

*Discover, Develop and Honor Your Gifts*  
Elizabeth Ricks

---

*This address was given Thursday, May 1, 2008, at the BYU Women's Conference*

© 2008 by Brigham Young University Women's Conference. All rights reserved

For further information write:

BYU Women's Conference

352 Harman Continuing Education Building

Provo, Utah 84602

801-422-7692

E-mail: [womens\\_conference@byu.edu](mailto:womens_conference@byu.edu)

Home page: <http://womensconference.byu.edu>

---

Between 1914 and 1916, Ernest Shackleton led the Endurance Expedition, attempting to cross the Antarctic continent on foot. Although he failed to achieve his goal, he demonstrated remarkable leadership. The ship *Endurance* became trapped in the frozen sea and was finally crushed nine months later.

Trekking across ice and then rowing in lifeboats, Shackleton led his men to refuge on remote, ice-covered Elephant Island. He left his men there while he sailed across 800 miles of open ocean to get help. After 14 days at sea, he reached an island where he crossed brutal, mountainous terrain and marshaled a ship. Four attempts later, Shackleton rescued his men. Astonishingly, all 28 survived their ordeal after spending 22 months in the Antarctic.

Despite Shackleton's notable leadership and tenacity, he unfortunately may not have recognized many of his own gifts. He explained in a letter to his wife why he was an explorer. "I'm not much good at anything else,"<sup>1</sup> he wrote. Perhaps too many of us are like Shackleton in that we define our gifts by default.

Let's not focus on what gifts we might not have, but let's consider the gifts we do have. Think, "I am a good neighbor, and I have the gift of empathy." Think, "I am a preschool teacher, and I have been blessed with the gift of singing silly songs." Think, "I am a mother, and I have the gift of nurturing."

I would like to urge you to do three things:

- First, discover your gift;
- Second, develop your gift;
- and third, honor your gift.

First let's talk about discovering our gifts. Do you know what gifts you have been blessed with? If you're thinking you don't have a gift, reconsider. Let's turn to the scriptures. Section 46 of the Doctrine and Covenants is a wonderful dissertation on gifts. In verse 11, we read, "For all have

not every gift given unto them; for there are many gifts, and to *every man* [and every woman] is given a gift by the Spirit of God.”

You have a gift; your challenge might be to discover it. One way to discover a gift is to actively seek it. In this same section, we read, “Ye are commanded in all things to ask of God, who giveth liberally . . . seek ye earnestly the best gifts, always remembering for what they are given.”<sup>ii</sup>

Elder Dallin H. Oaks has stated that we should desire and *zealously seek* spiritual gifts. He reminds us that, “the receipt of spiritual gifts is predicated upon faith, obedience, and personal righteousness.”<sup>iii</sup>

The Lord told Oliver Cowdery that if he desired it, he would be granted the gift to translate, even as Joseph translated.<sup>iv</sup>

In the Book of Mormon, Nephi sought the gift of vision, and he was granted the glorious vision of the Tree of Life.

President Heber J. Grant desired the gift of penmanship, and through perseverance, he received and achieved that gift.<sup>v</sup>

Another way to discover your personal gifts is to study and ponder your patriarchal blessing. The counsel given in your blessing can provide you with insight and inspiration.

My husband Lyndon’s patriarch grandfather gave him his patriarchal blessing when he was only 13 years old. In the following year, as Lyndon and his parents pondered the blessing, they realized that the gifts enumerated in it weren’t consistent with Lyndon’s becoming a fourth-generation farmer. With his parents’ help, Lyndon sought ways to develop the gifts his inspired blessing promised. Consequently, we don’t live on a farm today. We aren’t even very good at growing zucchini, but Lyndon *has* successfully developed his non-agricultural gifts that were identified in the blessing.

A most satisfying way to discover your gift is through personal revelation.

May I share with you the *process* that I went through to discover a spiritual gift:

Several years ago our bishopric was reorganized. There was a feeling of excitement during sacrament meeting as we contemplated new calls we might serve in. I had served most of my life in music callings and hoped that, for a change and for my own personal growth, I’d be called to be a teacher. The next week, new presidencies in all of the auxiliaries were sustained. The week after that, name after name was read as we sustained teachers, compassionate service leaders, music directors, and so forth. I was beginning to feel sad because I hadn’t received a new calling. My patriarchal blessing said that I was to fulfill “responsibilities in the activities of the Church, especially among [the women] and among the younger generation,” but the Relief Society, Young Women and Primary were fully staffed.

Nearly a month passed. I knew that the Lord loved me, but I felt hurt that I wasn't being entrusted with a calling. My sadness took me to my knees. I told my Father in Heaven that I had a desire to serve and asked Him to quell my uneasy heart. Most of all, I asked Him to help me *feel* of my own individual worth in His kingdom.

After my prayer I began my scripture study. That day I was at the end of the Book of Mormon, and one of the passages in Moroni 10 was about spiritual gifts. I read the list of gifts, hoping to receive the assurance of the Holy Spirit that one of them was mine.

Starting in verse nine, I read about teaching the word of wisdom and then the word of knowledge. I hoped for the familiar feeling of the Spirit's witness, but it didn't come, so I read on.

"Exceedingly great faith." Not my gift.

"Healing," "mighty miracles," "prophecy." Nope. Nope. Nope.

"The beholding of angels and ministering spirits." That would have been exciting, but it wasn't my gift either.

As I finished verse 15—"And again, to another, all kinds of tongues"—I felt anxious, because the list was coming to an end. I knew what the last gift was, and because I didn't have the gift of tongues, I knew that I wouldn't have the gift of the interpretation of tongues. But not wanting to be a quitter, I finished the list: "And again, to another, the interpretation of *languages* and of divers kinds of tongues."

As soon as I read the words "the interpretation of languages," my heart swelled. I experienced that wonderful, tender feeling that I knew was the Holy Ghost. Puzzled, I spoke aloud, "the interpretation of languages? Is that my gift?" Unmistakable warmth coursed through my veins.

I knelt down beside the couch and asked Heavenly Father to increase my understanding. In my mind I heard the words, "You have the gift of the interpretation of languages, and the language that you interpret is English."

It sounds crazy to have a gift of interpreting your native language, doesn't it? In the week that followed through the experience of discovering my gift of interpreting English, I realized that I had loved and interpreted the English language for as long as I could remember. I loved rhyming, writing, reading, and reciting. When I started college, I shocked my piano teacher by declaring an English major rather than a music major. I enjoyed the classes that led to my degree in English. I still love placing apostrophes, finding symbolism, and looking for patterns and insights in stories.

As you might guess, the next week, a member of the bishopric came and called me to be a Sunday School teacher, a calling that I held for over six years and absolutely loved.

As I embarked on the calling, I wasn't sure that I had the gift of teaching—even though I wanted it—but I knew I had the gift of the interpretation of English. Knowing that I had the ability to understand the original language of the latter-day scriptures, I set out to help my ward members appreciate these holy words in a way consistent with my gift. They may not have learned much about history or geography, but they certainly learned the intricacies and importance of words such as “remember,” “tent,” and “restoration.”

Of course the gifts outlined in Moroni 10 are not the only gifts. The Spirit can grant any gift that would fill a particular need, and so no exhaustive list is possible.<sup>vi</sup> As you discover your own gift, consider the vast range them.

For example, did you know that enthusiasm is a gift? Elder L. Tom Perry once expressed, “I think that the greatest talent that the Lord has blessed me with is enthusiasm.”<sup>vii</sup>

Elder Marvin J. Ashton delineated other gifts.<sup>viii</sup> Here are just a few from his list. See if you can claim any for yourself:

- The gifts of asking, of listening, of being able to weep;
- The gifts of avoiding contention, of being agreeable, of avoiding vain repetition;
- The gifts of not passing judgment, of looking to God for guidance, of being able to ponder.

Consider some more gifts. Do you have:

- The gift of being on time?
- The gift of writing thank-you notes?
- The gift of getting out of your comfort zone?
- The gift of being a conscientious visiting teacher?
- The gift of complimenting?

Let's talk about the gift of complimenting for a minute. I'm sure that all of us love it when those around us have this gift.

When I was growing up, part of each Family Home Evening was devoted to compliments. We went around the living room and complimented family members who'd done something significant that week. I might hear something like, “I'd like to compliment Barbara on being positive; she completed the fourth-year hike without a single word of complaint,” or, “I'd like to compliment David on being so diligent in both mowing *and trimming* the lawn without being asked.”

This is a tradition that we've carried on in our home and that my married children also carry on today. It's our favorite time of the week. Some weeks we might not get a lesson, but we *always* have compliments. How uplifting to receive sincere and thoughtful praise each Monday night from those closest to us. Even better than that, as family members think through the week, they appreciate the gifts of others. The blessing of our compliment time during Family Home Evening

is twofold: receiving compliments helps family members *discover* their gifts, and giving compliments helps us all *develop* our gift of complimenting.

Now that we've talked about our first area—discovering gifts—let's move to the second area, *developing* gifts. Once you know that you have a particular gift, you are under divine mandate to develop it.

I love the parable of the talents. Let's review it using the *New Testament Stories*.

“A man gave his servants some talents. A talent is a piece of money. The man gave one servant five talents . . . another servant two talents and a [third] servant one talent. Then the man went to another land. The servant with five talents worked hard . . . and made five more talents. The servant with two talents worked hard . . . and made two more talents. But the servant with one talent was not like the other servants. He hid his talent. He buried it in the ground [because] he was afraid he would lose it. The man came home. He asked the servants what they had done with their talents.”

The first and second servants brought their talents—ten and four, respectively—to the man. The man was happy. He said to each of them, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou has been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of the lord.”<sup>xix</sup>

“The third servant came to the man. He had only one talent. The man was not happy with the servant. He called the servant ‘wicked and slothful’.<sup>x</sup> He took the talent and gave it to the servant with ten talents and sent the lazy servant away.”

In this parable, “talent” refers to a piece of money, but how poignant the parable becomes when we understand that it also refers to our aptitudes and gifts. In fact, the modern meaning of “talent” is derived from this parable.<sup>xi</sup> I don't know if you think that's exciting or not, but knowing how we get the word “talent” makes my interpretation-of-English gift tingle.

We should develop our gifts by sharing them. President Monson has admonished us with these words: “Share your talents, for that which we willingly share, we keep. But that which we selfishly keep, we lose.”<sup>xiii</sup>

Let's look for some practical application to President Monson's words.

It isn't enough to develop your painting skills and then keep your paintings in your closet so that they can delight only you; you must display your paintings so that others can share in their beauty.

It isn't enough to study the scriptures and gain spiritual insights; you must communicate your newfound knowledge with others perhaps in church meetings, around the dinner table, or in letters to loved ones.

It isn't enough to make delicious meals for your family; you must bless your children by teaching them and others how to cook.

It isn't enough to know that you have a mighty testimony; you must share that testimony to lift others.

Developing and sharing your gift takes vigilance. A few months ago, a group of exceptional graduate students applied for positions on the senior editorial board of a prestigious publication. Because all of the candidates had excellent grades, the application asked them to identify unique traits—gifts—that set them apart and qualified them for the editorial board. Among the applicants were students with photographic memories, students with celebrated publishing experience, and students with advanced scholarship and academic proficiency.

One application stood out. The candidate wrote, “I am approachable. I rarely take offense, I do not hold grudges, I never raise my voice, I dislike gossip, and I can keep conversations in confidence.”

Are you surprised to know that he got the position?

Now that he has it, that young man must be watchful to continue to develop these gifts. Having recognized and stated that he never raises his voice, he must control his feelings even when the editorial schedule gets stressful. He knows that he can keep conversations in confidence, and he will develop his gift by teaching others to do the same.

Let's move to our third area—honoring your gift. Once you have discovered your gift and are working to develop it, how do you *honor* your gift? Let me illustrate honoring your gift with a question and then a story.

Have you ever gotten out of bed Christmas morning, bubbling with excitement, only to return to that same bed with a feeling of disappointment? I have. Let me tell you about my pogo-stick Christmas.

One year as a young girl, I wanted a pogo stick for Christmas. I asked for a pogo stick for Christmas, and I got a pogo stick for Christmas. It was beautiful, with long, colorful streamers descending from the handlebars. At first it magically sparkled, propped up in the family room next to my stocking. Yet also in the room were thrilling gifts for other family members—a Lasting Curls Hairsetter *with Beautifying Mist*, Head 360 skis, the Carpenters' *Close to You* album. As others oohed and aahed over their Christmas gifts, somehow, my pogo stick didn't seem quite so enchanting.

Looking back, I hope that my parents thought my lack of enthusiasm was because of a driveway full of snow. I hope they didn't know that I was dissatisfied. As the youngest child, I didn't feel that my gift was quite as spectacular as the big-kids'. I professed excitement about the pogo stick and halfheartedly displayed it in a corner of my room for a few days before carrying it out and leaving it in the garage.

I didn't honor my gift of a pogo stick on that Christmas, nor did I honor the givers, my parents. Several months passed before I tried it out and discovered how fun it was to pogo up and down the driveway. My parents *had* given me a wonderful gift, but during the winter season, I failed to appreciate it because I found it lacking when weighed against other gifts.

When we fail to honor the gifts that our Heavenly Father has given us, we also fail to honor Him.

“For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift? Behold, he rejoices not in that which is given unto him, neither rejoices in him who is the giver of the gift.”<sup>xiii</sup>

You may feel that your gift of compassion pales in comparison to your neighbor's gift of wisdom. Could it be that your gift of organization isn't as laudable as your sister's gift of energy? Not having your mother's gift of baking or your daughter's gift of friendliness might make you feel inferior.

When we feel these very human feelings of envy, we must remember that, “All these gifts come from God, for the benefit of the children of God.”<sup>xiv</sup>

*All* gifts are to benefit the children of God—and we are all children of God. “To some is given one, and to some is given another, that *all* may be profited thereby.”<sup>xv</sup>

When you honor your gift, you appreciate it without comparing it.

Sometimes when I begin to feel envious of another's gifts, I stop to think, “How is her gift blessing me?” It might be a selfish thought, but it helps me to remember that through others, my Heavenly Father blesses me.

For example, I have a brilliant brother. When Paul was young, he was given the gift of a fascination for the human body. He has developed that gift with extensive schooling and decades of practice as a surgeon. I could allow myself to feel inferior because I'm not as educated, nor have I given the life-saving service that my brother has. Heavenly Father has blessed Paul with a gift of medical expertise to bless His other children, including me. Paul's gift blesses me in times of illness and times of trauma, and his gift helps our family deal with an aging and ailing father.

Stop and think about the gifts of others in your life. Contemplate the gifts that Heavenly Father has given by making a catalog of the ones you are personally a witness to and then determine how those gifts bless your life. For me, Lenora's gift of meticulousness forces my daughter to mature into a precise pianist, which in turn blesses our home with beautiful music; Heather's gift of patience inspires me to “hold my horses” when I am too eager. Margaret's gift of serenity calms me, and Adam's gift of laughter puts a smile on my face.

As we rejoice in our gifts and in the gifts of others, we honor the gifts and, more importantly, we honor the giver. Recognizing and applauding the gifts that God has given to others is one way to worship the Giver of all good gifts.

One afternoon I asked my high-school daughter, Whitney, how to rejoice in the success of others rather than feeling inferior. Her answer was preposterously plain. She said, “Pray for the gift of rejoicing in the success of others.” How profound! Did you know that there is such a gift? There is, and I know someone who has it.

In 1995, vehicles sliding on icy, Idaho roads claimed the lives of five beautiful young people while three others survived. Among the dead was my niece, 20-year-old Veniece Ricks. The community mourned the loss of Veniece, Lisa, Lacey, Trudi and Shaun.

Veniece’s mother, Linda, has the gift of rejoicing in the success of others. To my amazement, Linda absolutely rejoiced that three had survived the terrible collision. Even as her own heart ached, she celebrated their survival. She exulted as each recovered, and she continues to delight in their successes.

If Linda can rejoice in the good fortune of others even while at the funeral of her own daughter, can’t we each rejoice when others succeed?

After discovering her gift of rejoicing in the success of others, and after years of developing it through motherhood, Linda honored her god-given gift even when it was sorely tested. Like Linda, Sir Ernest Shackleton honored his gifts in terribly unfortunate circumstances that he never expected to encounter.

Despite his best plans, Shackleton never crossed the Antarctic continent; however, he will be remembered for miraculously bringing 28 men safely home. When he landed on Elephant Island to rescue the men who had been stranded there for 105 days, one said, “We knew you’d come back.”<sup>xvi</sup> Shackleton’s men knew of the extraordinary gifts their leader had been blessed with, and those gifts saved their lives.

Don’t fret over the gifts that you don’t have; focus on discovering, developing, and honoring the gifts you do have, and then appropriately seek additional gifts that you will use to bless the lives of God’s children.

Although we each have individual gifts, we can all share the greatest gift. If we keep the commandments and endure to the end, we are promised eternal life, “which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God.”<sup>xvii</sup>

We can only receive this greatest gift—the gift of living with Heavenly Father forever—because of the gift of the Atonement.

If you haven’t yet recognized and accepted the gift of the Savior’s Atonement, follow the three steps that we’ve talked about today. *Discover* the gift of the Atonement by gaining a personal testimony of the Savior. *Develop* the gift of the Atonement as you use it in your life by repenting of misdeeds, by enduring life’s challenges, and by sharing the glorious news of the gospel. *Honor* the gift of the Atonement by your gratitude to the Giver, by your service to His children, and by recognizing that you have been ennobled by the Savior’s very personal and individual gift to you.



How grateful I am for the gifts I’ve been blessed with, and how grateful I am for the gifts that *you* have been blessed with. I’m especially grateful that I have the gift of knowing that Jesus is the Christ and that His gospel is true.

---

<sup>i</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/shackleton/1914/alexandra2.html>

<sup>ii</sup> D&C 46:7–8

<sup>iii</sup> Dallin H. Oaks, “Spiritual Gifts,” *Ensign*, Sep 1986, 68.

<sup>iv</sup> D&C 6:25

<sup>v</sup> “Lesson 19: Developing Our Talents,” *Duties and Blessings of the Priesthood: Basic Manual for Priesthood Holders, Part B*, 172.

<sup>vi</sup> *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 544.

<sup>vii</sup> “Elder L. Tom Perry of the Council of the Twelve,” *Ensign*, May 1974, 120–21.

<sup>viii</sup> Marvin J. Ashton, ““There Are Many Gifts,”” *Ensign*, Nov 1987, 20.

<sup>ix</sup> Matthew 25:21.

<sup>x</sup> Matthew 25:26

<sup>xi</sup> <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=talent>

<sup>xii</sup> Thomas S. Monson, “The Spirit of Relief Society,” *Ensign*, May 1992, 100.

<sup>xiii</sup> D&C 88:33

<sup>xiv</sup> D&C 46:26

<sup>xv</sup> D&C 46:12

<sup>xvi</sup> Jennifer Armstrong, *Shipwreck at the Bottom of the World*, New York: Crown Publishers, 1998, 123.

<sup>xvii</sup> D&C 14:7