

# Invest Your 'Talents'

## Stewardship Emphasis Sunday

Matthew 25:14-30 (Malachi 3:8-12)  
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

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I'm sure that you have been asked the following question many times before. But it bears asking again. Have you ever just sat yourself down and taken an inventory of your gifts, abilities and talents? Have you ever made a mental list of all the things that you have, and of all the things that you do well or like doing?

Time and again the scriptures assure us that each and every one of us has been created in a unique and special way. Each and every one of us have been blessed with particular and different gifts and abilities. The hard part, though, is that most often we are left to discover them for ourselves. Sometimes, however, it's other people that first recognize our giftedness.

Some talents and abilities are obvious at a young age, while others aren't discovered until late in life. But you know, none of them are recognized until we first step out in courage to try something in order to see if we might be good at it or not.

For instance, speaking in front of a group of people was one of the greatest fears of my life – really! My heart would pound so hard that my voice shook. My palms got sweaty and I'd feel sick to my stomach. I clearly remember this happening to me as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. I specifically remember this fear when I served as a liturgist in my home congregation not long before I went to seminary. (That's why I'm so appreciative of those of you who volunteer to be a liturgist.) What was scarier is that this anxiety and fear was still the case when I got out of seminary. All I could think of is that there was no possible way I was going to make it as the pastor of a church.

Perhaps you've found some of your gifts by mistake, or only after trial and error. What do you think your hidden talents and abilities might be right now - those gifts just waiting to be discovered and nurtured? I am convinced that no one is ever too old to discover their giftedness.

A few moments ago I read from the Gospel of Matthew the parable commonly known as the **Parable of the Talents**. Modern biblical scholars believe it has been modified by the gospel writer in order to fit his own eschatological theology of the second coming of Christ and the end times. The traditional interpretation of this parable is that **whatever your abilities are, and no matter how many talents you have, you are meant to use them – to invest them for the common good, and to the glory of God.**

So let's take a closer look at this parable of the talents. First we are introduced to a master who is going away on a long journey. Before he leaves he distributes huge sums of money to his three servants according to his evaluation of their capabilities. No servant is given more than he is able to handle. Even the one with the least ability is given a significant amount, an honor for which he should be deeply grateful.

The word "talent" that is used in this parable wasn't originally about gifts and abilities, however. The Greek word *talenta* was a monetary term. One talent, referred to a particular unit of silver or gold, and was equal to the enormous sum of 15-20 years of laborers wages! Later on in the parable we will see how it reflects the biblical principle that, "**to whom much is given, much shall be required.**"

The first two servants, the ones who received 5 and 2 talents, went to work immediately. They understood that they had a responsibility to be good stewards and caretakers with what they had been entrusted. But **the 3rd servant was unwilling to take risks, and merely dug a hole and buried the money entrusted to him for safekeeping.** This seems like a prudent, careful, cautious investor. He is not about to take chances with the money, which may end up being lost entirely. It is all there, every penny of it, when his master returns.

After a long period of time, the master came back home and settled accounts. The first two servants both doubled what they had originally received. The emphasis is simply on the fact that they went to work, risking what they were given in order to increase their return. The master declares, "well done, good and faithful servants" and gives them both two things in return: increased responsibility, and a share in their master's joy.

Notice what happens, in contrast, when the 3rd servant approaches his master. This servant, filled with fear, was afraid that if he invested the money and lost it all, he would incur the master's wrath, with whom he obviously didn't have a very good relationship.

Ironically, he ended up getting what he was most afraid of. The severity of the master's judgment toward this third servant, whom the master calls lazy and wicked, is disturbing. It seems so unfair. For his lack of effort, he is treated as harshly as anyone in the entire Bible. The one talent entrusted to this servant is taken from him, and even more drastically, the relationship between master and servant is severed.

Like many parables, this one seeks to make its points through excessive exaggeration, therefore it does not reflect a strict allegorical connection to the actions and character of God.

Saying that, however, **we are challenged by this parable to reflect upon what it means to invest and make full use of the time, talents and financial resources that have been entrusted to us. Being passive and doing nothing, especially out of fear, is not to be the mark of a follower of Jesus.** I think this may be at the heart of Jesus' original message. One biblical commentator writes:

The greatest risk of all, it turns out, is not to risk anything, not to care deeply and profoundly enough about anything to invest deeply, to give your heart away and in the process risk everything.

The greatest risk of all, it turns out, is to play it safe, to live cautiously and prudently... The ancient church called this sloth, one of the seven deadly sins. Sloth means not caring, not loving, not rejoicing, not living up to the full potential of our humanity, playing it safe, investing nothing, being cautious and prudent, digging a hole and burying the money in the ground.

**It makes me wonder just how much of our goodness, time, love, treasure, and talent we bury in the ground. It is fear and distrust that paralyzes the third servant in this parable. We are warned to not let fear of the unknown future paralyze us.**

Perhaps Jesus was providing a warning that the outcome of playing it safe – not caring, not loving passionately, not investing ourselves, not risking anything, not resisting fear – is something akin to death, like being banished to the outer darkness.

Unlike the common misperception, we learn that **faith and discipleship is a high-risk venture – as individuals and as a congregation. We are to live our lives as fully as possible by investing all that we have and all that we are.** We are indeed given both freedom and responsibility to risk and invest our time, talents, and financial resources – our very lives – as we so choose.

So on this Stewardship Emphasis Sunday, a week before we are asked to pledge our time, talents, and financial resources to the ministry efforts of this congregation, we are invited by this parable to **see being a disciple of Jesus as a high-risk venture.** May God guide us in our efforts to invest not only wisely, but also fully.

Amen.

Resource:

*Feasting on the Word* Biblical Commentary