

# The Songbird and the Flower

by Chip Brogden

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*The sermon illustrates the journey of a songbird who learns the importance of ministering to the Lord rather than seeking fame and recognition in her ministry.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 37:4, Psalm 95:6, Matthew 6:1, 1 Corinthians 10:31, Galatians 1:10, Colossians 3:23

**Topics:** "Spiritual Gifts", "True Ministry"

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## Description

Chip Brogden preaches about the importance of recognizing and staying true to our unique gifts and callings from God, using the story of a songbird who discovers her true ministry while on a journey to fame and recognition. The songbird's encounter with a humble flower in the wilderness leads her to realize that true ministry is about ministering to the Lord Himself, not just to others, and finding fulfillment in His presence alone.

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## Transcript

In a land not too far away lived a songbird. According to outward appearances this songbird was no different than the rest. She had blue feathers, a white breast, and a yellow bill. But she also had a very special gift!

Her gift was discovered one day quite by accident. She enjoyed singing to the Lord and worshipped Him at every opportunity. It was her custom to wake up early to see the sunrise and spend time worshipping the Lord. She had done this every morning since she was a little bird.

Her song carried unusually far one morning. Her neighbor, the squirrel, was sitting in his little recliner with a cup of tea, reading the morning newspaper, when suddenly this magnificent song came wafting through the open window! "I have to find out where that's coming from!" he exclaimed. Jumping up out of his chair, he ran through the door and into the field, looking for the source of the beautiful music.

Also, at that exact moment, a deer was walking through the woods and heard the same sweet melody. "What singing!" she cried. "I wonder who it could be?" And she, too, went off to find out where the music was coming from.

The songbird, of course, was oblivious to the excitement she had generated. She was lost in her worship when suddenly the squirrel arrived on the scene, followed by the deer - and about a dozen other animals!

"Where did you learn to sing like that?" they all asked with great admiration.

The songbird shrugged her shoulders. "I always sing like this whenever I want to give praise to the Lord. I hope I didn't disturb you."

"Disturb us?" answered the deer. "We think it is wonderful! How uplifting to hear such beautiful singing early in the morning. You really have a gift!"

"I do?" asked the songbird.

"Absolutely!" said the squirrel. "God blessed you to bless others, and you shouldn't let that gift go to waste. You have a special calling!" And all the other animals agreed.

"I don't want to waste my gift," answered the bird. "What should I do?"

"Come with us to the church service this morning," said the deer. "I'll speak to the pastor about you and he'll let you sing for the congregation!"

The songbird wasn't sure what to do about all this attention, but she didn't want to waste her gift, and she certainly wanted to bless others with what she had been blessed with. So she agreed to go.

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Of course, the congregation of animals were blessed by the singing songbird, and she was such a blessing that they invited her to sing every Sunday morning. The little group began to grow as a result of the songbird's beautiful voice. In no time the songbird became the worship leader. Not only was she responsible for selecting the music and leading the worship service, but she was supposed to conduct the choir practice twice a week and teach voice to the pastor's daughter (the crow) so she could one day sing as well as the songbird.

One Sunday morning a group of eagles arrived, listened to the songbird, and watched her very carefully. After the service, the eagles gathered around the songbird and began to prophesy! "The Lord says that you have a special anointing, and He will give you an international ministry!"

Of course, the songbird was very thrilled about this, because she wanted to use her gift and she wanted to be a blessing. Another member of the church, the fox, offered to record her music and put it on CD. "That way," he explained, "You can reach more animals and be a blessing to God's creatures all over the world. This is what the Lord meant when He said He was giving you an international ministry!"

Before long the CD's were produced, and the fox had promoted them all over the world. The orders began to come in, and everyone said they were blessed by the songbird's music. Then came the invitations! "Is the songbird available to come to our church?" Everyone wanted their own live performance, and the fox took care of everything.

"Congratulations!" he told the songbird. "You're booked up for ministry every week for the next two years, and your CD's are in record stores all over the world. Now you can be in the full-time ministry! The Lord has really blessed you!"

So the songbird took her itinerary from the fox and began flying all over the world to meet the demands of her full-time ministry schedule. The fox even made her a special backpack so she could take all her CD's and ministry resources with her and raise money for her ministry.

The songbird sang in church services, and in retreats, and in conventions, and in concerts. She truly enjoyed meeting all the other animals, and she still enjoyed singing. She was getting a little tired of flapping her wings all the time to get from one ministry event to the other, and her voice seemed to be losing some of its former strength and purity from being used all the time, but she accepted that as part of fulfilling the call on her life. Besides, no one seemed to notice. Everyone loved her, and wanted to hear her.

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Time went by, and the songbird was becoming more and more popular. She had a ministry headquarters, a ministry staff, and ministry partners all over the world. Her next CD was coming out soon, and everyone was looking forward to it with great anticipation. She was a busy little songbird, flying all over the place to keep up with her hectic ministry schedule, but having to carry around all those CD's and ministry resources on her back was a constant strain, and she tired easily.

One day she was traveling to her next singing engagement and found herself flying over a canyon out in the middle of nowhere. Exhausted from her flight, she decided this would be a good place to stop and rest her wings for awhile. Far below her she saw a gorgeous flower of indescribable beauty! So she circled around the flower and landed right next to it.

What a lovely little flower it was! It had round petals of many colors - yellow, blue, pink, and white - and golden leaves. She had never seen anything like it in all her travels around the world. And the fragrance! It was unlike anything she had ever smelled, and far better than any perfume she had ever tried. Yet here it was, growing out of a crack in the bottom of a rocky canyon floor, out in the middle of nowhere!

"Hello little flower!" the songbird said. "I was just flying overhead and admiring your beauty, so I thought I would visit with you for a moment. You are certainly the most beautiful flower I have ever seen, and I don't think there is another flower in the world quite like you."

"The Lord has been very gracious to me," answered the flower pleasantly. "Who are you, and where are you going?"

"I am Rev. Songbird and I'm on my way to minister at a retreat on the other side of this canyon. Maybe you've listened to one of my CD's, or seen me on television?"

"No, I don't believe I have," the flower said. "I'm quite alone out here in the canyon, and I don't have a lot of contact with the rest of the world. As you can see, I don't have wings to carry me anywhere."

"That's a shame," said the songbird. "Because you are such a beautiful flower, and you give off such a lovely aroma. The Lord has blessed you to be a blessing, yet your gifts are not being used as they should! Why don't you come along with me to church, so the other animals can see your beauty and enjoy your fragrance?"

"Oh no, that would never do," the flower said, "Because that would only distract me from my own ministry."

"So you are in the ministry? What denomination are you with?" asked the songbird.

The flower laughed. "I'm not with a denomination."

"Where do you go to church?"

"Oh, I'm not involved with a church, either."

"Do you have some books or tapes out?"

"Heaven's no!" the flower laughed.

"So what kind of ministry do you have, then? Are you in the ministry full-time, like me?" the songbird asked.

"Oh yes, it is a full-time ministry," answered the flower.

"But you are out here in the wilderness, all alone. There are no churches, no one to fellowship with. How can you be in the full-time ministry? It seems like such a waste."

"Oh, but that is where you are wrong," explained the flower. "You see your ministry as being to the other animals, but my ministry is to the Lord Himself! He has planted me out here in the wilderness, hidden from the rest of the world. You believe that is a waste, since no one can see me or smell me. But He can see me! And He can smell me! And the measure of my fruitfulness is not what I am to other people, but what I am to Him."

The songbird was silent for a long time. Finally, she said, "Creatures all over the world are being blessed and encouraged by my music. Perhaps you are called to minister to the Lord, but I am called to minister to the other animals!"

"Who told you that you are called to minister to the other animals?" asked the flower.

"The Lord!"

"Really?" asked the flower.

The songbird thought about what the squirrel had said, and what the deer had said, and what the eagles had said, and what the fox had said, and what all the other animals said. "Well... just about everyone who has heard me sing has told me that the Lord has given me a special gift, a special calling, and a special ministry."

"Yes," agreed the flower. "But all of God's creatures have a special gift, a special calling, and a special ministry. Who told you that your gift, calling, and ministry is to the other animals?"

"I guess the other animals said so."

"Naturally," continued the flower. "But wait! What is that huge pack on your back?"

"Oh, that is my bag of music CD's and ministry resources. I carry these with me wherever I go, because this is how my full-time ministry is supported."

"It looks mighty heavy," observed the flower.

"It is, believe me!" said the songbird. But it's part of being in the ministry."

"For your ministry, perhaps," said the flower. "It's not part of my ministry! Ministering to the Lord is not a burden at all."

(Secretly, the songbird envied the flower, but she couldn't bring herself to admit it.)

"It does sound good," said the songbird. "But I'm not sure I even know how to minister to the Lord."

"Do you remember when you used to sing praises to the Lord in secret every morning, and just worshipped Him for Who He is, with no agenda or vision or plan or crowd of onlookers to minister to? Do you remember when you just sang the songs He gave you, and they were just between you and Him?" the flower asked.

"Yes."

"You were ministering to the Lord! And what was your reward, when no one could hear you sing, and you were just singing to Him?"

The songbird thought. "I didn't get any rewards, or recognition, or applause. So I guess the only reward I had was... Him?"

"That's right," the flower smiled. "When we minister to the Lord then the Lord becomes our reward. So then the question becomes: is Jesus enough for you? Or is the work of the Lord more important to you than the Lord of the work?"

And the songbird had to admit that she never had time to just sing to the Lord the way she used to. With all her traveling and performing she seldom took time to just minister to the Lord, the way she did before anyone knew how gifted she was. Now the ministry had become so big that the Lord Himself had been neglected.

"I see it now," the songbird finally admitted. "I went into the ministry, but I missed my calling."

"That's what usually happens," said the flower.

The songbird and the flower sat together in silence for a long time.

"So what do I do now?" the songbird whispered.

"Just go back to the beginning," the flower said. "The Lord is waiting to meet with you there."

The songbird and the flower embraced, and the songbird flew back to her nest, leaving the burden of her ministry behind on the canyon floor. So from that day forward the songbird devoted herself to ministering to the Lord, just like she used to do. And the Lord gave her some beautiful new songs to sing - just for Him.

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