

INTRODUCTION

If I conducted a poll about the most famous parable Jesus ever told, I suspect most people would vote for the parable of the Prodigal Son. But if I polled pastors and Christian workers about the most *practical* parable Jesus ever told, I believe most Christian leaders would vote for the parable we're studying in this message. It's often called The Parable of the Talents, but I am calling it the Parable of the Three Managers.

This is a powerful parable about how you can multiply your God-given potential. When you understand this truth, just a little potential can be transformed into a huge possibility. Before we read Jesus' story, let me tell you a true story demonstrating the truth of this parable.

Around the turn of the 20th century, Martha Berry had a passion to teach and train poor children in northern Georgia who had no access to education. She had no books, no building, and no money, just a heart and a dream to help children. She started teaching Sunday School to children in an abandoned church in Possum Trot, Georgia. This weekly class soon became a daily class. She later opened a boarding school for boys—and though she only had five boarders, she saw the need and potential.

The school was struggling for money, so Martha Berry traveled to Detroit to ask multi-millionaire Henry Ford to make a donation to expand her school. She boldly asked him to donate \$1 million. Henry Ford, tired of listening to requests for money, reached into his pocket and said, "Here's a dime. That's all the money I have in my pocket, but you can have it." Martha Berry could have been insulted, discouraged and quit. But instead she used Ford's dime to buy seeds to plant a peanut crop. She used that first harvest to plant more peanuts. Martha Berry faithfully sent Henry Ford detailed accountings of each year's harvest. Ford was so impressed that he finally visited the Berry School and eventually donated \$1 million. He went on to build the Ford buildings on campus, a cluster of Gothic buildings. Martha Berry died in 1942, but because of her good management, Berry College, near Rome, Georgia lives on. It is a private four-year college with 1,700 students enrolled, and has the largest campus of any college in the world—28,000 acres. And the Ford Foundation recently gave Berry College a \$9.4 million grant. What an amazing story about a woman who took a dime and multiplied it into dream for teaching young people.

In one Dennis the Menace cartoon, Dennis and his parents are leaving church and the pastor is standing at the back door. Dennis turns to the preacher in front of the other worshippers and he asks loudly, "Now, Pastor what are you going to do with that dollar my dad gave you this morning?" That's funny, but it's actually a pretty good question. In fact, as we read and study this parable, the question I want you to ask yourself is: What am I doing with what I've been given?

Matthew 25:13-30. "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour. Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five

more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.'

"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

"The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.'

Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

Jesus didn't name the three managers, but for the sake of illustration, I'm going to call them Tom, Dick, and Harry or they can be Kim, Ruth, and Mary. I'll let these three jars represent each of them. Their boss told them he was going away so he left them some funds to manage while he was gone. He gave Tom five coins, and he gave Dick two coins, and he gave Harry one coin. The master wasn't a socialist; he didn't give each one the same amount, because he knew they had different abilities, so they were given an amount reflecting their potential.

The master took off on his journey, and the servants went to work. We don't know exactly what they did, but let's imagine Tom took his five coins and started investigating ways to invest it. He noticed people crossing the Jordan River had to walk ten miles out of their way to find a place shallow enough to cross, so Tom used the money to buy materials to build a large wood raft and he started operating a ferry service. Eventually he doubled his master's money.

Dick took his two coins and bought a young goat. He fed the goat and sold the goat's milk. When the goat was fully grown, Dick sold it for twice the amount he paid for it.

Harry, on the other hand, was lazy and he thought the master was a cruel man, so he was afraid of losing the money. So Harry went out and dug a hole and hid the coin. He was a play-it-safe kind of guy. We'll leave Tom, Dick, and Harry for now and come back to them later.

These three jars represent our lives. Each of us has been given resources from God. There are four truths about this parable I want to challenge you to embrace. If you'll do this you're on your way to turning your God-given potential into amazing possibilities!

1. I OWN NOTHING; I MANAGE RESOURCES FOR GOD

Jesus said, "It will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them." (Matthew 25:14) I don't know if I'm the only one, but I grew up thinking that the parable of the talents wasn't about money, but it was about special abilities, talents. Susan Boyle singing on "Britain's Got Talent"—that's talent; or Tim Nipp or George Faber playing the keyboards—that's talent; or Dirk Nowitzki shooting his fade away jump shot—that's talent. For many years I thought the point of this parable was that God gave some people more talent than others. That's true in the natural realm, but this parable is about managing money. The word "talent" was actually a word that meant a certain weight of coins. Depending on which coins were used, these were large amounts of money. Some commentators suggest each talent was worth about \$100,000. So the master placed a lot of trust in his servants to give them that large amount of money to manage.

The parable is about money, but the application is about managing ALL the resources God has given you. In addition to your money, God has given you health, time, talent, energy, abilities, influence, and relationships. This is not just about money management; it's about life management. But it all starts with acknowledging that *everything* I have is a gift from God. I don't own it; I just manage it.

The Bible clearly teaches that God owns it all! Here are just a few verses to confirm this. "To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it." (Deuteronomy 10:14) "For every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills." (Psalm 50:10) "The world is mine, and all that is in it." (Psalm 50:12) "'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the Lord Almighty." (Haggai 2:8)

As I was preparing this message in my study at home, I asked myself if I really believed God owns everything. I decided to proclaim this truth to myself, so I said aloud, "I'm in God's house, sitting in God's chair, I'm looking out God's window at God's trees and God's garden. I'm wearing God's clothes and I'm using God's brains and God's hands to type God's words on God's keyboard on God's computer. Later, I'm going to get into God's car, and drive on God's roads and visit with some of God's people." It actually was a lot of fun for me to say it out loud. Why don't you try it?

Here's a management affirmation for you to read aloud: I woke up this morning in God's house! I ate God's food for breakfast! I used God's soap to clean up! I rode in God's car to church! I'm breathing God's air! I don't own a thing. God owns it all!

Do you believe it? Here's a test. Let's say you work at a job where you got paid \$1,000 last week. How much of that \$1,000 belongs to God? If you said, "10%. \$100 belongs to God," then I haven't done a very good job of teaching. But if you said, "All of it belongs to God," then you gave the right answer! The second truth is:

2. I WILL FACE A DIVINE AUDIT

Jesus said, "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them." (Matthew 25:19) Jesus said that the master was gone for a long time. Remember, this parable is about the second coming—and Jesus has been gone for a long time. But He WILL return, and when He does, we're going to face a divine audit. One day, we're going to stand before the Lord and give an account for how we managed the resources God has given us. The Bible says, "So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God." (Romans 14:12)

During this message I have resisted using the word "stewardship," because when people hear it they only think about tithing or giving money to God. I've chosen to use the word "management." But how you manage God's money is a great indicator of how you manage His other resources.

Ron Blue is a successful Financial Consultant who has written over 20 books on personal financial management from a biblical perspective. He has written: "You can't fake stewardship. Your checkbook (credit card statement) reveals all that you really believe about stewardship. Your checkbook reflects your goals, priorities, convictions, relationships and even the use of your time. A person who has been a Christian even for a short while can fake prayer, Bible study, evangelism, and going to church and so on but he can't fake what his checkbook reveals." (*The New Master Your Money*, p. 23)

Nobody wants to be audited by the IRS, but that's a part of life. It's a hassle to produce all your tax returns, cancelled checks, and bank statements. But the IRS requires this in order to create a money trail of how much money you earned and how much tax you owe. An audit doesn't have to be a scary thing, unless you haven't paid your taxes. I've heard of people being audited and the IRS discovered they had overpaid their taxes. Tom and Dick enjoyed reporting to the master. But Harry's audit wasn't much fun.

One day God will ask each of us, "What did you do with what I gave you?" Will you have to show for your management?

3. MY VIEW OF GOD DETERMINES HOW I MANAGE HIS RESOURCES

I counted, and Harry spoke thirty-seven words explaining why he did nothing. "Master," he said, "I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground." (Matthew 25:24-25) He blamed his failure on the master's hard character. What kind of person harvests where they don't plant? Think about it: Only a dishonest cheat does that. The master called him a "wicked, lazy servant." If you had asked Harry to describe his master he probably

would have said, "He's a wicked lazy man. He doesn't even do his own work. He tries to get us to do his work for him." The lazy servant insulted the character of his master. He allowed his view of the master to justify his failure. Have you noticed when some people fail, it's never their fault? It's always someone else's fault?

But consider how the first two servants viewed the same man. Tom and Dick considered their master to be a good businessman who knew how to invest money for a good return. They followed the good example of their master and turned their potential into profit. The master said, "Well done, good and faithful servants." If you had asked Tom and Dick to describe their master I believe they would have said, "He's a good and faithful man."

A.W. Tozer wrote: "What we think about God is the most important thing about us." If we view God as a tyrant then we'll filter everything through this lens. Some of you may be secretly angry with God because you think He did something, or didn't do something that you think He should have. As a result, your view of Him is skewed. Your preconceived notions prevent you from seeing Him as a God of grace, and as a result you refuse to serve Him with what He's given you. When we blame God we end up burying our blessings.

Maybe you have a skewed view of God. You can always change your opinion about God, and when you do, it changes your life. A few nights ago, I watched the wonderful movie, "Shenandoah," again. Jimmy Stewart played a Virginia farmer named Charlie Anderson who tried to keep his family together during the Civil War. He didn't have much use for God. He never attended church. But his deceased wife wanted the children to be raised as Christians, so before a meal, Jimmy Stewart prayed this prayer: "Lord, we cleared this land. We plowed it, sowed it, and harvest it. We cook the harvest. It wouldn't be here and we wouldn't be eating it if we hadn't done it all ourselves. We worked dog-bone hard for every crumb and morsel, but we thank you Lord just the same for the food we're about to eat, amen."

But in the last scene of the movie, Charlie Anderson breaks down and ends his private battle with God. He has lost several of his children and he assumes his youngest son, whom he called "the boy" has also died in the war. To everyone's surprise Charlie loads up the remaining family members to attend church. When Charlie walks into the church, the preacher is so surprised he almost has a heart attack, but Charlie stands there without singing. Then, the back door of the church opens and "the boy" comes limping in. Charlie embraces his son and then the movie ends with everyone singing the Doxology. Man, if that doesn't make you cry, then nothing will.

God has given each of us a measure of potential. If you see God as a loving Father, full of grace and truth, then you will make it the goal of your life to make the most of the gifts and resources He has given you. Zig Ziglar is one of the most positive Christians I've ever been around. He has written: "Our potential is God's gift to us. What we do with it is our gift to Him. You are the only person on earth who can use your ability."

4. GOOD MANAGEMENT IS REWARDED WITH THE MASTER'S PRAISE

The master commended the two fruitful servants with the same words, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matthew 25:21)

Now, let's go back and visit with Tom, Dick, and Harry. When the master returned he called the three managers together. He said, "It's time to tell me what you did with what I gave you." Tom said, "You gave me five coins, master. I took your money and built a ferry, and now I've doubled your money. Here it is!" Dick said, "Master, you gave me two coins. I bought a goat and sold it for twice what I paid for it; I've doubled your money!" The huge smile broke out on the master's face and he said, "Great job, guys! I'm so proud of you! You've made me happy! I want you to share my happiness." Then he looked at the third manager and said, "What about you, Harry?" Harry started hemming and hawing and making excuses. He stammered, "I know you...you're a hard man, a cruel man, so I was afraid of displeasing you, so I hid your money in the ground. Look, here it is...all of it." The master's face clouded over with disappointment. He said, "Harry, you expended a lot of time and energy burying that coin in the ground, you could have used that same energy to put seeds in that hole instead of my money or at the least you could have put it in the local bank and earned .01% interest. Don't blame me for being a hard man. Take responsibility for your own failure. You are not only wicked, but you're lazy. Give that coin to Tom, and get out of here, because you're fired."

CONCLUSION

So what is the Take Away Truth for this parable? Well, for one thing, you aren't in this alone. We can help each other. The church is your partner in wisely investing God's resources! The best place to start investing your time, talents, testimony, and treasure is in the church.

Fred Smith is a personal friend and a leader here at Green Acres. He is one of our Bible Study teachers and he is the President of the Fourth Partner Foundation. The Fourth Partner Foundation assists educational, charitable, and non-profit organizations in East Texas. There's an interesting story about how the Fourth Partner Foundation got its name. Let me read Fred's explanation: "I was teaching this parable to a Sunday School class and asked them what would make for a better ending if the Master went away a second time? I proposed a second trip where he left a fourth servant. This servant did not work for the other three and they did not work for him. His role was not to manage or direct but to get a better return for the Master...and a happier ending for the story. That's how I've seen my role in the community." And that's how the Fourth Partner Foundation was born.

And that's the role of the church. We're here to partner with you to get a better return on the Master's investment. Eugene Petersen paraphrase's Jesus words this way: "Good work! You did your job well. From now on be my partner."

There is a hidden key in this parable that I believe is the key to fruitful life management. It's found in three little words Jesus used in verse 16. Jesus said, "The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work..." In other words, he didn't delay; he immediately went to work and KEPT ON working until the master returned. How about you? What are you waiting for?

The main lesson I learn from this parable is that God's resources are never to be stored, hoarded, or hidden; they are to be put in circulation. Tom and Dick had to spend the talents before they got a return.

One of the things that has discouraged me through the years of ministry is when I see people who retire from serving the Lord. I think retirement from a career or business is a good thing, but I don't find anything in the Word about retiring from serving the Lord. I may be speaking to some Christian servants who at one time were busy for the Lord, but for the past year, or five years, or ten years you have buried your talent, you have stopped serving the Lord. Jesus took the one talent away from the lazy servant and gave it to the one with ten. He was pronouncing a principle: Use or lose it. If you don't utilize God's resources, you'll lose them. It's like a muscle. God has given you muscles, but if you don't exercise those muscles, you'll lose them.

Bob Layton went to be with the Lord a few days ago. Although he was well into his eighties, he was up here on stage faithfully playing his trombone in the Orchestra long past when most people would have retired.

So maybe the best thing I could give some of you today is a shovel. The Master hasn't returned yet. Quick, go dig up those resources that you've buried. There's still time to invest them in the Lord's work—and we're here to help you!

In 1996 Billy Graham was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal for his service to America. When he was being interviewed afterward by Diane Sawyer he said, "I am humbled by this award. But the only recognition I am looking forward to is when I stand before the Lord Jesus Christ. My greatest reward will be to hear Him say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'" You may be thinking, "I'm not gifted like Billy Graham." Few people are, but God HAS gifted you, and He expects a return on what He has given you. It will be worth it all when you hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

OUTLINE

1. I OWN NOTHING; I MANAGE RESOURCES FOR GOD

"It will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them."
Matthew 25:14

2. I WILL FACE A DIVINE AUDIT

"After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them." *Matthew 25:19*

3. MY VIEW OF GOD DETERMINES HOW I MANAGE HIS RESOURCES

"Master," he said, "I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground."
Matthew 25:24-25

4. GOOD MANAGEMENT IS REWARDED WITH THE MASTER'S PRAISE

"Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" *Matthew 25:21*

TAKE AWAY TRUTH: The church is your partner in wisely investing God's resources!

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Dykes in Texas.” This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes