



"The price of greatness is responsibility."
—Winston S. Churchill

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What Is Your Talent?

[Matthew 25:14-30](#) relates the [Parable of the Talents](#). What are talents? Usually, we think about this word in terms of skills, abilities, or aptitudes. But is that what the Greek word translated as "talent" actually means? The underlying Greek word, according to *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, means "a certain *weight* (and thence a *coin* or rather *sum* of money)." Verses 18 and 27 validate this definition.

The incident in this parable, then, is much like one we see today. Wealthy people travel a great deal. Rather than being mired in the details of finance, they turn to money managers to grow that wealth. These money managers now have the weight of responsibility to be diligent in their work so that the wealthy person will receive a significant return. Are not such tasks weights on our shoulders, and do they not become especially heavy when things are not going well?

In this parable, the lord is Christ, and we are the servants, those who have been given the weight of various responsibilities. What "talents"—that is, what weights or responsibilities—has our Lord given us? They can include the responsibility of being a husband or wife, a father or mother, or an employer or employee. All of us have been given at least one talent, one

weight of responsibility—our calling, one filled with many challenges ([Psalm 34:19](#); [Matthew 5:14-16](#)).

[God](#) gives these responsibilities "to each according to his own ability" (verse 15). Using work as an example, some, due to their abilities, may be given the responsibility of employer or manager but another, that of worker. As Paul points out in [I Corinthians 12:12-26](#), whether foot, eye, hand, etc., *all* have their place and are needed if the whole is to function successfully.

Either we can be faithful in carrying out those responsibilities, or we can be like the wicked servant, producing no return for our Lord. What does this parable teach us so we, too, will someday hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant"?

A point to consider is that, whatever the talent, whatever the responsibility, who do we really work for? Money managers work for the benefit of their "lord"—an employer or client—who gives them the responsibility of handling their money. He judges how well the money manager carries out that responsibility. Likewise, whatever the responsibility God gives us, we work for and are accountable to our Lord ([I Corinthians 10:31](#)).

[Colossians 3:22-25](#) is about the obligation we have as employees, but the ideas apply to whatever our responsibilities, our weights, our talents, are:

Servants, do what you're told by your earthly masters. And don't just do the minimum that will get you by. Do your best. Work from the heart for your real Master, for God, confident that you'll get paid in full when you come into your inheritance. Keep in mind always that the ultimate Master you're serving is Christ. The sullen servant who does shoddy work will be held responsible. Being Christian doesn't cover up bad work. (*The Message*)

We are never to forget that, whatever responsibility has been entrusted to us, we really have to please our Lord regardless of the people and circumstances we have to deal with. In terms of rewards, our focus should be on the eternal benefits He will be giving as opposed to any we may receive in this short life.

Another consideration is that these talents, these responsibilities, are our Lord's to give. He decides who gets what and how many. In this, we recognize that He is sovereign, and our part is to submit willingly to His decisions. We can plan and work toward having responsibilities changed or added, but while in a responsibility, we must be aware that our Sovereign knows why we are where we are and why it is best for us at this moment. It is human nature to believe the grass is greener elsewhere. All too often, we are oblivious to the big picture. Our Lord is not. He says in [Jeremiah 29:11](#) (*The Message*), "I know what I'm doing. I have it all planned out—plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for."

It is easy to become discontented and to allow our displeasure to affect the performance of our responsibilities, whether it is our job, marriage, example, etc. It is human nature. When we have an attitude like this, [Psalm 84:11](#)—which says in part, "No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly"—tests our belief in His sovereignty and [love](#) for us.

This single verse contains profound implications. In a trial, if it would be better not to be in it, this verse says that the God—who is sovereign, to whom all power belongs ([Psalm 62:11](#)), who loves us just as much as He loves [Jesus Christ](#) ([John 17:23](#))—would withhold *no* such change from us. So, if we are experiencing a burdensome trial, and *we* think it would be a good thing for it to be different, the fact that it is *not* different is evidence that God judges otherwise. Understanding this, will we faithfully, willingly, and positively do our part, submitting to *His* judgment and [waiting](#) for *His* answer, since He has our best interests at heart?

While Job may have thought his severe circumstances and trial unjust, God was actually saving him from following in Satan's footsteps, a supreme act of divine love. Joseph endured many injustices, yet they never stopped him from carrying out each responsibility with distinction. He could do this because he knew his God. At the end he could tell his brothers, "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" ([Genesis 50:20](#)). Will we have [faith](#) that God is using our sufferings either to save us, as in Job's case, or to prepare us to save others, as Joseph did, a responsibility we will have in God's Kingdom ([Isaiah 30:20-21](#))?

Another principle to ponder in this parable is that our Lord is looking for faithful, productive activity. Applied to our calling, our common responsibility, are we growing and producing fruit or just coasting like the wicked, lazy servant? Note that each servant's fruit is measured. Can we count our spiritual fruits like the faithful servants? If not, verses 28-30 stand as a sober warning.

Finally, what is the major cause of the unfaithful servant's failure? What sealed his doom? He misread his lord's character. His false belief that his lord was "a hard man" demotivated him, fueled his wickedness and laziness, and led to his downfall. What do we think of the character of our Lord? If we misperceive the depth of His [goodness](#) ([Psalm 84:11](#)), that alone could lead to our destruction. However, if we instead mischaracterize God's love, believing as much of Christianity does today that all we must do is believe, that is just as dangerous.

As we near the end of this age, our circumstances could go from bad to worse to catastrophic in an instant. This parable gives us principles that, when applied to whatever we face, will end in our Lord saying to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

- Pat Higgins

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by John W. Ritenbaugh

A major distinguishing characteristic of mankind is his free moral agency, presenting him with choices and the right to make decisions. We need free moral agency to be transformed into God's image. The volition to do right has to come from the core of our character or nature. Paradoxically, the way to maximum freedom is to yield to God's way of doing things. Unless one has the Spirit of God, he cannot exercise the necessary internal control to be subject to the government of God. Even though the church is not the

government of God (John 18:36; I Corinthians 15:50), we need to respect the ministry as well as lay members, being subject to one another (I Corinthians 11:1). The operation of God's government absolutely depends upon each person governing himself, never going beyond the parameters of the authority God has given him.

From the Archives: Featured Article

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by John W. Ritenbaugh

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