

## New Hope Sermon Parable of Talents: God's Enormous Generosity Matthew 25:14-30

Your talent is  
God's gift to you  
What you do  
with it is your  
gift back to God

Let me open our discussion of the parable of the talents with three short quips:

#1. My friend's son worked at a fast-food restaurant when he was in high school. One night while he was manning the drive-thru, a customer told him that the intercom wasn't working properly. My friend's son went about filling the order while a female co-worker fiddled with the intercom.

She asked, "Is that okay now?" "Well, no," the customer replied. "Now you sound like a girl." GCFN 5/15/17

Today we look at the parable of the talents. Principle #1: Although the parable speaks of male servants, the Bible is clear that God gives great gifts to men and women.

#2. Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson are hiking. They hiked all day long and then, having gotten tired, went to sleep in their tent.

Holmes wakes up deep at night, wakes Watson and says, "Watson, do you see the bright stars and do you notice how clear the sky is? What can you deduce from it?"

"Well, this clearly tells us the weather tomorrow is going to be dry and sunny."

"No Watson, it's simpler than that. It just means that somebody has stolen our tent." gcfn 5/15/2117

Principle #2: Today I want us to see the things that are clearly set forth in the scripture about the talents and gifts God gives us – without the covering of the tent of various doctrines about gifts. The focus will be on the extraordinary magnanimity of God.

#3. Known for their luxury watches, Swiss watchmaker Patek Philippe has also become well-known for its clever advertising slogan: "You never actually own a Patek Philippe; you merely take care of it for the next generation." So it is with what we "own": money, gifts, ministries, time, and our very lives.

*Alan Wilson, Nyon, Switzerland.* Principle #3: The parable of the talents is about what we own. From this perspective, the parable of the talents is essentially an issue of stewardship.

Let's go over the story first.

The word talent here refers to money—actually an enormous amount of money the master gave his servants. Five talents=a hundred years wages; 2 talents=worth 40 years wages; 1 talent=worth 20 years wages (Hultgren, *The Parables*, Eerdmans, p. 275). The role of the servants was to be trustworthy with their stewardship of it so it would benefit (or even honor) the master/benefactor. The amount given to each was based on their abilities (vs. 15).

When the servants used their talents and brought good dividends, they were told, "Let's celebrate together—i.e. come and share your master's happiness." They were also given more responsibility, trusted with even great things that belonged to the master that they were to now steward, "Faithful in little—I will entrust more to you" (vs. 21, 23). These two were on the same page with the master, doing what would please him, making the master's generosity pay off. They were good stewards of what they had been given.

The third servant, however, was not on the same page as the master. He didn't steward his gifts but instead hid them away because he didn't trust the master. He was afraid. Apparently, "the laziness and wickedness of the servant impelled him to pervert the image of his master which then provided

him with an excuse for his personal irresponsibility” (Wilkins, p. 820). And he was judged harshly for his irresponsibility.

That’s the barebones of the story...From these I want to emphasize two lessons to apply to our lives.

First, the magnanimity of God. The gifts, talents and resources He gives us are amazing. C. S. Lewis said: “God seems to do nothing of Himself which He can possibly delegate to His creatures. He commands us to do slowly and blunderingly what He could do perfectly and in the twinkling of an eye. Creation seems to be delegation through and through. I suppose this is because He is a giver. (C.S. Lewis, *Leadership, Vol. 10, no. 1.*)

The first application: He is a giver indeed. All our spiritual gifts are just that – gifts from the Holy Spirit to each believer as the Spirit chooses. They are called “grace gifts” because they are all from God’s goodness – nothing related to our worthiness and our qualifications or earning of those gifts. And this includes all the gifts – gifts of teaching, of helping, of leading, of giving, of mercy, of healing, of shepherding, of speaking in tongues and interpreting tongues, of prophecy, of serving, of encouraging, of wisdom, of knowledge, of faith, of discerning of spirits, of miraculous powers – they are all gifts given because God is a giver and immensely generous. He has chosen to use His people to manifest His reality.

But His generosity is not just in our spiritual gifts. It is also in all the resources He has given us – for some it is a car – so like Miyuki, they use it for ministry. For some it is time, so like Marti, they take people to doctors and stay with those who are sick, or Cathy Shi who during the school year came every week to be Keith’s exercise coach. For some it is money so they give liberally (and often very sacrificially like Alex who gave the church his last \$200 dollars as he headed back to Hong Kong; for some it is a house, like ours – or others’ who have rooms to spare and can rent to those in need.

“The giving of the talents to each according to his ability must signify not only the different gifts given but also the different levels of responsibility each person has been given—what is given is what the master considers appropriate. Nothing is given that is more than one can manage” (Hultgren, p. 228).

So what in God’s great generosity has He given you?

Second application: And how are you managing it? Andrew Murray, a south African church leader, once said: “The world asks, ‘What does a man own?’ Christ asks, ‘How does he use it?’” (Money II, *Christian History, Issue 19*).

Usage is a critical question given the statistics on people’s use of gift cards: “39.2 percent of shoppers will purchase a department store gift card for friends and family, followed by 33.4 percent of shoppers opting for a restaurant gift card. But according to estimates reported in the *Journal of State Taxation*, the typical American home has an average of \$300 in unused or “unredeemed” gift cards. These cards are often misplaced, accidentally thrown out, or only partially redeemed. Between 2005 and 2011, \$41 billion in gift cards went unused. In the same way, the gifts of God (salvation, spiritual gifts, talents, the Bible) often remain unused, sitting on a shelf or getting stuck in a drawer. *Harvard Business Review, Stats & Curiosities (Harvard Business Review, 2013), page 104*

To be a steward of our gifts we must be faithful to put our gifts and resources to work in God’s kingdom.

“We have nothing to do with how much ability we’ve got, or how little, but with what we do with what we have. The man with great talent is apt to be puffed up, and the man with little [talent] to belittle the little. Poor fools! God gives it, much or little. “Our part is to be faithful,” doing the level best with

every bit and scrap. And we will be if Jesus' spirit controls. (S.D. Gordon in *The Bent-Knee Time. Christianity Today*, Vol. 32, no. 6.)

Now, being stewards of our gifts likely involves taking risks. "The 2 servants were not afraid to take risks in using what the master gave them. "Taking risks is the work of faith in action when it comes to serving Christ, one should be bold and not be afraid of risks...Get on with lives of self-abandon and witness, knowing that the grace of God in Christ will more than compensate for any mistakes they might make" (Hultgren, p. 280).

The book I reviewed this week gives many examples of such risks. In *Play the Man* by Mark Batterson he describes the Covenant of Discipleship he created to initiate each of his teenage boys into manhood when they turned 13. He had emotional challenges, spiritual challenges for them to complete in their Year of Discipleship and physical challenges. For one son, they did physical training to prepare for a five day rafting trip down the Colorado River. Here's how Batterson described it:

"Is it any coincidence that the most memorable moments from that trip doubled as the most dangerous? It was surviving the class 7 rapids that could have capsized our raft...The truly liminal moment for Josiah was mile marker 79.1 called the Sockdolager on the River...If you look up sockdolager in the dictionary, it means 'knockout blow.' And that's exactly what the rapid felt like – a 48 degree punch in the face....we white knuckled the handles of the raft and held on for dear life...As we broke through the rapid, Josiah yelled at the top of his mid-puberty voice, "We are men! We are men!.' I've since wondered: what was it that gave Josiah such a sense of manliness in that moment? I think part of it was the fact that he faced his fear and fought through them"(Batterson, Baker Books, 2017, pp. 191-192, 102,103)

For Mark "the goal of the discipleship process [with its 3 pronged spiritual, physical and mental challenges] isn't just to make a man; it's to make a man of God. And that takes more than a father; it takes a spiritual father"(Batterson, Ibid., p. 182), a man who can model trusting God with all his heart and growing as a responsible, mature adult who puts Jesus first in everything. His Year of Discipleship with his children was one way he was being a good steward of his responsibilities to them as a Dad.

But stewardship also has a global dimension. It involves seeing where God directs us to meet the needs in the world. David Brooks says, "Commencement speakers are always telling young people to follow their passions. Be true to yourself. This is a vision of life that begins with self and ends with self. But people on the road to [character growth] do not find their vocations by asking, what do I want from life? They ask, what is life asking of me? How can I match my intrinsic talent with one of the world's deep needs?" David Brooks, "The Moral Bucket List," *The New York Times* (4-11-15)

Finally, stewardship of God's great generosity in our lives involves vision and courage. "Some people have the notion that following your spiritual gifts is spending the days and years of your life doing only those things which come naturally, easily, with no effort, discipline, or practice." Wesley Tracy, *Leadership*, Vol. 3, no. 4. No, being stewards requires a great deal of effort and wisdom and creativity. Let me close with how this was seen in two very different churches.

One Thanksgiving, Denny Bellesi asked for volunteers to join him at the altar of the Coast Hills Community Church in Aliso Viejo, California. He didn't say what they would be volunteering for. When just a few people came forward, the pastor got down and trolled the aisles, pointing at parishioners. "My biggest fear," says Glen Pickren, "was that he was going to ask us to dance."

Actually, Bellesi had an even bigger challenge in mind...He handed crisp \$100 bills from the church treasury to 100 church members and told them to enrich God by investing in the needy. "I dumped a huge responsibility on them," says Bellesi. "But it turned out to impact more people than any of us thought possible."

The good works funded by Bellesi's offering cover a wide range in terms of both scale and geography... Internet employment-agency executive Michael Rodriguez e-mailed old schoolmates for matching funds and wound up giving \$8,000 to cover medical and funeral expenses for a couple whose two daughters died of a rare blood disorder. Steve L'Heureux, a software-company owner, and his wife, Cathy, a homemaker, whose only child, 6-year-old Alex, died suddenly in January 2000 of unknown causes, planted an artificial Christmas tree in a neighbor's yard in her memory, and decorated it with cards requesting holiday gifts for three destitute families. Some 90 donors matched the L'Heureux's \$100 with \$8,000 worth of toys and grocery certificates...Homemaker Terry Zwick told friends at a party about the pastor's challenge and left with \$1,700. That sum helped an acquaintance of an acquaintance—Lisa Panzica, 33, a single mother of three who had recently moved out of a homeless shelter—buy groceries and pay the rent. *William Plummer and Jill Moushin Singer, "They Took God's Money," Christian Reader (Nov/Dec 2002), pp. 39-42*

A similar story occurred in a church “across the pond.” Another example: St. Peter and St. Mary's Church in Stowmarket, England is a 14<sup>th</sup> century structure in need of repairs. Reverend Michael Eden gave each of the 90 parishioners 10 pounds (about \$18) and instructed them to "go forth and multiply." And the people did. One person bought baking ingredients and made over \$750 selling cakes and scones. Another invested in wool and earned \$138 selling scarves. In the end, the church raised over \$9,200. Commenting on his unusual plan, Reverend Eden observed, "God gives us all sorts of things, but does not expect us to waste them and do nothing." *It Wasn't All Bad," The Week (5-12-06), p. 4.*

Those are our twin challenges today:

1. **What are you doing with God's great generosity to you?**
2. **How are you stewarding those resources and using them to help others – for God's glory?**

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