

A Light We All Carry

"Light of the World, Part 1" Series, June 13 & 14, 2026 | Exodus 31:1-1
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How well do you know the gifts God has given you?

Many of us question our gifts.

If you ask us the question, "What gifts has God given you?", you might just say, "I don't know." You might go further and say, "My gifts aren't important." Perhaps in the pit of your stomach you really think, "God hasn't given me a gift." Even when we are aware of our gifts, sometimes we wonder if we're up to the job God has placed us in. I know there are lots of times when I quietly think to myself, "What am I doing here?" If you think these things, you're not alone.

Abraham Lincoln questioned his gifts and whether he was up to the job.

Lincoln was not very attractive. A young girl suggested he grow a beard to make himself look better, and he did. He led a small law office, and many thought this didn't qualify him for higher office. He was described as an uninspiring public speaker and simple. He was elected President by less than 40% of the vote, and even that scant support evaporated as southern states withdrew from the Union. He entered Washington for his inauguration undercover to avoid assassination threats. Lincoln heard it all but felt compelled to lead as the nation's survival hung in the balance.¹ Looking back, we know that Abraham Lincoln was a leader with few equals. Just because we can't see our gifts doesn't mean they aren't there!

We want to advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

That's our church's vision for this next season. We ourselves want the Gospel to advance in us and to take firm hold of us. We also want to shine the Light of Christ across our great big backyard in Hartford and Litchfield Counties. We want God to use us to reach the next generation of children, students, and young adults. We want to care for hurting people and build bridges to faith. That's what we've been talking about for the past three weeks.

To do that, we need an "all hands on deck" approach to our gifts.

God is the One working; He is the One advancing the Gospel and building His Kingdom. He is reaching Hartford and Litchfield Counties, He's reaching the next generation, He's caring for the hurting and bringing them to faith. And He's inviting us to join Him. Joining Him means saying "yes" to His invitation. And it means that we all find those gifts God has given us and use them for His purposes. It will take my gifts, your gifts, and the gifts God has given to everyone in this congregation to do what He is calling us to do. Simply put, we need you!

¹ <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/evidence-unpopular-mr-lincoln>

What if our church were like Launch Pad 39A at Cape Canaveral?

Launch Pad 39A sent some of the most significant missions into space. It launched the Apollo missions. It launched the space-shuttle missions too. It's a great picture of how we want to think of Valley in this next season. You—with the gifts God has given you and the call He has placed on your life—are the rockets. We as a church together are like a launching pad for each other. What does that mean? Let's dig into the story of Bezalel and Oholiab from Exodus to find out.

Some gifts make the world go around.

That moment at the foot of Mount Sinai called for a special set of gifts.

God delivered the people of Israel from 400 years of slavery in Egypt and led them into the wilderness toward the Promised Land. The people came to the foot of Mount Sinai where God appeared in a dark, rumbling cloud full of fire. God invited Moses into the cloud and gave him the Law. Moses went back for forty more days, and God gave him plans for the Tabernacle—a place where God would meet with His people. The plans included a tent, the Ark, an altar, implements for worship, and garments for the priest. But how would they make it all in the wilderness?

In Exodus 31:1-5, the Lord revealed that He already had a plan:

The LORD said to Moses, "See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft."

Some gifts make the headlines, but some make the world go around.

Deeply spiritual gifts like evangelism and apostleship seem to grab our attention. And there are gifts in the Church we all see—like the gifts of the musicians who lead us in worship every week and the gifts of those who lead our church. God gives more than just spiritual gifts, though—both inside and outside the Church. We know this intuitively. Everyone would agree that leadership such as we see in people like congresspeople, governors, and presidents is a gift. But at some point, we all tend to draw a line and assume that some things are gifts and others are not. Is it really a gift to grow wheat so that we have bread to eat? Is it really a gift to teach school, manage money, sell cars, and study atoms? These are all gifts. God gives us spiritual gifts, passions, abilities, personalities, and experiences that are ours and ours alone. These gifts make the world go around and matter deeply to Him.

Bezalel had gifts we easily overlook today.

God filled Bezalel with His Spirit and supercharged his intelligence for the moment at hand. Bezalel was highly skilled in carving, working with metals, and making jewelry. He was also a gifted leader—able to teach and manage teams of craftsmen. He had the skills God wanted for creating the Tabernacle. These are all skills we might possess but wouldn't necessarily say are from God or useful for His purposes. If we thought that, we would be profoundly wrong.

Be sure you're looking in all the right places for your gifts.

You might be lamenting not being a gifted pianist and overlook the fact that you are talented with numbers. You may worry that you aren't working with children and overlook the fact that you are

passionate about people who grieve. You may wonder why you're not more outgoing and miss that you are very good at making people feel comfortable around you. Who has God made you to be? What are you passionate about? What are you good at? These are the right questions to ask and the right places to look for your gifts.

God has been generous with us.

God was generous with Israel, Moses, and Bezalel.

The workload would still be too much for one man, but in **Exodus 31:6**, God gave more good gifts:

“And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan.

And I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you ...”

Oholiab would help Bezalel; God had given him special gifts, too. Craftsmen from throughout Israel would be ready to help. They would have the skill and passion needed that God Himself had given. God is incredibly generous with His people.

God's generosity makes me think of Doug Lee, the long-time President of Stetson University.

Stetson, a historically Baptist liberal-arts private college in DeLand, Florida, is my alma mater. Dr. Lee was President when Tammi and I were students there. He led the university through rough days as the school's biggest donors pulled out. Dr. Lee led a \$50 million fundraising campaign to stabilize Stetson and then a \$200 million campaign to secure the future. That is important to everyone who will ever go to Stetson. He helped me in the late 1990s when I was one of the pastors at First Baptist Church of DeLand where he was a member. Our air conditioner went bad as summer was heating up, and we instantly lost use of the sanctuary. The air conditioner would need to be replaced, and the church had not anticipated or saved for the expense. I had to raise \$150,000 for the project. Fast. Dr. Lee helped me do it, and we got the air conditioning replaced. God made Doug Lee to do certain jobs for His glory, just like He made Bezalel, Oholiab, and every craftsman on their team. God has made each one of us with essential gifts!

In fact, you never know whom you're sitting next to at Valley.

You may be sitting next to a colonel or a retired school superintendent. An ER doctor or an entrepreneur. You may be sitting next to a restaurateur or an on-air correspondent for a TV network. You could be sitting next to an actuary or someone who plays in the symphony. God has been generous in giving us all kinds of amazing gifts!

We have everything we need to advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Just think of the gifts we are putting to use here all the time! Martha Campbell will be at Friendship Community on Thursday evening. Nancy Parent will be here to help people purchase their Saturday-evening meals. Jim Atheneos will be ushering at the 10:30 service. Next week when you come, Summer Bible Club decorations will be up everywhere, and Emily White will have painted most of the rocks. Last month, **614 people** served in some way here at Valley. And that's just the tip of the iceberg because our people serve God out in the community as well. It's all important, and it all serves to advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

What kind of gifts has God given you?

I hope you know the answer to this question. But if you don't, take a moment. We all have gifts—whether they are spiritual, spectacular, or just special—because God faithfully and generously gives them to us. We need all those gifts God has given to advance the Gospel, and that starts with...you.

You are a gift God has given to His Kingdom.

But what if you think, "I don't want to use my gift."

Some of us are locked in on other priorities. Some of us tried serving, got burned, and quietly quit. Frankly, some of us just don't want to be bothered; the couch feels safer. I understand. Asking you to use your gifts means asking you to spend time and expend effort. It sounds risky. But please don't forget the life-changing nature of the Gospel.

Jesus reorders our priorities, which changes how we use our gifts.

Let me remind you of Jesus' invitation (a summons really) to follow Him. In **Mark 1:17** He says,

... "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men."

When He calls us to "follow Me," Jesus is calling for our **loyalty**. When He says, "I will make you," He is saying that He will **change us internally**. When He says that we will become "fishers of men," He is giving us the life-purpose of **bringing God glory and building His Kingdom**. He gives us a new purpose for living! When describing our purpose in life, we can use aspirational language like "living the good life" or even "doing good for others". But we choose our own purpose for life. When we become followers of Jesus, He sets our priorities. Our priority now is God's glory and Kingdom because Jesus makes that our priority. That may sound like an obligation, but it's actually a tremendous gift. If you are not yet a follower of Jesus, please hear this. Following Jesus gives you an upgrade on your life's purpose! Apart from Jesus, you're frankly wandering. With Jesus, you come to understand why you were created in the first place.

Jesus reshapes us into gifts given to His Kingdom.

He takes your gifts and makes you a gift to the world. There is some purpose you fulfill in this world that no one else can fulfill the way you can. The same is true in the Church; you fulfill a unique purpose that God set aside just for you. It's only when your gift is present that we are truly whole. Paul describes us together as being like a body; the body without its hands is missing something. We can survive without a gall bladder, but life is more complicated. You are a gift to the world and to the Church. When we realize that we are all gifts and that we all have a part to play in God's purpose in the world, it makes us overflow generously.

God stirred the hearts of the people of Israel, and they responded generously.

God had done miraculous things for Israel. Moses laid out God's plan for the Tabernacle, and the Spirit of God was moving. That's when the people opened the floodgates: **Exodus 35:21**:

And they came, everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose spirit moved him, and brought the LORD's contribution to be used for the tent of meeting, and for all its service, and for the holy garments.

Some people rolled up their sleeves and got to work. Others reached into their bags. As they left Egypt, Egyptians gave them gifts—jewelry, fabric, and precious metals. They had everything they

needed to build the tabernacle. They brought it together; eventually Moses had to say, "Enough is enough!" Imagine the day we say that here!

We serve a generous God, so we are generous people.

God blesses us, and we don't want to mistake His purpose in it. Yes, it is to bless us, and we thank Him for that. But it's also so that we might bless others. We are blessed to be a blessing with our time, talents, and treasures. I believe that deeply, and it leads me to want us to help each other discover and use our gifts for God's glory and Kingdom.

Let's launch one another into ministry.

The work by Bezalel and the others ended in God's glory descending on the Tabernacle.

Exodus 40:34

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. God's glory was the end of what those seemingly ordinary craftsmen did with the kind of gifts that make the world go 'round. Perhaps their gifts are like yours. Glory to God! Imagine it!

We're living in a new golden age of spaceflight.

In 1969 when Neil Armstrong first set foot on the moon, roughly 125 rockets were launched. Everything was new and the headlines were spectacular! But in 2025, there were roughly 325 rockets launched. More countries and more companies are launching more rockets than ever before. This is a new golden age of spaceflight! What would it look like for this to be a golden age of launching people into ministry?

How many rockets can you and I launch for God's glory?

Remember what we said in the beginning: You and the gifts God has given you are the rockets. We as a church together are like a launching pad for each other. We want to launch you into the places God has called you. It may be into vocational ministry—some of you should be thinking about pastoring, about serving on a church staff, or about going on mission around the world. It may be in an existing role here at Valley, it may be a role you invent, or it may be out in the community. It's all for God's glory! We just want to launch as many rockets as possible for God's glory!

Let the rest of us be your launching pad.

Paul tells us in Ephesians chapter four that the leaders of the Church are here to equip God's people for ministry. We need to help you discover your gifts, help you develop those gifts, and help you put them to work in the place God has planned for you. That means that it's our job to be your launching pad! How can the rest of us help you?

Once again, God will get the glory.

God is building His Kingdom and advancing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He invites us to join Him! He's given us all the gifts we need to do what He has called us to do. He's put those gifts in your hands. How can we help launch you and your gifts into ministry for God's glory?