

2018 Stewardship Month
The Gift of Talents
Matthew 25:14-30
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INTRODUCTION

Words and actions can either be encouraging or discouraging to a kid. They can be spiritual markers or negative life commandments—things seemingly insignificant, but monumental. A lot of profound things happen when we are totally unaware.

Captain Norman Goodwin preached the sermon that Sabbath. I can remember part of that sermon as if it were yesterday. Goodwin was married to a local girl—Jo Ann Dill, from Puyallup, Washington. They were on vacation visiting his wife’s family, and he was invited to preach that Sabbath. He was an Adventist Chaplain in the Navy. And as great preachers often do, he told stories—stories that captivated the attention of the old and the young.

He told the story of leading his secretary to the Adventist message by having her type evangelistic sermons. She typed each message and then proofread it by reading it again. By the time she was finished, she made a decision to follow Jesus.

He told a story about being out on the high seas. A storm came that never seemed to end. Day after day the waves were incredible, and the ship would go

down, down, down, and then it would rise up, up, up. He finally called the crew together and read to them from Psalm 107:23-32:

"They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man,

And are at their wits' end.

²⁸ Then they cry out to the LORD in their trouble,

And He brings them out of their distresses.

²⁹ He calms the storm,

So that its waves are still.

³⁰ Then they are glad because they are quiet;

So He guides them to their desired haven.

³¹ Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness,

And for His wonderful works to the children of men!

³² Let them exalt Him also in the assembly of the people,

And praise Him in the company of the elders."¹

There are on the ship they cried to the Lord and the Lord calmed the seas after their season of prayer.

It was a powerful sermon, and, as a young girl, I was moved. But something else happened. My sister and I sang a duet that morning. After the sermon, he said to me words that I have never forgotten. He said, "God gave you a talent for

singing. Keep singing for God and you will have the talent. But if you stop singing to honor God, you will lose that talent.”

Please open your Bible to Matthew 25:14-30. The context for this parable is the signs of the end of the age, or the Second Coming of Jesus. The chapter begins with the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, which reveals those who fall asleep waiting and ends with the admonition, “Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.”

Next, Jesus talks about the gift of talents, and asks the question, “What are we doing while we are waiting for the Master to return?”

- Verse 14, *“For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them.”*

Jesus is the man who is going to be traveling to a far country. He’s going to be leaving them to go to heaven. Jesus has the 12, the 70 , and by the time we get to Pentecost, He has 120 in the Upper Room. But He promised them the Holy Spirit, Who would empower them to preach and live the Gospel. He would deliver His goods to them.

- Verse 15, *“And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability and immediately he went on a journey.”*

I imagine that Peter, John, and Paul were five-talent apostles. Thomas, maybe a two-talent apostle. Just saying! Some had the gift of preaching. Some had

the gift of writing. Barnabus later had the gift of encouraging. They all had the gift of speaking in languages as God gave them utterance. Notice who is it that gives the abilities? God does.

God gifts us with natural talent, but He also empowers us with gifts of the Spirit to use for ministry.

Paul elaborates on this in Ephesians 4:7-13.

• *“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. . . . And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, • and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ till we all come to the unity of the faith • and of the knowledge of the Son of God to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”*

The parable continues in verses 16, 17:

• *“Then he had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he who had received two gained two more also.”*

Notice these servants didn’t waste any time, but began immediately to use the gifts that God gave them. They realized that they were entrusted with these special gifts to use while the Lord was away, and immediately they set out to use them. In the process of using them, the talents were multiplied.

But there was one servant who had a different thought pattern.

- Verse 18, *“But he who had received one went and dug in the ground and hid his Lord’s money.”* You might be thinking, “Why would he do that? That doesn’t seem very bright on his part.”

In ancient times, burying one’s treasure was considered the safest way to preserve it. Maybe like what we would call “hoarding” today? But, the larger question is why do we bury the spiritual gifts God has given us? There might be a variety of reasons. Let’s see what the Bible records.

- Verses 19 and 20, *“After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, ‘Lord you delivered me five talents, look, I have gained five more talents besides them.’”*

Just as the lord of these servants settled accounts with them, Jesus is coming again and will settle accounts with us. What will we have to show Him?

My story is that as I began sharing what Jesus had done for me, I started studying the Bible more, and the door opened for me to give Bible studies. As I saw people make decisions for Him, I was so excited that I volunteered to go build a church for Maranatha! Then, they asked me to hold evangelistic meetings. I felt His Spirit was leading and I became more active in witnessing.

Someone else’s story might be, “Lord, I was a stay-at-home mom. I enjoyed being with my kids so much that I decided to start a child care business. I read

them stories about Jesus, and, as I developed relationships with their parents, I was able to share with them what Jesus means to me. Over time, I eventually brought them to Sabbath School and then they joined Pathfinders.'

Someone else might say, "God, you gave me the gift of repairing homes. As I was working for this person, I noticed that they were depressed. I asked if I could pray for them. Then, eventually, that person wanted to know more about the God I serve."

Or someone else might say, "Lord, you gave me the gift of healing. When I go into a patient's room, I pray for them silently. One day, I was in the room of someone who had received a terrible diagnosis and they were really scared. I asked if I could pray for them. They didn't know You, but they were open to anything at that point. I shared Jesus with them, and God gave them peace in the midst of their storm."

Every story will be different. Because Jesus and the Holy Spirit give each of us unique talents, they are tailor-made to our own individual personality.

- Verse 21, *"His Lord said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord."*

Do you like affirmation? What could be more powerful than God's affirmation of your use of the gifts that He's given you? Picture Jesus' huge smile,

His warm embrace, and His words, "Good job! You got it! You have my heart, my attitude, my Spirit. You selflessly gave of Your time and talents, and worked for Me whether you were a school teacher, a nurse, a housekeeper, a computer operator, took care of kids at home, or took care of shut ins. Joy is yours! Not temporary amusement, not self-seeking pleasure. But the joy of fellowship with Me, and the pleasure of the company of all the saints and angels."

- Notice verses 22 and 23, same story, second stanza, *"He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' His Lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'"*

No matter whether many or few the talents, there is joy in the service of Jesus!

- Verses 24 and 25, *"Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.'"*

This person has such a poor conception of God. He believed God to be hard, unreasonable, uncompassionate. He was afraid of God. He was afraid to risk anything for the Kingdom of God. So he hid his talent in the ground and went on

his merry way doing what he pleased, when he pleased, and how he pleased. But the day the master returned, he went back to the hole that he had dug for himself and dusted off the old talent.

The reward for faithful service is an increased opportunity to serve. Is it possible that those who choose to bury their talents do not want the responsibility of using their talents for their Master? Either from their belief that they aren't good enough or from their desire not to take responsibility, they choose to withhold their service.

- Then notice the Master's words—sad words. Verses 26 and 27, *"But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest.'*

- *"Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

The servant could have at least placed his money with a banker with a low risk investment to make *something* for His master. God accepts us according to what we can do. He never expects more of us than we can give. But God requires

no more—and no less—than our best. Whether it's our physical strength, our time, or our money, if we don't use them, we lose them. And if we are not faithful in the little things in this life, how will we be faithful with the eternal things He calls us to handle?

- In the book, *In Heavenly Places*, Ellen White states it this way: "It is the little things of life that develop the spirit and determine the character. Those who neglect the little things will not be prepared to endure severe tests when they are brought o bear upon them. . . Life is made up, not of great sacrifices and of wonderful achievements, but of little things" (226).

Friends, Jesus has purchased each of us with a price. Everything we have is from Him. When we use our talents and abilities, we are only giving to Him what He has already given us. We do not serve God to earn approval with Him. We serve Him because He first loved us and gave Himself for us. He emptied Himself and became a servant. Out of an abundant heart and relationship with Jesus, our response is to share and to love others.

You might say, "But I'm a kid. What talents do I have?" You have talents. Develop the skills of helpfulness at home, the skills of diligence and studies at school. Develop the skills of kind interactions with others. Develop the skills of helping the younger children, patience, sharing. All of those skills will gain you greater skills.

Some others of you might say, "But I'm older now. I can't do very much at this stage of my life. How can I use my talents now?"

I'm glad you asked! The church needs prayer warriors. You could turn your TV off for an hour or two hours and have intercessory prayer for your community, your neighbors, your family, your church, your country, your leaders, your pastors. You could call someone who no longer attends church and encourage them. You could offer to pray with your neighbor or even ask God to show you ways that you could still use the giftedness that He's given you.

CONCLUSION

Christianity Today tells the story of when Rick Hoyt was born, the umbilical cord coiled around his neck and cut off oxygen to his brain, leaving him a quadriplegic. His parents, Dick and Judy, were told that there was no hope for their son and that they should place him in an institution. However, his parents were determined to raise him as normally as possible. Since Rick was unable to speak, a group of engineers built him a specially designed interactive computer that allowed him to communicate his thoughts by using head movements.

At the age of 15, Rick told his father he wanted to participate in a five-mile benefit run for a local lacrosse player who had been paralyzed in an accident. Out of love for his son, Dick, who had never previously done any long-distance running, agreed to push Rick in his wheelchair. They finished next-to-last. Overwhelmed by

the experience, Rick managed to communicate to his parents that for the first time in his life, competing in that race, he didn't feel disabled. Thus, the father-son "Team Hoyt," was born and began entering more races.

To date, they have raced in 64 marathons, 78 half-marathons, and 206 triathlons. Their achievements become all the more staggering when you consider that when Dick runs, he pushes Rick in his wheelchair. When Dick cycles, Rick is in a specially designed seat attached to the front of his bike. When Dick swims, he pulls Rick in a heavy, stabilized boat attached to his waist.

Driven by love for his son and a desire to see him fulfilled, Dick has gone to great lengths to make Rick feel alive. In every race, it is the father, Dick, who does all the work, giving every ounce of strength for the sake of his son. Rick cannot offer any physical support—in fact, he only makes more work for his father. But when one sees Dick's affirmation of his son and watches Rick's face as he crosses the finish line, you might think that the son had won the race single handedly!

[Go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rF7Bv9RjI0E> if you would like to show the video, "Team Hoyt, My Redeemer Lives."]

The story of Dick and Rick Hoyt is a powerful reminder of our Father's love for us. Our Heavenly Father, who gave everything that we might know life in all its fullness, also gives His strength to empower us to use our gifts. He could have used angels to do His work—it would have been a lot less work for Him! But

holding nothing back, the Father delights in us, sings over us, chases after us, cares deeply about us, and sent his only Son to die for us.

What is our only possible response to this extravagant love? To hold nothing back in return. ²

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptures texts are taken from the New King James Version of the Holy Scriptures.

² Adapted from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/iyf/faithandlife/devotionals/13.4.html>.