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Finding Your Zone

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1 Corinthians 12:12-31 (selected verses)

1 Corinthians 12:1 Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. 2 You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. 3 Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. 4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. 7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. 12 The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. 14 Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

How many people are paralyzed because they have a false picture of what God wants them to be? How much goodness and love never gets expressed because people don't operate in their God-given gifts? How many lives are lost because people live in jealousy, comparing themselves to others rather than exploring their own God-given strengths? How much gets left undone in the world, because people have a false idea of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?

For several years during college, I was spiritually paralyzed. I had a false idea of what it looked like for me to follow Jesus. I idolized my roommate Eric Braun. (Of course I didn't realize it at the time). He was a very cool Christian on fire, goalie for the soccer team, and good at most everything. And I thought I had to be just like him. I also felt like I never measured up. It took me years of reflecting back to make connections and realize I had the lines of an old song running through my brain. It ends with the words "I believe that since my life began, the most I've had is just a talent to amuse. Heigh ho, if love were all—" Somehow I thought

that's all I was: a talent to amuse. Cheap parlor tricks. And what was God going to do with that?

A major spiritual break-through happened for me when I took my ideal of what "Matt Hook" should be, and replaced it with God's idea of what Matt Hook might be. Instead of hating myself and God for the set of gifts He'd given me, I learned to enjoy them, and I watched as God began to use my gifts. I wonder how many people here today are stuck in that trap. Maybe you've never considered operating in your gifts. Or maybe you've never considered that God made you to be a unique instrument in His hands in order to change the world...

Chuck Swindoll tells this story: Once upon a time, the animals decided they should do something meaningful to meet the problems of the new world. So they organized a school.

They adopted an activity curriculum of running, climbing, swimming, and flying. To make it easier to administer the curriculum, all the animals took all the subjects. The duck was excellent in swimming; in fact, he was better than his instructor. But he made only passing grades in flying, and was very poor in running. Since he was slow in running, he had to drop swimming and stay after school to practice running. This caused his webbed feet to be badly worn, so that he was only average in swimming. But average was quite acceptable, so nobody worried about that—except the duck. The rabbit started at the top of his class in running, but developed a nervous twitch in his leg muscles because of so much make-up work in swimming. The squirrel was excellent in climbing, but he encountered constant frustration in flying class because his teacher made him start from the ground up instead of from the treetop down. He developed Charlie horses from overexertion, and so only got a C in climbing and a D in running. The eagle was a problem child and was severely disciplined for being a non-conformist. In climbing classes he beat all the others to the top of the tree, but insisted on using his own way to get there...

The obvious moral of the story is simple—each creature has its own set of capabilities in which it will naturally excel—unless it's expected or forced to fill a mold that doesn't fit. When that happens, frustration, discouragement, and even guilt bring overall mediocrity or complete defeat. A duck is a duck—and *only* a duck. It's built to swim, not to run or fly and certainly not to climb. A squirrel is a squirrel—and *only* that. To move out of its forte, climbing, and then expect it to swim or fly will drive a squirrel nuts. ☺ Eagles are beautiful creatures in the air but not in a foot race. The rabbit will win every time, unless the eagle gets hungry. ☺

What's true of woodland animals is true of Christians in the church family and in your family. God has not made us all the same. He never intended to. It was God who planned and designed the differences, unique capabilities, and variations in the Body of Christ, the church. God was so concerned about this that he spelled it out several times in the New Testament.

- God has placed you in His family and given you a certain mixture that makes you unique. No mixture is insignificant!
- That mix pleases God completely. Nobody else is exactly like you. That should bring you pleasure too.
- When you operate in the realm of your capabilities, you will excel, the whole Body will benefit, and you'll grow too.
- When you allow others to operate in their realm, balance, unity, and health automatically occur in the Body. But when you compare...or force...or expect things beyond your or others' God-given capabilities, it becomes phony and frustrating. (from *Seasons of Life* by Chuck Swindoll)

So what's the key? How do you concentrate on your strengths and your unique gifts? Howard Hendricks may say it best: "The secret of concentration is elimination." If you want your life to change, if you want to experience God operating through you more, you have to decide what you will give yourself to. In that way, the less you do, the more you accomplish. Think of the power of a laser beam compared to a light bulb. The less you do, the more you enable others to accomplish. (But that means every one of us needs to be gathering people around us!) Focus on strengths, don't prop up weaknesses. To be in the "zone," to leverage your leadership, to make the most of your God-given gifts, you must do less, not more. The secret is of operating in your strengths is elimination. As much as possible, only do what only you can do.

During his 21 seasons of baseball, Greg Maddux' batting average has been a mere .172. But nobody complains. Why? Because he struck out 3235 batters.

Why do we miss this principle? Some leaders buy into the myth of being well-rounded. (Only organizations can be well-rounded...when everyone is playing to their strengths). Great achievers are not "well-rounded." They are men and women who play to their strengths and delegate their weaknesses. Other leaders are not able or willing to distinguish between their competencies and their weaknesses. Leaders not clued into their weaknesses are usually men or women who have bought into the notion that great leaders have no weaknesses. (Admit it!) They say if you don't know what you're not good at, ask the people who work for you. They know. When you admit it, that's not news to them. Everybody knows your weakness. But it's nice for them to know you know them too. ☺ Some leaders feel guilty about delegating their weaknesses. But not to do this is to try to be something God never intended.

But, that doesn't mean you don't do anything! **YOU MUST BE IN MINISTRY** for His Kingdom. Teaching children, gardening, construction, cooking, strategic planning, music, drama, art, finance, behind the scenes, organizing, caring for people in need, studying the Bible, praying for people, leading, inviting, working with youth, decorating, hospitality...

You may already feel like you're juggling 2 or 3 balls right now. My word to you is just keep juggling the 3. We'll get someone else to pick up the other 3. Even the best jugglers in the world can only juggle 6 or 8 or 10 balls for a minute or two. But they can juggle 3 in their sleep, because God made them that way!

This week,

1. Identify one thing you are involved in that is forcing you to be something you're not... If possible, try to remove yourself from that activity.
2. When you compare yourself with others, what do you generally find you don't match up to?...
3. Now, evaluate whether that's due to your trying to be something that's not you, and accept that.
4. Look at your friendships and determine if you're pressuring anyone to conform to your standards or skills. If so, back off, let the person be themselves, and do something to encourage them.

So relax. Enjoy your spiritual species. Cultivate your capabilities. Your own style. Appreciate the members of your family or church for who they are, even though they're different from you. Rabbits don't fly. Eagles don't swim. Ducks look funny trying to climb. So stop comparing! Enjoy being you. There's plenty of room in the forest.

Prayer: **ONLY DO WHAT ONLY YOU CAN DO.**