

EXCERPT



Discover Your Gifts

Celebrating How God Made You and Everyone You Know

May 10, 2022 | \$17, 192 pages, casebound | 978-1-5140-0373-2

Each of us has gifts to offer to the world around us, but we have not always identified or deployed them effectively. Incorporating new research on the impact that our gifts can make, Don Everts explores the many kinds of gifts God gives, whether spiritual, civic, artistic, or entrepreneurial. Discover how our gifts can pave a way for reconnecting with our communities.

Everyone Is a Gift.

The good news that God sees everyone as a gift naturally delights many of us. But for some of us, this news flies in the face of a heavy assumption we have been lugging along with us every day of our lives: namely, that we are no gift. We are no wonder.

I know this heavy assumption intimately. I lived the first twenty years of my life with the hard and fast knowledge (or so it seemed to me at the time) that I was different from everyone around me. I could see the wonder in others; I could sense the dignity and worth imbued within them at their creation. But me? I felt different. I felt worthless. I felt unimportant.

I did not feel like a gift.

For anyone who struggles with low self-esteem, or even self-hatred, the news that everyone is a gift might seem laughable. Perhaps it's true that *everyone else* is a gift. But not me.

This broken and cracked self-perception is common in our fallen world. This is why it is so good that the Bible's clear anthropology confronts the heavy lie of self-hatred straight on. It's a kind of beautifully painful invasion for someone struggling with low self-esteem to be confronted, as David was, with the reality that we are each "fearfully and wonderfully" made.

How does God confront the self-downtrodden among us with this important truth? For David it was reflecting on God's goodness and power as a Creator. For me it was encountering God's affection and love for me in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. At least that was the start. Healing is not always quick or immediate. It takes time for our souls to know this good news very well.

In my case, God confronted my self-hatred again and again, blow after blow. Each time, God's truth took deeper root and the twisted lie of my worthlessness lost ground. That lie lost ground as I read God's Word. It lost ground as I prayed to God. It lost ground as I began journaling and confronted head-on the unexamined lies I had been carrying within me. I remember how it lost ground in significant ways as I mentored a younger Christian who also struggled with low self-esteem. That person's wonder and dignity and worth were so clear to me, it was so obvious that God saw them as a gift . . . and as I confronted them with this truth, I couldn't help but know it at a deeper level for myself. Over time I became able to genuinely cry out in prayer as David did: "Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well" (Psalm 139:14).

In our broken and cracked world, it's understandable that this confrontation takes time. You can't just snap your fingers and have your soul know it very well. Think of Gideon, patron saint of all those who struggle to see their own wonder. When we first meet Gideon in the sixth chapter of Judges, he has been brought low, with all his

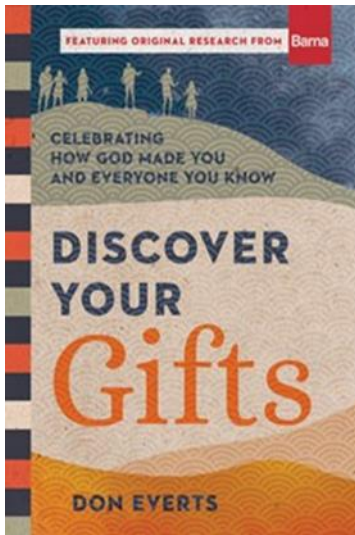


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Discover Your Gifts Workbook *Twelve Sessions for Exploring Your God-Given Purpose*

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Discover your gifts with this practical guide that describes twelve different kinds of gifts and gives examples of how each can be used in church, family, work, and society. By using this workbook alongside the *Discover Your Gifts* book, you can grow in your understanding and use of your own gifts and become better equipped to recognize and unleash the gifts of others.

fellow Israelites, by the ruthless Midianites. In modern parlance, the Midianites are the high school bullies and Gideon is the social outcast trying not to get noticed in the halls of his high school. Gideon does not feel like a gift as he awkwardly tries to beat out wheat in a cramped wine press—anything to keep from being noticed by the Midianites, who will surely swoop in and steal his wheat and lunch money if they notice him.

It's at that inglorious moment when an angel of the Lord appears to Gideon and confronts him with a glorious biblical anthropology: "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor" (Judges 6:12).

Oh, to have an angel look you in the eyes and call you a mighty person of valor! But Gideon's response? Well, sometimes it takes time for our twisted vision of ourselves to be displaced by God's vision of us. Gideon replies (to an angel of the Lord!), "Yeah, right," or something very close to that. But the angel, as God is always gracious to do, keeps confronting Gideon with the truth of his might and valor, inviting him to go and deliver his downtrodden fellow citizens. Gideon defends his low self-esteem, saying, "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house" (Judges 6:15).

Ah, Gideon. Low self-esteem can be stubborn in our fallen world, I know. But the Bible's clear anthropology is not going away, and God uses his Word (and whispers and times of prayer and journaling and mentoring relationships and angels and the extraordinary witness of Jesus' love for us on the cross) to confront the heavy lie of self-hatred straight on. And God patiently invades our lies and false assumptions with this simple but powerful truth: **everyone is a gift.**

In our nationwide research, we wanted to know whether people are aware of and understand their specific gifts. To get a baseline, we asked people how many "giftings, skills, or abilities" they believed they had to share on a scale of 1–10, from not having any gifts to feeling they have a lot of talents to offer. We used multiple words (giftings, skills, abilities, talents) to purposefully invoke a wide range of gifts within people's minds—from those they were born with to those they've developed over time through practice. There was not a huge difference between practicing Christians and all US adults in their answers: on average, people responded around 6.4 on a scale of 1–10.

When the data is analyzed based on education level and overall socioeconomic status, a difference is evident: on average, a higher education and higher socioeconomic status correspond with a slightly higher self-assessment of gifts.

A more illuminating finding came from analyzing the group of respondents who marked that they don't have any gifts, skills, or abilities to share. Consider this group of people that made up 3.5 percent of all respondents. What exactly is going on with this "no gift" group of people? As the researchers put it: "While the sample size of this group is too small to do an in-depth analysis . . . an overview of their answers provides some clues as to who these individuals are and why they might believe they are giftless."



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Don Everts is the senior pastor of First and Calvary Presbyterian Church in Springfield, Missouri, and is a writer for Lutheran Hour Ministries and the Hopeful Neighborhood Project. Don has spent almost three decades helping people on college campuses and in the local church become good stewards of their God-given gifts. His many books include *The Reluctant Witness*, *The Spiritually Vibrant Home*, and *The Hopeful Neighborhood*, all of which feature original research from Barna and biblical insights for our everyday lives.

What are these clues that can help us understand this group? The first is demographic: those in this group are more likely to be older, unemployed, or at a lower socioeconomic level. It's not hard to imagine how such circumstances might conspire to make someone think they have no gifts, skills, or abilities.

But the most striking clue relates to how *disconnected* this "no gift" group of people appears to be:

- A large portion of them has not been to church in the last six months.
- About half of this group says they don't know any of their neighbors.
- They are less likely to have ever worked on a community project.
- They don't feel like they have a sense of community in their life.

This evidence of disconnectedness stands in stark contrast, statistically, to those who identify at least one or more giftings in themselves.

What exactly do these findings tell us? Well, we can't say definitively that their lack of spiritual or community connections have caused them to see themselves as lacking any gifts, skills, or abilities. But being disconnected from church, community, and relationships may allow the heavy lie of low self-esteem to go unchallenged. I can personally attest to how God often used a passage of Scripture, a sermon on Jesus, and the people around me to confront and chip away at my own low self-esteem.

God patiently invades our lies and false assumptions with the simple but powerful good news that we are gifts. And he often accomplishes this patient invasion *through other people*. Giftedness lives most vibrantly in community. We need heralds in our lives who remind us of our own worth.

The plight of this disconnected "no gift" group underscores just how important it is for us to continue to champion this good news in our lives and in the lives of others. It seems unlikely that any person could see or appreciate their different gifts unless they first recognize, at a core level, their basic dignity and worth.

—Taken from chapter one, "Everyone Is a Gift: The Power of Seeing People as God Sees Them"



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