

# How Will You Use Your Talents?

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Date: 31 December 2023

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     man going on a journey who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability.

Then he went on his journey. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also the one with two bags of gold gained two more.

But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master's money. After a long time, the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.

The man who had received the five bags of gold brought the other five. Master, he said, you entrust me with five bags of gold. See, I've gained five more. His master replied, well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things.

I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness. The man with two bags of gold also came. Master, he said, you entrusted me with two bags of gold.

[ 1 : 1 3 ]     See, I've gained two more. His master replied, well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness.

Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. Master, he said, I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sowed, and gathering where you have not scattered seed.

So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, it's what it belongs to you. The master replied, you wicked lazy servant.

You knew that I harvest where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned, I will have received it back with interest.

So take the bag of gold from him, and give it to one who has ten bags. For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.

[ 2 : 1 9 ]     And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnash of teeth. Great. Thank you so much, Joanne.

Kate, if you want to come to the front, families, you can come together. Please do come up. We're all going to learn together about Jesus this morning. Come on up. We're going to be thinking about thankfulness this morning.

It's something we think about a lot in church life. And it's something we think about a lot because we know that God is really good to us. He's really generous to us, and he's really kind. And it's an important part of what it means to be a friend of Jesus, is saying thanks to God for the good things he has given us.

But also then figuring out how to use those good things to serve him. Now, I wonder what we're most thankful for recently. So I want you to put some hands up if you enjoy some of these things.

Who was thankful for Christmas? Interesting. Okay. Who was thankful for time off with family?

[ 3 : 24 ] I'm expecting some of you were thankful for time off work. Come on. Who was thankful for Christmas presents? Who was thankful for Christmas dinner? Who was thankful for making Christmas dinner for their family?

Anyone? I was. It was good fun. I love making Christmas dinner for my family, and I thought it was a real joy. Now, we've had lots of Christmas stuff recently that we're very thankful for. But what if you think about the whole year, the whole of 2023, what kind of things were you most thankful for?

So I want you to turn to the person next to you just for 20 seconds and tell them the thing that you were most thankful for this year or something you were thankful for. Adults as well. Turn to the person next to you. What were you most thankful for?

Thank you. Thank you.

Going on a really fun trip somewhere. Yeah, that's a really good thing to be thankful for. Anybody else got a thing they're thankful for? Yeah? A really, really good Christmas present.

[ 5 : 04 ] Well, yeah, there's lots of things that we can be thankful for over the year. I've been really thankful for being able to just go outside and see some beautiful places in Scotland I've never seen before in 2023.

It was great. Well, now, in our story today, Jesus is telling his disciples a parable. And a parable is a story with a message in it.

And it's in a bit of Matthew's Gospel where Jesus is telling his disciples what will happen when he leaves. And he sends them out into the world to go and do ministry for him. The question is, what are the disciples going to do?

Well, to help us think that through, I'm going to invite some friends up. So if you could all come up, that would be great. Friends, wherever you are. We're all over there. Excellent. Here he comes.

Excellent. This is my friend, Mr. Business. Mr. Business, how are you? I'm doing so well.

[ 6 : 03 ] Thank you, Simon. Excellent. How has business been in 2023? Business has been great. Profits are high. Everybody's happy. We're doing a lot of good things. Excellent. Well, that's great news.

Who are these? These are my guys. These are my people. These are the people who work for me. They're managers. They're responsible for so many of our wonderful projects. Oh, great.

Excellent. Guys, what's it like working for Mr. Business? So good. You get to do so many cool things. Okay. It's so exciting work you get to do.

Excellent. It's okay. How's the bills? Right. Okay. Not so positive. Well, do you know what, team? I'm glad you're here because I'm about to go on a very long journey.

And when I go on my very long journey, I'm going to leave you guys in charge to manage the business. It's a lot of responsibility. I trust you guys to do it. I'm going to wait for a long time.

[ 7 : 03 ] But when I come back, we are going to party. So, guys, I have got something for you. Callum, come on. You're a good guy. I want you to take this money and I want you to do something incredible with it.

Okay. Grow that money. Do it in business. Ruth, Ruth, come on. Come on. I've got something for you too. Ruth, I want you to take this and I want you to go and do incredible things with it.

Expand the business. Do good. Thank you. And Fraser, Fraser, come on. Come on. I've got something for you too. Fraser, I've got... I've got something for you too.

And I want you to take this. And I want you to go and I want you to do wonderful things with it. I trust you. You can do well. I'm going to go, guys. I will see you later.

And we will party. Bye, Mr. Business. Bye. Bye. See you. It's amazing. What are the good things you can do with this? I think I'm going to mess this up. I mean, it is a lot of responsibility.

[ 8 : 04 ] But, like, so exciting. I might start a business. Let's go business. Let's have a good day, guys. How are you? Ugh.

Why? What's the point? Mr. Business is the worst. Managers. I mean, you know what? I might hate this till he comes back.

If he ever comes back at all. Right. We're just going to hide it. Right. Okay. Great. Oh, well, that's maybe not the best reaction.

Sorry for the microphone issues, friends. The story we heard from Matthew's Gospel today is a little like our friends here. Jesus talks about a master who's... I'm going to go to the lecture and mic.

It was an awful. Our story today is about a master who goes away for a long time and leaves his servants with responsibilities for his stuff while he's away.

[ 9 : 05 ] And the message of the first part of Jesus' story for his disciples is that Jesus is a master who gives good things to his disciples when he leaves. For the first disciples, that was for them after Jesus was resurrected.

But for us, that's about the things that Jesus gives to us by his spirit every day. Every one of us has things we have that we can serve Jesus with. For some of us, maybe that's food that we can share with others or games that we can share with others and enjoy.

For some of us, that's the way we open up our homes to other people, welcome in new people, or even make friends with people who are really different to us. Sometimes it's the way we use our money and our time and our talents and the ways that we serve in church.

Even sometimes when we choose to step over the fear barrier and talk to someone about Jesus. Jesus has given us so many good things, and they're not just for us to use for ourselves.

They're for us to use to serve God and serve other people. Now, what each person does with the gifts that they receive from Jesus and how thankful they are for them really matters. If we're really thankful for what Jesus has done for us, for saving us from our sins, and for giving us every good thing we enjoy, we'll be really excited to use those things to serve him.

[ 10 : 22 ] And if we know that Jesus is one day coming back, knowing that he's going to restore everything and make everything perfect once more, knowing that he's that generous, well, that should change how we live and how we use every good thing that we have been given.

Now, we're going to spend a few minutes thinking about that together. So if you want to run back with your families, you'll have a little sheet you can fill in. And if you don't have a sheet as a family, Joanne will get one for you.

And if you don't have a pen, Joanne will also find out one of those for you. But for the rest of us as well, there's some questions on the screen to think through, just in small groups and maybe with the people around you. What are some of the good things God has given you that you are thankful for?

And how could you use those things to serve Jesus? Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 12 : 30 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[ 15 : 35 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[ 18 : 35 ] Thank you, Father, for today. Teach me how to choose your way. Help me lift my eyes and see who you are. You were faithful, always true.

Half of our story today, the master returns to see what his servants did with what he gave them. The first one doubled the big gift the master gave him, and in verse 21 of our passage in Matthew, the master says, well done, good and faithful servant. You've been faithful with a few things.

I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share in your master's happiness. The master is really joyful that the servant has done this and gives him two things as a reward.

The first is more responsibility. The servant has earned trust from their master. And secondly, they get to share in the master's happiness to celebrate together.

The second servant, who had slightly less responsibility, also doubles what they were given. And the master is just as happy and overjoyed because it's not about how much they brought back.

[ 19 : 47 ] But the fact that they worked hard with what they were given. Jesus is telling his disciples that when we use the good things that we have been given to serve him, it doesn't matter how much we produce with them.

It just matters about what we do with what Jesus gives us. We're looking forward to those twin rewards, the responsibility that Jesus will give us forever, to enjoy the things in his creation and steward them well.

But also to join in his joy and celebration forever. Jesus doesn't give us things in this life so that we can merely give them back and that's it.

But that we can celebrate with him and have even more with him in life eternal. And so if you think you're a person with lots and lots and lots of good gifts to share and to serve Jesus with, that's great.

It really matters that you do that. But if you're a person sitting there thinking, well, I don't actually have that much I could give. Do you know what? That's all right. All that matters is what you do to serve Jesus with the things that he has given you.

[ 20 : 49 ] It's all about your attitude towards him. The point is not to look at each other and compare the gifts that we have been given. It's about being thankful for what we have received.

And knowing that one day Jesus will ask us, what did you do with what I gave you to serve the people around you and to serve me? But in the last part of Jesus' story, he shows us the alternative.

The last servant. It's clear that the servant doesn't really like his master. He's pretty insulting. He doesn't think the master is good. In fact, he even just fears the master and does nothing whatsoever with what he has given.

When you see how the master treats the other servants, do you really think it makes very much sense, given how generous he is? But in our story in Matthew's Gospel, the master is offended.

He takes the investment back off the servant and throws him out into the darkness. No wonder he ends up with no reward. But Jesus says this is like anyone who receives good things from him but then rejects him.

[ 21 : 52 ] Anyone who takes good gifts and refuses to use them to serve God. Who thinks that God is not worth serving and just says, no, I won't do anything good with the things that you've given me.

I don't want to. Well, Jesus says that for that person, what they have will in the end be taken away. And they will be cast out and rejected. Just as they rejected him, so he will reject them.

Now, if we're honest, we all know the temptation to act like that. We all know the temptation to use the good things that God has given us, to use them for ourselves and not to serve others with them.

Even if we call ourselves a friend of Jesus, we might find ourselves feeling that way sometimes. But all that means is that we are people who need to say sorry to God often. People who need to receive the good things that he has given us.

When we don't use them the right way, say sorry. But knowing that he is generous and kind means that we can go on and use them well. And the big focus of that is knowing that Jesus is coming back.

[ 22 : 51 ] As the year changes, as we move from 2023 to 2024, is yet another year towards Jesus' kingdom coming. For some of us, we might sit thinking, well, will Jesus' kingdom ever come?

And the answer is yes, it is still coming. And it does still matter what you do. But that life is a life of exciting service of God, knowing that you can serve him now, that your actions to serve the Lord really do matter.

How you choose to treat the Lord, to treat his people, and to treat the people around you, is something in which you can truly and joyfully serve God, knowing that there will be an eternal reward for the ways in which you served.

So as we look ahead, what kind of year is 2024 going to be for you? Could it be a year where you look ahead, remembering the good gifts that God has given you, and figuring out how you might serve him?

Could 2024 be a year where you look forward to Jesus coming again, and you live life ready for that day? Let's look forward to asking Jesus to help us, to use the good gifts that he has given us, to serve him, remembering his goodness and kindness to us.

[ 24 : 03 ] And so to help us do that, I'm going to give us a few more minutes with our sheets, and we have a couple of questions on the screen just to finish off. A couple of questions. If Jesus is coming back, how does that change my life now?

And how can we pray for Jesus to help to serve him in 2024? So let's just have five minutes on those questions, and then I'll get up and pray. Father, thank you for the coming year.

Thank you that it will be another year of your faithfulness and kindness to us, that it will be a year of your presence with us. Father, thank you for every good gift that you gave us in the year past, and we pray, Lord, that we would see those things as things received, with which we can be generous to others, and with which we can serve you.

Father, help us to understand how we can use the things that you've given us to serve you. And help us to take joy in knowing you. Remind us always that Jesus is coming back, and that every day ahead is another day closer to his kingdom coming, and everything being made right again.

We pray that 2024 would be a year where more and more people come and hear your words here at our church. We pray it would be a year where you give us boldness to speak the truth about you to others. We pray that it would be a year of generosity and joy.

[ 25 : 16 ] And Father, in all these things, help us to know the Lord Jesus better through what we learn and the ways that we serve. Amen. Well, if you'd like to stand as...