

# Double Your Talent

I am a shy girl who grew up in a small town in southern Utah. The sixth child of nine - a middle child. I became lost in the busyness of two parents working full time trying to care for their family. I never learned that I could ask for help or state my needs and wants and expect them to be fulfilled. I also didn't understand the nuances of social interactions. In sixth grade, I found myself in a new school made up entirely of sixth graders. I was surrounded by hundreds of kids my own age, and I felt excited about the opportunity to make new friends. However, I didn't understand how to facilitate a friendship. I remember sitting in Mrs. Crockett's home room class and wondering to myself who was going to come over to me and be my friend. I sat quietly and patiently in my seat waiting for someone to appear at my side and declare that they were my friend. It never occurred to me that if I wanted a friend, I could initiate a conversation that might turn into a friendship. As a teenager in high school, I continued to struggle to build friendships. I had some friends who knew me from my small town, but I didn't have the skills to make friends beyond that group. I often found myself in social situations where I didn't know what to say or do. I see now that my lack of ability to talk to peers made it hard for me to connect and form friendships.

In Jesus' "Parable of the Talents" (Matthew 25) he tells the story of a person who also struggles. Three servants are given talents. The first two servants were given five talents and two talents. They easily recognized that the world would value their talents. They knew the steps to take to double them. Easy peasy. Their talents were doubled, and they were each blessed to be a "ruler over many things" and "enter . . . into the joy of the Lord" (Matthew 25:23). However, in a moment of not understanding the true nature of the situation, the servant who was given one talent felt fear and hid the talent he was given. I relate to the servant who was given one talent. I have been in many situations where fear and lack of understanding left me speechless. I have worried that I am a wicked and slothful servant who doesn't know how to double my talent.

Attending Brigham Young University (BYU) helped me see how to double my talent. After being a stay-at-home mom to five children for twelve years, I decided to go back to school. I had always wanted to earn a college degree, so I was excited about the idea. However, I felt unsure of my ability to think on the spot, to answer questions and have discussions about new topics. It was a struggle, but my abilities grew with each class I took. I earned a bachelor's degree from Utah State University and master's degree from BYU in communication disorders.

In my master's program at BYU, I took a class taught by Dr. Bonnie Brinton where I learned about social communication. To help the class understand the concepts she was teaching she showed videos of children navigating social situations. The discussion was focused on how the students interacted. Some students were able to approach the situation with confidence and clearly knew how to communicate their wants and needs. Other students struggled to interact in a way that their wants and needs were acknowledged. As Dr. Brinton discussed these interactions, I immediately saw my younger self in the students who could not communicate effectively. I was shocked to watch the scenarios play out and to feel again the real emotions of inadequacy that I felt as a child. Before taking this class, I had never connected my own struggles to the work I would be doing as a speech-language pathologist (SLP).

My experience as a graduate student at BYU helped me find my "beacon of light" as a teacher of communication skills. It sparked a "talent" inside me to use my past experiences to connect with the students I work with. My natural inclination is still to be the quietest person in the room but not because I lack the understanding of how to initiate or maintain a conversation. I have learned to express ideas and opinions in a group as evidenced by my professional leadership roles over the past two school years. I am a part of the leadership team of SLPs for Alpine School District, which includes being a collaboration group leader over 12 other SLPs. I am also on the leadership team at Windsor Elementary as the special education team lead. Additionally, I was awarded teacher of the year by my colleagues for the 2023-2024 school year. I am grateful for my past experiences which have given me the understanding I need to connect with and teach students who have communication disorders. Together we practice skills to increase their confidence and ability to communicate with others. I have been able to double my talents with every student that I work with.

I have a lot of compassion for the servant who was given one talent. Maybe all he needed was someone to help him understand the situation. Maybe he needed a teacher with similar personal experiences to help him develop the skills to be successful. I am that teacher. I am a beacon of light.