rediscover His word.

Have you found the Book of the Lord?

Do you remember the day you found the Book of the Lord? Where is your Bible right now? What place does God's word hold in your life? Does it keep you up at night wondering what will happen next? Do you swipe and click the moment you have a question or need counsel? The Book is not meant to be kept on a shelf or returned by a certain date. There is no penalty for keeping the Book, but there is a penalty for not following the Book. Even then, the fine has been paid in full by the blood of Christ.

Is your life in shambles? Is it a pile of rubble, or a fixer upper? God is in the renovation business. His tool is His Book. Renovation is a process, but if we cooperate God will give us beauty for our ashes.

Action Points:

1. **Get in the Book.** Read His Book. Study His Book. Join a Bible study. Add an extra study time to your daily routine. Download an e-version of the Bible on your device and study when you are waiting in line or in traffic.
2. **Get the Book in you.** Memorize Scripture. Commit to memory verses that deal with temptations or problems you face. Go big and memorize a whole book!
3. **Get the Book in others.** Who can you invite to church? Who can you invite to do a Bible study with you? Who needs you to send them a text with a verse today?

PS: In case you are wondering, I received a full pardon from the librarian when I confessed my crime and returned the goods.

Leave me a comment below about your adventures in the Book.

Life is sweet when you are in the Book.

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Short & Sweet: 3 Signs You're Building on the Rock



We live very close to Lake Michigan.

While we go to the big lake most often in the summer months, we enjoy it best in the fall and winter, after the tourists have gone home for the season. This winter the Midwest experienced days of turbulent wind, especially along the lake shore. The waves reached incredible heights, crashing the coast and pounding the beaches. Churning. Tossing. Stirring.

Big storms mean big change.



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They reshape and sculpt the landscape. Yards of beach can be gained or lost during the stormy season. Houses built too close to the shore are at risk. Every year some are lost to the lake. Expensive, beautiful homes tumble down to the surf like so many houses of cards. Why? Poor construction? Cheap

materials? No, wrong foundation – they were built upon the sand.

Sand is unstable—it shifts beneath our feet causing us to stumble and trip. Sand stings and whips as it is whisked away by the winds.

I have built upon the sand:

Crumbling castles of pride and foolishness.

Misplaced trust.

Wrong motives.

False doctrines.

A relationship that never should have been.

Habits of sin.

Dreams I built upon the sand came tumbling down.

I stood among the rubble, thinking all was lost—not realizing the false had been washed away by the waves to make way for the True.

Storms of life reshape the landscape of our existence—sculpting the substance of our souls. Underneath all the turmoil God is at work. The Holy Spirit, the breath of God, blows away the sand and reveals a Rock—a firm foundation.

While the wind and waves bring devastation to the house built upon the sand, we see a strange phenomenon for the house upon the Rock. The house is not wrecked or ruined by the waves—it is refined. Jagged edges smoothed. Rough surfaces polished. Sharp corners chiseled.

The storms no longer destroy—they transform.

We no longer have to fear the storms. God uses them as an effective tool to conform us into the image of His Son. We can stand upon the Rock with the assurance that because He stands, we also will stand.

On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.

²⁴ “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” Matthew 7:24-27

3 signs you are building on the Rock.

1. Are you building on the Truth? Can everything you are doing be traced back to Scripture? Is God’s Word at the foundation of all your decisions and actions?
2. Do you have a good supply of building materials? Are you filling your mind and heart with God’s Word? What needs to go? What do you need to add?
3. Are your current projects, relationships, and ideas built upon rock or sand? Will they stand the storms of life or are they destined to fall with a mighty crash?

It's never too late to make a change.

Life is sweet. Build on the Rock.

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Short & Sweet: Bread Enough and Some to Spare



"But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. 15 Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.

17 "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!'"
Luke 11:15-17

I am starving.

I said these words just the other day when I came home from work. The truth is, I was not *starving*, I was only hungry. Just like every other day of the week, I had eaten breakfast and lunch and there was plenty in the Frigidaire for dinner. I've have always had plenty of food. Other people – not so much.

When I was little someone broke into the garage and stole not our car but our *spare food*. I remember my dad saying he would not call the police because he didn't want anyone to go hungry while we had **bread enough and some to spare**. People are hungry.

The prodigal in the verse above had the same problem.

He was hungry. What caused his hunger? There was a famine in the land. The lack of bread finally drove him home. But there is another kind of famine more rampant and dangerous than famine of the land – famine of the spirit. Spiritual famine is the deep down hunger a person feels when they do not know God or are running from Him. Our souls become emaciated, and our hearts become barren and fruitless like the land in Luke 11.

What is the cause of spiritual

hunger?

As a lack of bread causes physical hunger, a lack of Bread of Life causes spiritual hunger. The world cannot offer what satisfies. It takes what little we have and leaves us hungry. Famished.

Destitute.

Finally, we come to our senses and realize only Christ satisfies. Jesus has a special talent for feeding thousands. In Him, we can have **Bread enough and some to spare**. Manna raining down from heaven. We get all we want. What is the implication then to being well fed? When we are filled, we will be able to turn and feed others. Double blessing.

Yet so many of us try to serve others on an empty stomach.

We skip our quiet time because we are too busy doing ministry, chores or living for ourselves. It is impossible to feed others when we have nothing to give. Just as God sent manna for His people to gather every morning, we must gather also, fresh from His Word.

Ironically, while I have joked about physical starvation, I have been spiritually starving and unaware of the danger until it reached a critical point. Finally I *came to myself* and ran home to my Father, where I had **bread enough and some to spare**. **Bread enough and some to spare.**

People are hungry. God gives to you so you can give to others. Share your Bread.

Action Points:

1. **Consume God's Word.** How can you get more of God's Word into your heart? Are you consistently spending time with God? If not, why not? What needs to go so you can schedule more time with God?
2. **Some to spare.** Do you have enough knowledge of God's

Word so you can share it with another hungry person? If not, what do you need to do ... join a Bible study group, find a good church, or ask someone to mentor you?

3. **Someone to share.** Who do you know who needs to hear the truth? Who in your daily life needs Jesus? What will you do today to share your Bread with another?

Life is sweet. Share your bread.

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