

*Read also Romans 8:18-22, 31, 38-39. Check out the service at [www.fpcd.org](http://www.fpcd.org).*

How do you determine what someone is good at? Can you watch a child and tell what their gifts are? That's part of our job as parents, to recognize the skills and talents of our children. We are stewards of the gifts God gives us and there is a strong tie between exercising your gifts and pleasing God.

What about your own life? Do you believe you are using your God-given gifts? When you do, you bless others. You make a difference.

Joseph had God-given gifts of administration and he maximized his use of them, which saved the lives of an entire nation during a terrible famine. Hear the story. READ Gen 47:13-27

Before you think this is the worst passage in the whole Bible, we need to realize that this was an entirely different cultural existence from ours. In ancient times, people were often enslaved due to debt, and could work themselves out of debt and regain their freedom. In other words, instead of having a credit card you would enslave yourself to somebody.

So for Joseph to solve the need for grain by buying first the people's livestock, then their land, and finally they themselves was a normal thing.

Still, Joseph was not following the dictates of God but rather, those of Egyptian policy. He has a king to satisfy. So he took their land, flocks, and indentured them. Their debt payment was 20 percent of their crops.

To see the difference, God's policy in times of trouble is clarified in Leviticus:

“The land must never be sold on a permanent basis, for the land belongs to me. . . . With every purchase of land you must grant the seller the right to buy it back. If one of your fellow Israelites falls into poverty and is forced to sell some family land, then a close relative should buy it back for him. If there is no close relative to buy the land, but the person who sold it gets enough money to buy it back, he then has the right to redeem it from the one who bought it.” (25:23-27)

In this way God gives a person a way to regain their land. If they sold themselves, the same principle applied:

“If any of your fellow Israelites fall into poverty and are forced to sell themselves to such a foreigner or to a member of his family, they still retain the right to be bought back, even after they have been purchased. They may be bought back by a brother, an uncle, or a cousin. In fact, anyone from the extended family may buy them back. They may also redeem themselves if they have prospered.” (47-49)

God gives an opportunity to recover. Redemption is always part of God's way.

Because Joseph used his skills fully to maximize the ability to feed people, he made the difference and the people did not die from starvation.

Notice, Jacob's family did not have to sell themselves or any of their livestock. Not owning land, they actually acquired property. They were fruitful and their population grew. For them, it was the best of times in the worst of times. So God powerfully provided for His people during this time so that they flourished.

What if we were having economic hardship, drought, or hard circumstances. What would we do? How might this passage teach us? The first thing to recognize is that overcoming this family was an effort of both heaven and earth.

When we face bad times God is not just passively sitting up there in heaven watching. God is with us in power, guiding, directing, pointing the way—and your job is to move.

We see this in the story of Joseph.

God gives a dream.	Joseph believes it.
God sends Joseph to Egypt.	Joseph does the best work he can wherever he is
God gives more dreams about the future.	Joseph takes action based on those dreams.
God sends his brothers to Egypt.	Joseph forgives them and helps them.
God sends the famine.	Joseph works to preserve life.

God guided, directed, pointed the way—and Joseph moved. “It isn't what we say or think that matters, but what we do.” Life as a Christian is a collaborative effort between heaven and earth. God's work is to guide you. Do you rely on Him? When you work through God, the Bible says no effort is wasted.

- “Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless” (1 Cor 15:58).

What you do matters, and when you do it for God, God brings God-sized benefit from it.

In a little Scottish town called Kincardine O'Neil there stands a castle. The castle was built in 1898. At that time it was self-sustaining, but within one generation it had become a financial disaster and fallen into disrepair. A man named Andrew Bradford inherited it. He was twenty-four years old.

As he began this venture, there was no help, no staff, the castle was not generating enough money to pay its bills, and no estate money. It had all been drained.

The work was hard, hands-on work—plowing, harvesting, much like centuries before. But he and his wife, Nicky, thought, “It just could be there's lots to come.”

They began trying to make a living through all the things the area is known for, like fly fishing parties, hunting parties, corporate conferences, weddings, developing a food market, employing local people to work. Their goal was to not only generate income for the estate, but also stimulate the local economy.

It was a struggle. After a couple of years, the fly fishing began falling because the salmon were getting eaten by an overabundance of dolphins and seals at the mouth of the River Dee. So they had to work to support survival of salmon.

The sport of game hunting helps in managing wildlife and employs 70,000 related jobs in the UK. They support businesses that fit the culture. They developed food products with nearby Aberdeen University with students as interns, and sell the goods in local markets.

This couple does not want to just walk away and live for themselves, but they feel a responsibility to the community. They want to help the local economy become vibrant in the things they once did.

The estate rents out eighty properties. They could charge the highest rents and rich people would come. But local people need to be able to live there. Mr. Bradford says there have to be businesses that work or you are not helping anybody. So they want to provide, not charity, but a viable way for local people to live.

It was too expensive to heat the castle with oil so they harvest wood chips, replant, and the carbon dioxide released by burning is recovered by the new trees, and thus the process is sustainable. All of this is hard work, not exciting or luxurious, but it provides a great sense of satisfaction and making a contribution.

The local church was established in Kincardine/O'Neil in 430AD. There has been a congregation there ever since. It might not surprise you to hear that Andrew is a lay pastor at Christ Church, and a Eucharistic minister in the Episcopal Church. Nicky plays the organ. They are people of faith making a difference through their work.

They are creatively using their gifts, being guided by God, and God is blessing the people around them because of what they do. At an annual festival a local says, "They look after their tenants', they take in consideration the peoples' needs."<sup>1</sup>

"We have to make it work but I would like to think we do it with a human face and there is some care and stewardship involved. There is more involved in it than just maximizing a profit. It's a fantastic privilege and a huge responsibility to do it. In life, a privilege and responsibility are a balance and it is meant to be that way. We started from the bottom and climbed up and there's a long way to go but that's life," says Bradford.

It is their life call and has brought good times back to their community.

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<sup>1</sup>See Kincardine Castle, Scotland at <http://video.pbs.org/video/2365335788/>, accessed October 29, 2014.

The Bradfords think their life is ordinary. They think it is what Christians are supposed to do. As his great, great, great aunt, Jane Austin, said, *“It isn’t what we say or think that matters, but what we do.”* Is your faith showing in what you do?

AMEN