



## Stewardship Season

### Talents

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev Tanya Webster, minister of Ardrossan: Park, for her thoughts on the stewardship of talents.

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## Sermon ideas

*Take my life, Lord, let it be  
consecrated, glad, and free  
Take my moments and my days;  
let them flow in ceaseless praise.*

This hymn takes me back to my days in the Methodist Church in South Africa. It was a hymn we sang often but we were forced to think carefully about the words as we sang it. We all began singing seated, and we would stand at the word or phrase that resonated most with what we wanted to offer to God; whether that was our hands, feet, voice, intellect, will, heart, love or our whole selves.

It was a powerful experience being part of that congregation and seeing people in different parts of the sanctuary stand at various different times, until by the last line the whole congregation were standing. It meant that we had to think specifically about what we wanted to offer most to God and to identify our talents. It also meant that, having identified what we wanted to offer most to God, we walked out of the service with that in mind and were more likely to think of how we could act on that intention.

One of the reasons I think it worked in its context is that many of the people attending the service were university students and young people who were aware of where their talents lay, partly because they had recently had to choose a study area, and partly because younger people are more confident in identifying their own strengths.

Children tend to be better at identifying their strengths than adults are. Perhaps it is because we encourage young people more and tend to do it less as people grow up. Perhaps it is because they have had less time for people to criticize them.

Often we have taken to heart criticisms others have made, but sometimes we need to get over these. Before Walt Disney built the empire he has today, he was fired by a newspaper editor because “he lacked imagination and had no good ideas.”

When I ask the children what they are good at, they can usually tell me: dancing, singing, music, sports, reading, maths, etc. However, when I ask an adult the same question they are much more unsure of the answer. Some of that is reticence to ‘blow their own trumpet’ because modesty is



encouraged as we grow up. But some of it is because they are not really sure what they are good at, what they have to offer. Children receive validation and recognition, whether it is in awards for achievement or verbal encouragement. Adults receive very little in that regard.

Now, we might say they are adults and shouldn't need external validation. And most adults function just fine without it. But when we are asking people to offer their talents for the work of the church, many are willing but don't know what talent they have to offer. This is not true of everyone, of course, but for many of the people who sit in our pews (or chairs) we may need to help them to identify their talents before they are able to offer them.

People often find it easier to identify talents in others than in themselves. I have asked the congregation to think of someone they admire and think of three of the strengths of that person. Most people manage that without too much difficulty and I can see smiles around the sanctuary. When I then asked them to identify three of their own strengths, the awkwardness, shuffling and lack of eye contact was obvious. Some people found it reasonably easy to do. Others found it very difficult. They all agreed it was much easier to identify strengths in someone else.

Sometimes we are hesitant to take up God's work because we don't think we are good enough or there are areas that we want to build up or work on before we offer them to God.

But Louise Penny in *How the Light Gets In* reminds us that the chorus from Leonard Cohen's "Anthem" is the metaphor for the way that humans keep working for good, despite our fragility and brokenness:

*Ring the bells that still can ring.*

*Forget your perfect offering.*

*There's a crack in everything.*

*That's how the light gets in.*

Cracks are sometimes what makes the talent! In the story of the cracked pot, the crack in the pot was part of what made it useful. And people are much better at identifying their flaws than their talents. Perhaps when we look at dedicating and offering our talents for God's use, we should also think about offering up our flaws, our failings. God uses our flaws as well as our talents – if we let him!



That same song also says:

*“You can add up the parts, you won't have the sum”*

And that, I believe is because when we offer something, God adds to it!

Perception constitutes a very large part of reality. If people perceive themselves to be flawed and limited in talent, then we need to work on changing that perception. If people believe they have nothing to offer, they will offer nothing. But we can use songs, sermons, personal interaction with others to identify talents and help others to see how they can be used for God's Kingdom.

When we join the church one of the vows we are asked to make is:

***‘Do you promise to give a fitting proportion of your time, talents and money for the Church's work in the world?’***

And it is up to each one of us to determine how we will fulfil that vow. How will we devote our time, talents and money to the church's work? We belong in the Church as our response to God's love in Christ Jesus. We have chosen to follow Christ and have promised to give.

We are all talented in so many ways  
but if we do not use our skills and talents  
for the furtherance of God's kingdom  
then our life in the church,  
our congregation  
and our community  
is diminished.

## Illustration ideas

### 1. Identifying and using your particular talent to resolve an issue

Kafka, the Czech writer was apparently walking in the park when he ran into a little girl in tears, sobbing her heart out. Kafka asks her what's wrong, and she tells him that she's lost her doll. He starts inventing a story to explain what happened in a way that will ease the child's pain.



"Your doll has gone off on a trip," he says.

"How do you know that?" the girl asks.

"Because she's written me a letter," Kafka says... "I'll bring it with me tomorrow."

Kafka returned to the park each day, with a new letter that he had written for the little girl and explained it was written by the doll.

Kafka works out the plot of the letters so that the little girl, Nancy, understands why the doll has had to leave and as a result her pain is eased.

Each day he returns to the park and gives her a letter that he explains was sent to him by the little girl's doll, Suzie.

Kafka could not find the missing doll but he used his talent for writing to help a little girl in distress.

## 2. **What we perceive to be flaws, can also be used as talents**

"A water bearer in India had two large pots, each hung on each end of a pole which he carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, and while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the master's house, the cracked pot arrived only half full.

For a full two years this went on daily, with the bearer delivering only one and a half pots full of water in his master's house. Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect to the end for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do.

After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the water bearer one day by the stream. "I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologise to you. "Why?" asked the bearer. "What are you ashamed of?" "I have been able, for these past two years, to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your master's house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work, and you don't get full value from your efforts," the pot said.



The water bearer felt sorry for the old cracked pot, and in his compassion he said, “As we return to the master’s house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path.” Indeed, as they went up the hill, the old cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path, and this cheered it somewhat. But at the end of the trail, it still felt bad because it had leaked out half its load, and so again it apologized to the bearer for its failure.

The bearer said to the pot, “Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of your path, but not on the other pot’s side? That’s because I have always known about your flaw, and I took advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back from the stream, you’ve watered them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my master’s table. Without you being just the way you are, he would not have this beauty to grace his house.”

Each of us has our own unique flaws. We’re all cracked pots. In this world, nothing goes to waste. You may think like the cracked pot that you are inefficient or useless in certain areas of your life, but somehow these flaws can turn out to be a blessing in disguise.”

## Prayers

### Call to Worship

We come together, some sad, some celebrating,  
some lonely, some overwhelmed.  
And God calls us all.

We come with our questions and wonders,  
our faith and our doubt,  
our talents and our imperfections  
And God knows us.  
And God loves us.  
Let us worship God.



## Prayer of approach

Loving God

You have called us to this place,  
Each one of us is unique,  
with differing gifts and talents,  
Yet each talent valuable to You.

Help us find ways in which to use our talents.

Help each of us to discover the joy of offering our skills and interests to enrich the lives of those around us and celebrate Your goodness to us.

As we gather around You, Lord,  
give us the humility to serve You in each other.

Be with us today

as we have come seeking Your guidance and direction for our lives.

Help us recognize the gifts You have given to us,  
and enable us to put these gifts to good use in Your world.

Gracious God, as we think about gifts today,  
may we be conscious of what we bring,  
rather than about what we may receive.

May we remember that bringing ourselves  
is what we really have to offer.

These are our prayers in Jesus name and in his name I invite you to join me in saying the Lord's prayer.

Our Father who art in Heaven...



### **Prayer for the offering**

Gracious God,  
We bring our offering to You.

We offer You our money,  
But also the gifts of ourselves,  
and our skills and talents.

God, we offer them all to You  
And we ask Your blessing on all that we give,  
so that Your word and Your loving care can reach out to all the world,  
In Jesus name  
Amen

### **Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession**

Gracious God,  
You give us so much  
for which to be thankful.

You have graced us with great gifts of life, love and faith  
more than we can imagine or believe.  
We delight in the diversity of blessings  
You have lavished on us.

Help us to embrace our gifts;  
to be courageous and  
generous with them,  
sharing and helping others through them.

Help us to use our talents and time  
To work for change and hope  
wherever there is poverty, injustice,  
abuse, violence or racism.





Help us to share your love and care  
wherever there is hate, depression,  
loneliness, bereavement or sadness.

And to bring Your peace  
wherever there is anxiety, stress,  
illness, intolerance or pain.

Teach us to accept our own talents openly,  
nurture them hopefully,  
develop them faithfully,  
and give them freely.

We are blessed with unique talents.  
Help us not to belittle our own talents  
Or those of others.

We can recognise the talents in others.  
Help us claim the talents You have given to us  
and to use them in Your service.

Enable us to encourage others  
to identify their special talents  
and to find ways to help one another.

Together we can use our talents  
to improve the lives of those around us  
in our church,  
in our congregations  
in our communities.

In Jesus Name. Amen



## Musical suggestions

CH4 502	Take my life, Lord
CH4 501	Take this moment, time and space
CH4 533	Will you come and follow me
CH4 655	For your generous providing
CH4 727	In the bulb there is a flower
CH4 641	Seek ye first the kingdom of God
CH4 503	I will offer up my life
CH4 505	All that I am, all that I do
CH4 532	Lord, you have come to the seashore



## Additional Resources

**Pray Now** is designed to be a starting point for what you might look for in prayers.

*Word of Life* is available from [St Andrew Press](#).



### SPIRITUALITY OF CONFLICT

The [Spirituality of Conflict](#) website publishes reflections on the Sunday gospel readings in the 3-year lectionary cycle of the church. The reflections explore the themes of conflict within the gospels and offer questions and commentary for private reading, group discussions and public worship. Whilst most of the content will be connected to the

Revised Common Lectionary, some will relate to occasions throughout the year – everything from St Patrick's Day to World AIDS Day. All of the content is free to download, use and share with others.

[Quick Guides](#) are designed to help people with the various elements of leading worship, gathering community and ordering space.

You may wish to email these three links to the people reading

Scripture on Sunday to support them in their involvement in worship: [Managing your nerves](#); [Creative readings](#); [Worship at the Lectern](#)

### Quick Guide...



[Resourcing Mission](#) is host to Starters for Sunday archive material and other key mission resources for download and purchase. Online booking is available for [Mission & Discipleship events](#).

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*Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.*



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