



SERVE: Generous Stewards of God's Gifts

Message Notes, January 31, 2016

The greatest pull on us toward institutionalization is that we would become passive consumers of spiritual provisions, coming to simply be fed and nurtured personally. This point, SERVE, in our "River of Life" strategy is critical in battling this unhealthy drift. God calls us to be actively engaged in the life and mission of His kingdom through joyful service and generous stewardship.

When we are children, we are basically consumed with our own needs, but to remain in such a posture into adulthood leads to a shallow, empty life. Part of growing up is discovering the fulfillment of living outward – recognizing the needs of others and learning the joy of serving and giving.

Matthew 25:14-18 (Parable of the Talents)

The context for this parable (and the other two surrounding it) is that Jesus is coming back. He is basically challenging His listeners, "How will you live until I return?" The "talents" parable essentially poses the question, "Will you use well the time, talents and treasures the master has entrusted to you until He returns?"

Truths from this Parable

1. There is important work to do! (A joyful privilege, not a burdensome duty)
2. God gives us the **opportunity** to join Him in His kingdom work. He *invites* us.
3. God gives us the **means** to join Him in His work. He *invests* in us – gifts, abilities, personality, experiences, passions, financial resources – and He calls and leads us. Stewardship means being entrusted with resources to manage and even multiply.
4. God is pleased by **faithfulness** (not production). Yes, sometimes faithfulness will produce obvious fruit, but sometimes not. The master was just as pleased with the two-talent return as he was with the five-talent return.
5. God operates on the principle of **progressive responsibility** (vv. 21, 23). God's school of preparation involves increasing responsibility as faithfulness is revealed.

For example:

- David – anointed to be king at a young age but returned to shepherding, then he became an attendant to a mad king (Saul), then he had to run and hide from Saul for nearly 20 years; only after all of this did he assume the throne of Israel.
- Paul – spent 10-14 years in obscurity after his conversion experience (we assume studying, serving, learning) before he went on his first missionary journey.

When was the last time God called you to something? How did you respond?

6. The wicked servant responded **out of fear** (fueled by a distorted view of the master)

- Maybe he was disgruntled by receiving only one talent, but this was a gift, not wages earned.
- His own words reveal his distorted view of the master: "I knew you were a hard man ..."



- But the story reveals the *generous* heart of the master – investing freely in his servants, giving opportunity, resources and encouragement to each of them.
- Then celebrating their faithfulness – “come enter into my happiness”
- But not the one-talent servant – the master was frustrated, even angry, because this servant did not trust in his master’s generosity; he did not recognize the opportunity; he did not appreciate the investment; he missed the joy of joining in the master’s work and the call to a generous life!

Poor motives for Serving/Giving

1. Guilt or duty. Stewardship is a life God wants *for* us, not *from* us.
2. To impress others (Matt. 6:5)
3. With strings attached. “God, I will do this for you, so you will do that for me.” Tithing in Monopoly won’t ensure you win the game!
4. An inability to say “No.” We want people to find the one or two things they are passionate and gifted for, not serving in all things all the time.

Good motives for Serving/Giving

1. Jesus *is* coming back. Seeing our service in light of eternity:
 - Caring for children, nurturing the foundation of their eternal faith.
 - Encouraging teens in their tumultuous years, fueling their trust in Jesus for eternity.
 - Greeting a newcomer warmly, showing the kindness of Jesus, the eternal lover of their souls.
2. Gratitude. See 2 Chronicles 29:10-14, David’s praise of gratitude to Yahweh
3. To “share in His happiness.” We were made in the generous image of God. We were made to live generously! We are most alive when we so live.
4. Because He is worthy. Our fifth Core value: “Because He is worthy, we give Him the best of what He has given us.”

Response

1. Give thanks to God for His generous heart.
2. Ponder your gifts, abilities, passions, experiences – consider where these can be used for His glory.
3. If you don’t know #2 above, sign up for the next Gifted to Serve class.
4. Fill out the Serve card in the sanctuary chairs, expressing interest in possible areas of service.
5. Renew your passion and commitment in the places where you are currently serving. Doing these as an expression of love and gratitude to our good and generous master!
6. Renounce these fears:
 - I won’t like serving where I end up, and I will be stuck. (You will have a probationary period to determine if a ministry is a good fit. Most service roles are only for one -year terms.)
 - I’m not qualified. (Good training and support will be available. God is looking for faithfulness not perfection.)
 - I’ve been there, done that, got burned or burned out. (Don’t let past negatives rob you of the potential for “entering into His happiness.” Brief breaks from serving can be healthy; the danger is that one might *remain* there.)