

Adult Teaching Resources

November 15, 2020



The Right Stuff

Matthew 23:1-12—“The Right Stance”

Matthew 25:1-13—“The Right Preparation”

Matthew 25:14-30—“The Right Investment”

Psalms 100—“Good God!”

Christmas Letters

1 Corinthians 1:1-9—“Every Good Gift”

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“The Right Investment”

Matthew 25:14-30

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Key Text

His master said to him, “Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.”

Opening

After everyone arrives, form smaller groups of 3-4 in each group. Once everyone is settled, ask each person to share their answer to this question:

What has been your most successful investment?

Some might immediately think of the stock market, but investment is not just about money. Investment could be the amount of mentorship shared with a younger colleague. Investment could be the amount of time devoted to a hobby or relationship. No answer is wrong with this question. Let each person answer as they see fit.

After they share their most successful investment, ask them to share the reward they received because of that investment.

Was it a monetary reward?

Was it a relationship reward?

Was it the reward of doing something good for someone else?

What was the reward?

Then, ask them what investment they missed out on that they would like to go back and get involved with.

Give each group time to share with each other. As time allows, open the floor for large group conversation and discussion.

Reading the Bible

What did the man going on a journey do? (he summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them)

What did he give to each of his slaves? (to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability.)

Reading the Bible *continued*

What did the one with the five talents do? (he went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents)

What did the one with the two talents do? (made two more talents)

What did the one with the one talent do? (went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money)

After the master came back, what did the one with the five talents say? ('Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.')

How did the master respond? ('Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.')

What did the one with the two talents say? ('Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.')

How did the master respond? ('Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.')

What did the one with one talent say? ('Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.')

How did the master respond? ('You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest.')

What will be given to those who have? (more will be given, and they will have an abundance)

What will be given to those who have nothing? (even what they have will be taken away)

What happened to the worthless slave? (he was thrown into the outer darkness)

Making Connections

What is the wisest thing you've ever done with a specific sum of money? What is the most foolish thing you've ever done with a specific sum of money? What did you learn from each experience?

What is the most responsibility you've given someone else over something you own? Why did you trust that person with that responsibility? How did they do with what you trusted them with?

Making Connections *continued*

Our Lesson Writer explains, “One denarius represented the daily wage for a day laborer, so one talent of silver would be equivalent to about 20 years of wages. At today’s minimum wage, that would be nearly half a million dollars.” How does that knowledge affect your understanding of this story Jesus told? Does the amount of money make a difference to you? Why or why not?

When have you been praised for doing good work? What was the work? What did you do to earn the praise?

When have you been shunned for doing bad work? What was the work? What did you do, or not do, to be shunned?

For those who “reap where they did not sow and gather where they did not scatter seed,” what do you think should be their reward?

When it comes to money, responsibility, and business, should “fair” be a consideration? If so, how? If not, why?

Would you rather take a risk and possibly be called wise or be cautious and possibly be called lazy? Why do you think Jesus called the cautious slave wicked and lazy?

So What?

Ask everyone to find their small group from the beginning of the lesson. Once everyone is settled, share the words from our Lesson Writer with the groups.

“We don’t know how the master would have responded if the first two men had risked big and lost the money. For all we know, he may still have congratulated them for taking a risk and doing the best they could.

“Paralyzed by fear, the third man did nothing.

From any of these angles, the message seems to be that God wants us to dream big and stretch far and open our arms wide to a world in dire need of grace and love.

God wants us to get off of our chairs and stop hiding behind the punch bowl, to get out on the floor and dance.”

Ask everyone to think about, and then answer, this question:

When have you taken a huge risk, not knowing how things would end, for the sake of God’s kingdom?

Give everyone time to share with their small groups, then ask these follow-up questions.

When it comes to faith and your faith journey, what are you afraid of? What is holding you back from the living a complete and total life in Christ?

So What? *continued*

What is your big kingdom dream that needs your focus and attention? What is holding you back from making that dream a reality?

What will it take for you to get busy and live more for God?

Let the small groups have time with those questions, then open the floor for large group conversation and discussion.

The Challenge

This week, do one thing that addresses the fear you have in totally, unconditionally following Jesus. It doesn't have to be a life-altering thing, just something small that is new and different and moves you to be less fearful.

Prayer

Loving God, your parables are powerful and we give you thanks for the story and for the wisdom. We've heard this parable many times before and it's easy for us to nod our heads in agreement at what happens. But today, open our hearts so that we might understand the fear from the third slave. Help us to recognize the fear we share with him. We want to do more, but we're scared. Take away our fear and help us to live in a way that we can dream big and be bold for you. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Four stories—Matthew 24-25 begins with a mysterious apocalyptic discourse in which Jesus spoke in cryptic and symbolic terms about things to come. Matthew has constructed the account so that four stories follow, all of which counsel readiness for meeting Christ and facing judgment.

The first parable, which concerns an overseer of other slaves who grows negligent in his duty while the master was away, was probably directed at church leaders (24:45-51). The second speaks of wise and foolish maidens awaiting a bridegroom and his wedding feast (25:1-13), and was directed toward church members in general.

The third parable, our text for the day, portrays servants entrusted with varying amounts of financial responsibility while their master was away. This parable appears to urge believers to make maximum use of their abilities as they await Christ’s return (25:14-30).

The three parables are followed by a figurative description of the coming judgment as a division of sheep and goats, with those faring the best being those who had served Jesus by serving others (25:31-46).

Talents or pounds?—A similar story appears in a different context in Luke 19:11-27. There, a nobleman who went in search of a royal commission entrusted one *mina* each to ten of his servants and told them to “do business with these until I come back” (the KJV translated *minas* as “pounds”).

One man had gained ten more minas and was rewarded with leadership over ten cities. Another had gained five minas and was given charge of five cities. The only other servant mentioned had hidden his mina for fear of losing it. He was not punished, but his mina was taken from him and given to the one who had gained ten.

The story is confusing because it includes an account of certain people who had opposed the nobleman’s rise to power, who were brought before him and executed.

Luke places the parable between the story of Zacchaeus’s conversion and Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Since Zacchaeus responded to Jesus by giving away money he had obtained, the economic aspect is evident. Similarly, the story’s proximity to the triumphal entry connects it to the nobleman’s return with a royal commission, and Jesus’ king-like entry to Jerusalem.

Hard—The third servant’s assertion that the master was a “harsh man” could also be translated “hard man,” as in NET and NIV 11. The word used is *sklēros*, which means “hard,” and is the root of our word “arteriosclerosis,” or hardening of the arteries.

Digging Deeper *continued*

Harsh—The harsh judgment passed on the third servant echoes Matthew’s favorite way of describing the fate of the wicked: to be “cast into the outer darkness” (8:12; 22:13) where “there will be weeping and the grinding of teeth” (8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51). The expressions appear mainly in Matthew. They are probably not intended to suggest that people who don’t exercise their God-given gifts go to hell, but simply as a strong contrast to the warm congratulations and blessings offered to the first two servants (vv. 21, 23).

Secrets?—While the traditional interpretation of this parable sees the talents as representing divinely granted gifts and abilities, at least one person has argued that they should be interpreted as secrets of the kingdom.

The story setting has Jesus talking to his disciples, to whom he had entrusted the secrets of the kingdom by interpreting parables to them while leaving them a mystery to others (Matthew 13).

Rather than talents or abilities, one might argue that the challenge is for disciples to put to good use the knowledge of the kingdom with which Christ has entrusted them. (Ben Chenoweth, “Identifying the Talents: Contextual clues for the interpretation of the parable of the talents [Matthew 25:14-30], *Tyndale Bulletin* 56.1 [2005] 61-72.

Dancing faith—Do you remember going to your first dance in junior high, and you were scared to death, fearful of what others would think of your moves, or lack of them? A school cafeteria or gymnasium converted to a dance floor can be one of the most frightening places on earth. Sometimes I think the most grace-filled people on earth are those who dare approach the frightened wallflowers and encourage them to give it a try.

The dance floor of life beckons us. Jesus has gifted us. Hurting people are waiting for us. If this parable means anything at all, it means that God’s people are called to get off of their pride, to get off of their self-centeredness, to get off of their stinginess, to get off of their pious prudence, and get a little bit reckless for the sake of the gospel.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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Should we turn this parable upside down?

While I have focused on traditional interpretations of this parable in the printed lesson, we should note that some scholars believe this understanding is upside down.

They suggest that the master in the story does not represent Jesus, but an unscrupulous businessman who wants to exploit other people but doesn't want the seedy reputation that would come with such behavior. So, he entrusted servants with funds and set them up in business, fully expecting that they would gain wealth by exploiting the poor – from lending at painfully high interest rates like payday lenders, perhaps, or by charging exorbitant prices from cheaply made goods.

As a good Jew, Jesus would hardly have encouraged the third servant to leave the money with bankers to earn interest, some argue, since Jewish law prohibited usury (Deut. 23:19-20).

In this view, the first two servants play into the greedy master's hands and turn over their ill-gained wealth, while the third servant is the only one who refuses to play the game of exploiting others for profit.

The servant portrays the master as “a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed”—which sounds very much like the definition of a thief.

The rabbis, according to accounts in the Babylonian Talmud, argued that when someone entrusted a person with money, they were liable for keeping it safely, and the safest way was to bury it (*B. Mezi'a* 42b).

In Luke 6:35, Jesus said we should be willing to lend, expecting nothing in return. Is this out of character with portraying God as such a demanding master?

Reading the parable “upside down,” makes it more of a commentary on inequality, and the statement in v. 29 that “For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away” would reflect the harsh reality of life in an exploitive world (for more, see Richard Rohrbach, “Biblical Views: Reading the Bible Through Ancient Eyes,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 42:5 [Sept.-Oct. 2016], and Symon Hill, “Misreading the Parable of the Talents,” personal blog at <https://symonhill.wordpress.com/2014/08/21/misreading-the-parable-of-the-talents/>).

The suggestions in this upside-down interpretation are well-taken. The master in the story does seem overly harsh, and we long for a way to tone it down. The problem is, if we read the parable in this inverted way, it no longer fits the context unless we are to flip the first

The Hardest Question *continued*

two servants' congratulations as a welcome to the fraternity of criminals, and the third servant's banishment to outer darkness as symbolic of where faithful followers are expected to be. This seems highly unlikely.