

Youth 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”

Psalm 100— “Good God!”

Christmas Letters

1 Corinthians 1:1-9—“Every Good Gift”

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“The Right Investment”

Matthew 25:14-30

YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Jeremy Colliver

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

SOCIAL MEDIA CHALLENGE

Post across your various social media platforms different people situations where something simple can grow into something big.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Fellowship

Begin your session by showing the clip “Multiplying Mogwai” from *Gremlins*. If you are unable to show the clip, summarize it as best you can, and then facilitate a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) How does the mogwai reproduce?
- 2) What was it like for them to watch Gizmo multiply in number?
- 3) What is the concern of the two brothers?
- 4) What is something that you have been entrusted with that you have seen grow into something bigger?
- 5) How does your faith multiply?

Information

Transition to the next section of the session by reading Matthew 25.14-40. Allow the students to ask any initial questions they have about the text. As you answer their questions, you may want to provide some of the information found in Tony’s commentary to answer their questions. When the students have had an opportunity to share their initial thoughts, continue the discussion by facilitating a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) Share with the group the amount of a talent that Tony shares in his commentary. Then ask the group how this changes their perception of the parable.
- 2) What would you have done with the money that had been entrusted to you? How do you resonate with each of the characters in the story?
- 3) What upset the master in regards to the third person whom he had given money to?
- 4) How do you interpret this passage? How can you apply this to your life?
- 5) How can you take more risks with your faith?

Information *continued*

If your group would like to dig deeper in their discussion, share some of the insights that Tony provides in the “Digging Deeper” portion of his commentary. You may want to use some questions like the following to facilitate your discussion:

- 1) What could the talents in this story represent?
- 2) Was the master “hard” or “harsh”? What is the difference? How does it matter in this story?

You may also want your group to discuss “The Hardest Question” if they would like to continue their discussion on this passage. Tony poses the following question to consider as “The Hardest Question”: Does the bridesmaids’ supply of oil represent good works?

Transformation

Conclude your session by introducing the social media challenge for the week:

Post across your various social media platforms different people situations where something simple can grow into something big.

Allow time for the students to share stories of how they have seen something simple grow into something big.

Close with a prayer thanking God for entrusting us with the gifts that we have and for the discernment to use them as they need to be used.

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

The Hardest Question 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.

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 two

The Hardest Question *continued*

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.