



Mining Hidden Talents Bible Study

[Please provide: copies of this study for participants, Bibles, and hymnals]

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another (1 Peter 4:10).

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, You have wonderfully created each one of us. You have given every person gifts and talents to be used to serve You and to serve one another. As we study Your Word today, open our eyes to those individuals around us who have special physical and learning needs. Help us to see these individuals as You do, with love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Introduction

The people whom God has made to live in this world are physically and intellectually different from one another. But we all have one similarity: we are all born sinful and are in need of a Savior (Romans 3:22b–23). God sent Jesus to rescue and redeem us from our sinful condition through His death and resurrection. Through Word and Sacrament, the Holy Spirit works to bring us to faith in the Triune God and to keep us in that faith for eternity. Once God has incorporated us into His family of faith, He uses each and every one of us to share His Word, His love, and His mercy. Galatians 3:26–28 reminds us: *For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* There is no difference in God's eyes when He looks at us. We are *all one in Christ Jesus.*

Those of you who are familiar with the mining industry know that mining is hard work. It takes lots of time, patience, care, and persistence to mine the treasured gems in God's creation. This is also true when mining hidden talents in those people around you who are also God's creation. When we mine hidden talents in people, we don't use drills, pick-axes, or dynamite as coal or gem miners do. Instead, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we use loving patience. As does everyone who God has created, individuals with special learning and physical needs also have unique gifts which God has given them. To mine their talents may take a little more patience and perseverance, but as you will see from the people we are about to meet, the effort will yield treasured blessings. Let's meet some very special people and take a look at how they are using to God's glory the talents He has given them that have been "mined" from within them.

Paula

First, let's meet Paula. Paula lived in a group home with eight other adults with developmental challenges. Paula was always happy, quiet, and busy. At times, she was also a peacemaker among her fellow housemates. Once after an evening visit, Paula came to me as I was leaving and shared with me some words of wisdom. She said, "I've really been praying for Betty, (a fellow housemate), but it isn't working." As I hugged Paula, I told her, "Just keep praying!"

Read Philippians 4:4–9 and list some of the qualities that Paul mentions, which Paula mirrored in her life.

How did Paula use her talents for her Savior? _____

Reflect: Is there a “Paula” in your congregation who is unable to get out and who can use her hidden talent to pray for others?

Robert

Robert, too, was a “special” child of God who lived in a group home. He had spent most of his life in the care of others because when he was born “different” his parents were told it would be best for him to be “put away” for he would never be able to live an independent life. However, someone forgot to tell that to Robert. Robert was a happy, talkative, caring individual. Even though he faced physical and mental challenges, Robert was a natural greeter. With the help of his caregivers, each Sunday Robert was at the doors of the church before anyone else. He had a big smile and shared it with everyone who came through the doors. He would approach each worshipper with the greeting, “Hi, my name is Robert—what is yours? Did you come to worship my Jesus?” To some, Robert was different—not at all the person you would expect to greet worshippers. But to Jesus, Robert was a wonderful missionary. He gave glory to his Savior as he welcomed people to church without hesitating to share with them his love for his Lord Jesus.

Read Romans 15:7. How are we to welcome others? _____

Our Lord Jesus is the expert miner of hidden talents. Name some of the individuals others did not consider worthy whom Jesus called to faith and whose talents He utilized. _____

Jesus has rescued us all from the most unworthy position possible. His death and resurrection delivers us all from the disability of sin, from eternal death, and from the devil’s heinous plans. But even though in the eyes of Jesus, we are loved and cherished, we often see those with differences and with mental and physical challenges as less than we are. What is it that can make us blind to the talents of those with special needs?

For what can you ask God in prayer to help you better see the worth and talents of others?

Reflect: Are there members of your congregation, who like Robert, are full of the love of Jesus, but do not fit the picture or mold we have to be greeters or to serve in other meaningful ways? Maybe it is time to “mine” their talents for Jesus’ work.

Keith

Keith struggled in all his classes. Reading and any subject that required reading were sometimes more than he could bear. He wanted so much to fit in and be part of the class. During class discussions, Keith sat quietly. His special needs made him feel like an outsider looking in. His classmates and teacher tried to help him. His teacher spent one-on-one time each day with Keith as the rest of the class did their assigned work. It took a little “mining”, but she discovered that Keith loved art and was very good at it. Keith’s teacher then began to give

him special assignments where he could use his artistic talents. Keith beamed when he could turn in an assignment at the same time as his classmates. He soon became the program designer for special school activities. When we would have art as a class, Keith became the “teacher”—helping others with his talent, patiently showing them time and time again how to draw or create wonderful artwork.

Read Ephesians 4:2. According to this verse, how are we to accept others? _____

How did Keith’s teacher use the wisdom from Ephesians 4:2 to mine his artistic talent? _____

How might you use this wisdom as you encourage all people, including those with special needs, to uncover and share the talents with which God has blessed them? _____

Reflect: Just as God gave Keith the gift of art to share, He gives everyone a special talent. Do you have a Keith in your congregation who loves to express himself through art? Have you taken advantage of such talent from individuals who are not the typical “artists”? Is it time to do some “mining” to discover the hidden talents which lay beneath the surface just waiting for a chance to be shared?

Carol

Almost every Sunday morning, Carol sat in church a few pews behind me. As a young child, I could not figure out why she would always have a hymnal in her hand and would always sing with us, yet her words never matched ours. She never seemed to be singing the same thing we were. I even heard some adults in church try to tell her not to sing, but Carol loved Jesus and loved singing. Carol was a “special” child of God who not only had learning challenges, but also speech challenges. She was doing her best, but for some, that was not good enough.

According to these Bible verses, what does Jesus say about our singing to Him?

Read Psalm 96:1. Who is to sing to the Lord? _____

Read Psalm 96:2a. When are we to sing God’s praises? _____

Read Psalm 98:1b. Why do we sing to God? _____

Read Psalm 98:4. What attitude are we to have as we sing praises to God? _____

Carol did just what we all are told to do according to God’s Word. Through her singing, Carol joyfully shared her love for Jesus.

Reflect: Do you have a Carol in your congregation? Is this individual being encouraged to sing along, or are they, instead, hushed into silence so the beauty of the hymns is not “ruined” by their voices?

Perhaps Paula, Robert, Keith, and Carol remind you of someone you know. Their names have been changed for this study, but not in my heart. Each of them is a child of God. Each of them has been led by the Holy Spirit and by the encouragement of people who care for them to find their special talent (gift) from God. God is working in them and through them so they are able to use their talents to the fullest. So, do a little “mining” in your congregation and communities and find some “buried talents” that will bring God glory by their use. May the Holy Spirit work in all of us so that we each reflect the light of Christ into this dark and dying world.

Closing Prayer: Lord Jesus, You have redeemed each one of us from the disability of sin. We are made righteous through faith in You as our Lord and Savior. You graciously give every person talents to use to glorify You and to serve You and others. Open our eyes to the talents You’ve given to the individuals around us who have special learning and physical needs. Help us to cherish and love them as You do. Help us to encourage and nurture the talents of people with special needs so they may have the joy we have that comes from telling others and showing others Your saving love. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Sing: “Take My Life and Let It Be,” (LSB 783, TLH 400, LW 404)

Mining Hidden Talents
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Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2019