

The Talents (Matt. 25:13-30)

A Small Group Outline

Suggestion: Do This Lesson Over 2-3 Sessions to Unlock its Full Value

1. Praise *(Purpose: To worship God)*

- What are you thankful for this week? *(let the group's secretary write these down in an A4 hardcover or some notebook)*
- Song Service
 - Sing a few songs of praise to God

2. Pray *(Purpose: To carry each others' burdens and to seek the Lord)*

- What challenges did you have this week? *(write these down in an A4 hardcover or some notebook)*
- Go into a season of prayer

3. Review *(Purpose: To learn accountability)*

- Tell us how it went with what you promised to do in last week's meeting? *(e.g. Who did your share you faith with this past week? Who did you minister to? How did actioning your I WILL STATEMENT go?)*
- *Where people have failed to fulfil what they said they would, do not be harsh with them but gently encourage them to try again in the coming week. Give them more support by phoning or joining them in the week.*

4. Give *(Purpose: To be good stewards of our monies)*

- This is the time to return tithes and offerings. If done electronically, kindly ensure that you get the bank account details of your local church from your treasurer. Don't forget to complete an envelope and to send the breakdown to him/her.

5. Discover *(Purpose: To learn to listen to God, and be obedient to His Word)*

- **Notes for the facilitator**
 - Read *Christ's Object Lessons (COL)*, pp. 325-365
 - **"The development of all our powers is the first duty we owe to God and to our fellow men. No one who is not growing daily in capability and usefulness is fulfilling the purpose of life"** (COL 329-330).
 - This parable teaches us what while we are watching for Christ's Second Coming, we are not to be waiting idly, but diligently working (see COL 3225).
 - Vs 14: The man who went on a journey represents Christ, and the servants, his followers.
 - Vs 15. A talent is valuable. **A talent of silver in Bible times was worth 20 years' wages for the common labourer.** Thus the church cannot do without your talent.
 - **"Christ's followers have been redeemed for service.** Our Lord teaches that the true object of life is ministry. Christ Himself was a worker, and to all His followers He gives the law of service—service to God and to their fellow men... **By living to minister for others, man is brought into connection with Christ.** The law of service becomes the connecting link which binds us to God and to our fellow men" (COL 326).
 - "To His servants Christ commits "His goods"—something to be put to use for Him. He gives 'to every man his work.' Each has his place in the eternal plan of heaven. Each is to work in co-operation with Christ for the salvation of souls. **Not more surely is the place prepared for us in the heavenly mansions than is the special place designated on earth where we are to work for God"** (COL 326).
 - "The **special gifts of the Spirit** [as found in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4] are not the only talents represented in the parable. It **includes all gifts and**



endowments, whether original or acquired, natural or spiritual. All are to be employed in Christ's service" (COL 328).

- "The talents are not apportioned capriciously. He who has ability to use five talents receives five. He who can improve but two, receives two. He who can wisely use only one, receives one. **None need lament that they have not received larger gifts; for He who has apportioned to every man is equally honored by the improvement of each trust, whether it be great or small.** The one to whom five talents have been committed is to render the improvement of five; he who has but one, the improvement of one. God expects returns "according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." 2 Corinthians 8:12" (COL 328).
- "In making a profession of faith in Christ we pledge ourselves to become all that it is possible for us to be as workers for the Master, and we should **cultivate every faculty to the highest degree of perfection, that we may do the greatest amount of good of which we are capable**" (COL 329).
- "**Many whom God has qualified to do excellent work accomplish very little, because they attempt little.** Thousands pass through life as if they had no definite object for which to live, no standard to reach. Such will obtain a reward proportionate to their works" (COL 331).
- **Mental Faculties:**
 - "**God requires the training of the mental faculties.** He designs that His servants shall possess more intelligence and clearer discernment than the worldling, and He is displeased with those who are too careless or too indolent to become efficient, well-informed workers.... **[He] lays upon us the obligation of developing the intellect to its fullest capacity, that with all the mind we may know and love our Creator**" (COL 333).
 - "**If placed under the control of His Spirit, the more thoroughly the intellect is cultivated, the more effectively it can be used in the service of God.** The uneducated man who is consecrated to God and who longs to bless others can be, and is, used by the Lord in His service. But those who, with the same spirit of consecration, have had the benefit of a thorough education, can do a much more extensive work for Christ. They stand on vantage ground" (COL 333).
 - "Let the youth who need an education set to work with a determination to obtain it. Do not wait for an opening; make one for yourselves.... Be determined to become as useful and efficient as God calls you to be. Be thorough and faithful in whatever you undertake. **Procure every advantage within your reach for strengthening the intellect. Let the study of books be combined with useful manual labor, and by faithful endeavor, watchfulness, and prayer secure the wisdom that is from above.** This will give you an all-round education" (COL 334)
 - "Those who hunger for knowledge that they may bless their fellow men will themselves receive blessing from God. **Through the study of His word their mental powers will be aroused to earnest activity.** There will be an expansion and development of the faculties, and the mind will acquire power and efficiency" (COL 334)
 - "Self-discipline must be practiced by everyone who would be a worker for God. This will accomplish more than eloquence or the most brilliant talents. **An ordinary mind, well disciplined, will accomplish more and higher work than will the most highly educated mind and the greatest talents without self-control**" (COL 335)
- **Speech:**
 - "The power of speech is a talent that should be diligently cultivated. Of all the gifts we have received from God, none is capable of being a greater blessing than this. **With the voice we convince and persuade, with it we offer prayer**

and praise to God, and with it we tell others of the Redeemer's love. How important, then, that it be so trained as to be most effective for good” (COL 335).

- “The culture and right use of the voice are greatly neglected, even by persons of intelligence and Christian activity. There are many who read or speak in so low or so rapid a manner that they cannot be readily understood. **Some have a thick, indistinct utterance; others speak in a high key, in sharp, shrill tones, that are painful to the hearers.** Texts, hymns, and the reports and other papers presented before public assemblies are sometimes read in such a way that they are not understood and often so that their force and impressiveness are destroyed. This is an evil that can and should be corrected. **By diligent effort all may acquire the power to read intelligibly, and to speak in a full, clear, round tone, in a distinct and impressive manner.** By doing this we may greatly increase our efficiency as workers for Christ” (COL 335)
- “The right culture and use of the power of speech has to do with every line of Christian work.... **We should accustom ourselves to speak in pleasant tones, to use pure and correct language, and words that are kind and courteous.** Sweet, kind words are as dew and gentle showers to the soul. The Scripture says of Christ that grace was poured into His lips that He might “know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary.” Psalm 45:2; Isaiah 50:4. And the Lord bids us, “Let your speech be alway with grace” (Colossians 4:6) “that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Ephesians 4:29)” (COL 336).
- **Influence:**
 - “Every soul is surrounded by an atmosphere of its own—an atmosphere, it may be, charged with the life-giving power of faith, courage, and hope, and sweet with the fragrance of love. Or it may be heavy and chill with the gloom of discontent and selfishness, or poisonous with the deadly taint of cherished sin. **By the atmosphere surrounding us, every person with whom we come in contact is consciously or unconsciously affected.** This is a responsibility from which we cannot free ourselves. **Our words, our acts, our dress, our deportment, even the expression of the countenance, has an influence.** Upon the impression thus made there hang results for good or evil which no man can measure. Every impulse thus imparted is seed sown which will produce its harvest.... If by our example we aid others in the development of good principles, we give them power to do good. In their turn they exert the same influence upon others, and they upon still others. Thus by our unconscious influence thousands may be blessed” (COL 339).
- **Time:**
 - “Our time belongs to God. Every moment is His, and we are under the most solemn obligation to improve it to His glory. **Of no talent He has given will He require a more strict account than of our time” (COL 342).**
 - “**The value of time is beyond computation.** Christ regarded every moment as precious, and it is thus that we should regard it. **Life is too short to be trifled away. We have but a few days of probation in which to prepare for eternity.** We have no time to waste, no time to devote to selfish pleasure, no time for the indulgence of sin. It is now that we are to form characters for the future, immortal life. It is now that we are to prepare for the searching judgment” (COL 342).
 - “Life is too solemn to be absorbed in temporal and earthly matters, in a treadmill of care and anxiety for the things that are but an atom in comparison with the things of eternal interest. Yet God has called us to serve Him in the temporal affairs of life. Diligence in this work is as much a part of true religion as

is devotion. **The Bible gives no indorsement to idleness. It is the greatest curse that afflicts our world. Every man and woman who is truly converted will be a diligent worker**" (COL 343).

- **"A few moments here and a few there, that might be frittered away in aimless talk; the morning hours so often wasted in bed; the time spent in traveling on trams or railway cars, or waiting at the station; the moments of waiting for meals, waiting for those who are tardy in keeping an appointment—if a book were kept at hand, and these fragments of time were improved in study, reading, or careful thought, what might not be accomplished.** A resolute purpose, persistent industry, and careful economy of time, will enable men to acquire knowledge and mental discipline which will qualify them for almost any position of influence and usefulness" (COL 343).
- **"By tact and method, some will accomplish as much in five hours as others do in ten....** Decide how long a time is required for a given task, and then bend every effort toward accomplishing the work in the given time. The exercise of the will power will make the hands move deftly" (COL 344).
- **"Parents cannot commit a greater sin than to allow their children to have nothing to do. The children soon learn to love idleness, and they grow up shiftless, useless men and women.** When they are old enough to earn their living, and find employment, they work in a lazy, droning way, yet expect to be paid as much as if they were faithful. There is a world-wide difference between this class of workers and those who realize that they must be faithful stewards" (COL 345).
- **Health:**
 - "Health is a blessing of which few appreciate the value; yet upon it the efficiency of our mental and physical powers largely depends. Our impulses and passions have their seat in the body, and it **must be kept in the best condition physically and under the most spiritual influences in order that our talents may be put to the highest use**" (COL 346).
 - "The misuse of our physical powers shortens the period of time in which our lives can be used for the glory of God. And it unfits us to accomplish the work God has given us to do. **By allowing ourselves to form wrong habits, by keeping late hours, by gratifying appetite at the expense of health, we lay the foundation for feebleness.** By neglecting physical exercise, by overworking mind or body, we unbalance the nervous system. **Those who thus shorten their lives and unfit themselves for service by disregarding nature's laws, are guilty of robbery toward God.** And they are robbing their fellow men also. The opportunity of blessing others, the very work for which God sent them into the world, has by their own course of action been cut short" (COL 346)
- **Money:**
 - **"Our money has not been given us that we might honor and glorify ourselves.** As faithful stewards we are to use it for the honor and glory of God. Some think that only a portion of their means is the Lord's. When they have set apart a portion for religious and charitable purposes, they regard the remainder as their own, to be used as they see fit. But in this they mistake. All we possess is the Lord's, and we are accountable to Him for the use we make of it. **In the use of every penny, it will be seen whether we love God supremely and our neighbor as ourselves**" (COL 351).
 - "Money has great value, because it can do great good. In the hands of God's children it is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, and clothing for the naked. It is a defense for the oppressed, and a means of help to the sick. **But money is of no more value than sand, only as it is put to use in providing for**

the necessities of life, in blessing others, and advancing the cause of Christ” (COL 351).

- **“Hoarded wealth is not merely useless, it is a curse.** In this life it is a snare to the soul, drawing the affections away from the heavenly treasure. In the great day of God its witness to unused talents and neglected opportunities will condemn its possessor. [See] James 5:1-4” (COL 352).
- **“Talents used are talents multiplied.** Success is not the result of chance or of destiny; it is the outworking of God's own providence, the reward of faith and discretion, of virtue and persevering effort. The Lord desires us to use every gift we have; and if we do this, we shall have greater gifts to use. **He does not supernaturally endow us with the qualifications we lack; but while we use that which we have, He will work with us to increase and strengthen every faculty.** By every wholehearted, earnest sacrifice for the Master's service our powers will increase” (COL 353).
- **“Every effort made for Christ will react in blessing upon ourselves.** If we use our means for His glory, He will give us more. As we seek to win others to Christ, bearing the burden of souls in our prayers, our own hearts will throb with the quickening influence of God's grace; our own affections will glow with more divine fervor; our whole Christian life will be more of a reality, more earnest, more prayerful” (COL 354).
- **“It was the one with the smallest gift who left his talent unimproved. In this is given a warning to all who feel that the smallness of their endowments excuses them from service for Christ.** If they could do some great thing, how gladly would they undertake it; but because they can serve only in little things, they think themselves justified in doing nothing. In this they err. The Lord in His distribution of gifts is testing character. The man who neglected to improve his talent proved himself an unfaithful servant. **Had he received five talents, he would have buried them as he buried the one”** (COL 355).
- **“‘He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much.’ Luke 16:10. The importance of the little things is often underrated because they are small; but they supply much of the actual discipline of life.** There are really no nonessentials in the Christian's life. Our character building will be full of peril while we underrate the importance of the little things” (COL 356).
- **“When the Master receives the talents, He approves and rewards the workers as though the merit were all their own”** (COL 361).
- Vs 24: The charge that God is a hard master, reaping where He has not sown, is false.
- Vs 26: **“The master does not deny the charge of the wicked servant, unjust as it is; but taking him on his own ground he shows that his conduct is without excuse.** Ways and means had been provided whereby the talent might have been improved to the owner's profit” (COL 362).
- **“The unused capabilities are as much brought into account as are those that are improved. For all that we might become through the right use of our talents God holds us responsible. We shall be judged according to what we ought to have done, but did not accomplish because we did not use our powers to glorify God. Even if we do not lose our souls, we shall realize in eternity the result of our unused talents.** For all the knowledge and ability that we might have gained and did not, there will be an eternal loss” (COL 362).
- **“We should not talk of our own weakness and inability. This is a manifest distrust of God, a denial of His word. When we murmur because of our burdens, or refuse the responsibilities He calls upon us to bear, we are virtually saying that He is a hard master, that He requires what He has not given us power to do”** (COL 363).
- **“Your talents will increase by winning souls to Christ.”** (*Testimonies to Southern Africa*, p. 65)
- **The Talent Removed:** Activity is the law of life; idleness is death.... Employed to bless others, his gifts increase. Shut up to self-serving they diminish, and are finally

withdrawn. **He who refuses to impart that which he has received will at last find that he has nothing to give.** He is consenting to a process that surely dwarfs and finally destroys the faculties of the soul” (COL 364).

- “Many who excuse themselves from Christian effort plead their inability for the work. But did God make them so incapable? No, never. This inability has been produced by their own inactivity and perpetuated by their deliberate choice....**The continual misuse of their talents will effectually quench for them the Holy Spirit, which is the only light**” (COL 365).
- **Some lessons from the parable** (Russell Burrill, *Revolution in the Church*)
 - **God** is the One who decides what gift(s) to give, and how many.
 - Those who use their gifts receive **more**. Talents used become talents multiplied.
 - **Everyone** receives some gift – No one can claim that he/she has nothing to do in the Master’s course.
 - A talent is **valuable** (a talent of silver in Bible times was worth 20 years’ wages for the common labourer) – Thus the church needs **everyone’s** talent.
 - Utilising talents means taking **risks** – To use one’s gift means to risk failure, not to use one’s gift is failure.
 - Those who fail to use what is given them **lose** what they have.
 - Those who use their gifts are preparing to enter heaven; those who don’t, suffer an **eternal loss** – the servant who did not use his talent was sent into outer darkness.
- **Purpose of spiritual gifts**
 - To equip believers for the works of service (Eph. 4:11-12)
 - To build up the whole church (Eph. 4:12)
 - For unity of faith (Eph. 4:13)
 - To develop spiritual maturity in Jesus (Eph. 4:13)
 - For doctrinal stability (Eph. 4:14)
 - To establish believers in their faith (Rom. 1:11)
 - To encourage believers (Rom. 1:12)
 - For the effectiveness of the whole church (1 Cor. 12:4, 7)
 - For the enlargement of the church (Eph. 4:16)
- **Spiritual gift clusters (cf. Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4)**
 - **Support Gifts:** Helps (Support), Hospitality, Giving, Mercy (Compassion), Exhortation (Encouragement)
 - **Teaching Gifts:** Teaching, Knowledge, Wisdom
 - **Leadership Gifts:** Leadership, Administration, Faith
 - **Outreach Gifts:** Evangelist (*Note:* being an evangelist is a gift, but *evangelism* is not a gift – everyone should do it), Shepherding (Pastoring), Discernment, Pioneering (Apostleship), Speaking Authoritatively for God (Prophecy)
 - **Sign Gifts:** Miracles, Healings, Tongues, Interpretation of Tongues, Voluntary Poverty (1 Cor. 13:3), Martyrdom (1 Cor. 13:3; Acts 7:60), Celibacy (1 Cor. 7:7; Matt. 19:12)
 - **NOTE:** Not all spiritual gifts are limited to those found in the Bible.
- Five steps in discovering your spiritual gift(s)
 1. **Pray** - Since spiritual gifts come from the Spirit, they must be discovered in a spiritual context. It is impossible to discover our gifts without much prayer and heart searching.
 2. **Explore the possibilities** - Become familiar with the various gifts available in the Bible (Rom. 12, 1 Cor. 12, Eph. 4). During this phase one may use a spiritual gifts questionnaire to assist you. Ask people what they think your gifts are.
 3. **Experiment with as many gifts as possible** – and see what the results are. You may never know you have a gift until you try it. When you find you have one

gift, keep trying. God may have blessed you with more than one gift. Also, as you use your gift you will receive more, so retry every so often.

4. **Examine your feelings** - While experimenting, do you have a sense of satisfaction? If you have total distaste, it may be that you are not gifted along those lines. Don't however confuse nervousness and uneasiness the first time you do something with a lack of satisfaction.
 5. **Evaluate your effectiveness** - Keep the following in mind:
 - a. Spiritual gifts have a purpose, so they are designed to accomplish some objective. They will make you effective in some area of ministry.
 - b. If you begin to use a spiritual gift, be sure you see appropriate results when you use it. If you get no results, you may not have the gift. There is need to be careful here, because some people underestimate their effectiveness.
 - c. Consult other people to see if they think you are effective. Ask for several honest opinions.
 - d. Don't belittle yourself—think positively. Don't boast, but give God the glory for the gift the Holy Spirit has given you.
- *Read Matt. 25:13-30. Preferably let one person read it. Let everyone then put down their Bibles and get the group to reconstruct the passage in their own words. This teaches the group to be careful in quotation Scripture correctly and to use it as the basis of their discussions.*
 - **Discussion Questions** (use only a few). *The notes in italics after some of the questions below are for the facilitator, and not to be read out to the group.*
 - What is your understanding of a talent in this parable?
 - Give examples of what you think talents are?
 - Why do you think the Master gave unequal talents to his servants?
 - Why do you think God gives talents to His church?
 - Below is a list of talents/endowments in addition to those found in Scripture. In which way can they be regarded as talents, and how can one use or improve them for God? *(work through one at a time):*
 - Mental faculties
 - Speech
 - Influence
 - Time
 - Health
 - Money
 - What do you think are some of the gifts and talents within this small group, without flattering each other?
 - How do you think a person discovers their gifts?
 - Share your understanding of how you think talents increase? Be practical.
 - Why do you think the servant with the one talent accused His Master of being a 'hard man'? (vs 24)
 - What are some thoughts and attitudes that cause people to hide their talents?
 - What are the key lessons that can be drawn from this parable?
 - **Application Questions** (select a few depending on your time. *One has to be the I WILL STATEMENT*)
 - With what talents and resources has God entrusted you? *(if person is not too sure, others in the group could help)*
 - Do you use your talent(s) for God in a sustained, regular way; OR in a random, occasional way? Explain. If the latter, what could you do to begin using your talents more regularly? *(ask one question at a time)*
 - What encourages and motivates you to serve God with your talents?

- I WILL STATEMENT: Formulate an I will statement in response to what you have discovered in the Word. Let the group's secretary also record these in an A4 notebook. Ensure that everyone gets a chance to give their I WILL STATEMENT. You have to be specific. E.g. "I commit to always being involved in service, and will do something **every week** to further God's kingdom."

6. Share (*Purpose: To be witnesses of our faith*)

- Do you have anyone you could share today's lesson with this week? *Be specific.*

7. Closing prayer

Prepared by Shandrell Penniken / Northern Conference