

# Going Further

## Sermon Series: "A heart of thankfulness"

### **#2 Redirecting Talents**      **Matthew 25:14-30**

#### **Warm Up**

Circle any **three** of the following things you love to do in life (be sure to respond quickly to each one)....

**Design/Develop**- I love to make something out of nothing. I enjoy getting things started from scratch

**Pioneer**- I love to test and try out new concepts. I am not afraid to risk failure.

**Organise**- I love to bring order out of chaos. I enjoy organizing something that is already started.

**Operate/Maintain**- I love to efficiently maintain something that is already organized

**Serve/Help**- I love to assist others in their responsibility. I enjoy help others to achieve their goals.

**Acquire/Possess**- I love to shop, collect, or obtain things. I enjoy getting the highest quality for the best price.

**Excel**- I love to be the best and make my team the best. I enjoy setting and attaining the highest standard.

**Influence**- I love to convert people to my way of thinking. I enjoy shaping the attitudes and behaviour of others.

**Perform**- I love to be on stage and receive the attention of others. I enjoy being in the limelight.

**Improve**- I love to make things better. I enjoy taking something that someone else has designed or started and improve it.

**Repair**- I love to fix what is broken or change what is out of date.

**Lead/Be in charge**- I love to lead the way, oversee and supervise. I enjoy determining how things will be done.

**Persevere**- I love to see things to completion. I enjoy persisting at something until it is finished.

**Follow the Rules**- I love to operate by policies and procedures. I enjoy meeting the expectations of an organization or boss.

**Prevail-** I love to fight for what is right and oppose what is wrong. I enjoy overcoming injustice.

Do you find one or more motivating directions in this list above that describes your “heart”?

### Looking at the key text

The *Parable of the Talents* (Matthew 25:14-30) suggests that we Christians should put to work what God has invested in us for His Glory and His Kingdom purposes. The good servants (or “slaves”) were commended in the story by the master:

1. **Firstly**, vs. 16 tells us the first slave set about doing something with the talent “at once”. He felt the responsibility and opportunity given him by the master and acted upon it without hesitation or provocation. The text implies that the man set up some business and worked with the capital to make a profit from it rather than depositing it to gain interest<sup>1</sup>.
2. **Secondly**, when the master eventually returns, the good servant is ready to present the work he has done with what he was given. Note that he does not boast or compete with the other two servants- he merely presents what he has done with his talents. The good servant has concern for his own charge and responsibility, not with another’s. He does not seek to gain reward at the other’s expense.
3. **Thirdly**, the master praises and rewards the good servants appropriately. Verses 21 and 23 show us that there is a new level of responsibility given to the good servants because of how they responded to a “lesser” responsibility. Note the irony here! A “Talent” in anyone’s terms was a great deal of money, let alone 5 Talents. The profits of the good servant’s work must have brought a large and impressive return. And yet, the story measures this wealth as a relatively small charge compared with the future responsibilities promised to the faithful. Not only that, it seems that a new level of partnership and equality awaits the good servants; they will share in the master’s joy. Romans 8:17 gives us the parallel for Christians who are good servants:

*Now if we are children, then we are heirs-- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

*In the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the Greek word talanton referred directly to the exchange of the currency of the times. A “talent” was a very large amount of money measured by the weight of the silver or gold.*

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<sup>1</sup> A practice restricted in Jewish Law such as Exodus 22:25, Leviticus 25:35-37 and Deuteronomy 23:19. No doubt such laws were broken or skirted in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, but given the negative connotations of lodging the money with a lending agency in Matthew 25:26-27, it likely Jesus intended us to see the good servants as making good of their money by hard work.

The third servant in the story had a very different attitude and action, and subsequently received a very different “reward” from the master:

1. **Firstly**, vs. 24 tells us that the third servant thought the master a “hard” man. His appraisal of the master led him to believe any profit made would only be an act of exploitation that profited the master and not himself (“harvesting where you have not sown”). More than this, he expected that if he lost what he had, the master would surely express his great wrath. One might also suggest that because he was given less than the other two (vs. 15) he may have buried his money as an act of spite thinking that the master thought less of him than the others.

**Discuss >>>**

- While we must be careful not to make a direct parallel between God and the master of this story, in what ways do you see people in our world express an attitude towards God that is similar to the servant in our study?
  - “Grace never condones irresponsibility.” What do you think of this quote? Do think those who are given less in this world can think differently about what they have to those who have been given more?
2. **Secondly**, the master of the story condemns the servant and even grimly accepts the servant’s view of his reputation. Irrespective of the flawed nature of the master in this story, the servant failed to act astutely. He is viewed badly because of his apparent laziness, or perhaps even a sense of fatalism. This servant may represent a Christian who plays it safe with what God has given for fear of the consequences and in so doing achieves nothing.
  3. **Thirdly**, and consequently, what the servant has is taken away (vs. 28). Look at Matthew 13:12 for guidance here- Jesus has set a clear principle in place for those considering the Kingdom of God.
  4. **Finally**, the relationship between the master and the servant is over and this is a terrible fate for the servant (vs. 30). The third servant in the story represents those whose attitude and actions profits nothing for the Kingdom of God, because their attitude to what they have been given and the one who gives it is so flawed.

**Consider >>>**

- ...another parable of Jesus in Matthew 24:43-51 applied to those who consider themselves leaders of God’s people. What does it therefore mean to be “ready” or “watchful” or “faithful” as a Christian?... as a leader?

## **Talents today**

The full value of Jesus’ parable in Matthew 25:14-30 is found in appreciating that God has given to all Christians His immensely valuable grace and mercy through faith in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ. It is our opportunity and responsibility to put to work the measure of faith God has entrusted to each of us to bring God glory in the world. It

is important that we don't lose our watchfulness and readiness even though Christ's return is delayed beyond our expectation.

The Bible affirms that God is creator and sustainer of all life. We believe that God is provider of all our creativity and abilities. The New Testament also teaches us that there are special grace-gifts given in the era of the Holy Spirit (e.g. 1 Corinthians chapter 12). Let's allow a distinction to be made in this regard. We shall consider innate talents and learned skills, not the spiritual gifts as given for particular ministries to particular people for ministries.

These innate talents and abilities we speak of are ours due to the providence of God. Each of us is a talented and able person in one way or another. Sadly, such innate abilities are sometimes relegated in Christian circles and considered less "spiritual". If we believe that God is the Lord of all life, we need to celebrate how we are "wired up" through our life circumstances. We can then ask God to redeem our abilities and talents for His work in the world and in the Church. As we seek and discover the special spiritual gifts distributed by the Holy Spirit, the results can only be more effective.

**Discuss >>>**

- In what way are you working for good profit what God has already invested in you in the way of talents and abilities?
- What is it that you know you are very capable of doing or developing that you are yet to give over to God's purposes in some way?

## **Practical Application Exercises**

(Choose one or two of the following exercises)

### **1. Check your attitude towards God**

**Consider the following story:**

There is a well known fable from the subcontinent of a poor beggar who lived in a State ruled by a Maharaja. The beggar had no home but put up every night in a free guest-house, sleeping on a mat on the floor, and covering himself on the cooler nights with old rags. Having no other means than begging, he used to go out in the morning after a meal of cold rice left over from the previous day and sit by the wayside with his beggar's bowl. Passers-by used to throw some grains of rice or copper coins his way, so he usually had enough rice for two meals a day, and enough money to buy sticks for a fire and a few vegetables, fish or lentils for curry. One day he heard that on the next day, the Maharaja himself was coming that way in his chariot. He was so excited, for he said to himself, "*The Maharaja will not give me a handful of rice or a copper coin, but nothing less than gold*". The next day he took up his usual position by the side of the road, and patiently awaited the Maharaja's coming. The sun stood overhead and still he waited in the noonday heat, but no sign of the ruler. Patiently he waited, until finally he heard the hooves of the horse and the wheels of the carriage coming down the road. Stepping into the road he brought the carriage to a stop, and

approached the Maharaja and begged him for a gift. Instead of giving him anything, the Maharaja extended *his* hands and asked the beggar to give *him* something. Extremely disappointed and disgusted at the attitude of this wealthy ruler begging from a poor beggar he counted out five grains of rice from his bowl and placed them angrily into the hands of the Maharaja. “*Thank you,*” said the Maharaja, and continued on his journey. With a sore heart the beggar went that evening to his guest house, took out his winnowing fan and began to clean his rice for his meal. As he did so, a small glittering object attracted his attention. Picking it up, he saw that it was a grain of gold! Laying it carefully to one side, he went on cleaning his rice till he found another glittering golden grain, then another, then another. After another search he saw a fifth and put it with the others. But no matter how long he searched after this he could not find another grain of gold. Then the truth dawned on him: five grains of rice given to the Maharaja; five grains of gold. “*What a fool I was!*” he exclaimed. “*How I misjudged the Maharaja,*” he said with regret. “*If only I had known what my ruler was really like, I would have given him everything*”.

- In what way is your attitude toward God like that of the beggar to the Maharaja in the story?
- What passages of the Bible do you know that express the mercy and generosity of God? Share them with the group.

## 2. **Change your way of thinking**

### **Discuss the following five misconceptions about abilities**

- I. Myth: people aren't born with skills. Skills must be learned by experience.
- II. Myth: those skills which must be learned are learned primarily in the classroom.
- III. Myth: if you have certain abilities, you will be very aware that you have them.
- IV. Myth: skills that I use at work are only usable in that environment. I couldn't use them in ministry.
- V. Myth: most people only have a very few abilities.

3. Consider your personality type

Complete these (simple) personality indicators below...

How do I see myself?		
	Strong      Mild      Strong	
Introverted	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Extroverted
Self-controlled	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Self-expressive
Routine	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Variety
Cooperative	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Competitive

Each category above should be considered value-neutral; i.e. considered neither intrinsically good nor bad. Tick along the lines as you see yourself to get a simple appraisal of your personality.

Which of the following words best describes you? Rank them in order as you think they describe your usual tendency in working with others.

- \_\_\_\_\_ *Team member*
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Prefer to work alone*
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Coordinator of people*
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Director of operations*
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Coach*

**Discuss >>>**

- How might different people of differing personality be suited to different ministries in the church?
- What challenges in working with others are apparent to you for the different types of personalities in your group?
- How might differing personality types and modes of ministry be complementary in the church?

4. **Study your S.H.A.P.E. for ministry**

Rick Warren of Saddleback Church, Lake Forest California U.S.A. has developed a helpful tool for considering one's make up for Christian service called S.H.A.P.E.

Get started by considering the Apostle Paul's S.H.A.P.E. for ministry with this simple study below, and then try assessing your own S.H.A.P.E. in the section provided:

**Discover the Apostle Paul's S.H.A.P.E. for ministry...**

**S** piritual gifts                      2 Timothy 1:11

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**H** eart (or passion)                  Romans 15:20; Galatians 2:8

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**A** bilities                                  Acts 18:2-4

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**P** ersonality                              Galatians 1:13-14

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**E** xperiences                              Acts 9:1-20; Galatians 1:18;  
2 Corinthians 12:2-7 & 11:23-27; Acts 22:3

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**Now have a go at sketching your own S.H.A.P.E. for ministry below...**

**S** **piritual gifts** (consider 1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12; & Ephesians 4 for clues)

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**H** **ear** (or **passion**) (consult the list in the “warm up” section of this study)

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**A** **bilities** (thoroughly scan your current or past daily activities for clues)

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**P** **ersonality** (consult activity #3 in this study)

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**E** **xperiences** (include your past experiences both painful and joyful)

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**Discuss >>>**

- How did the Apostle Paul’s S.H.A.P.E. suit him to the tasks God called him to undertake?
- What does your sketch of S.H.A.P.E. say to you about your suitability for serving God in the world? ...in the Church?
- What area of ministry might you consider taking part in now that you’ve undertaken this study? Why not consider talking with another Christian about it?