

The purpose of this leader's guide is to be a tool for ABF and Life Group leaders to follow the sermon series with their group. Our hope is that this guide will give you a head start for your study and will allow your group to respond to what they've heard and apply it for life.*

Why Parables?. In Definition the word parable comes the Greek word 'parabole,' which means "a placing beside" and therefore is a comparison or an illustration. The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke contain about 30 of these stories while John's gospel contains no parables but does use figures of speech. A parable is a story taken from real life (or real life situation) from which a moral or spiritual truth is drawn. They are not fables (talking animals/walking trees). They are not allegories where every detail has hidden meaning. They are basically an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

Parable of the Talents

Read Matthew 25:14-30 - Introduction and observation questions

Introductory Questions:

Talk about a time in your life where you know that God used your unique gifts and abilities to make a difference in someone else's life.

Introduction and Context:

While the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins stresses the need to be prepared, the Parable of the Talents seems to emphasize stewardship and accountability to the Lord while we wait for His return. The word entrust literally means "to put something into someone's care or protection." The word steward literally means "to manage or to look after someone else's property." The word "Talent" in this parable pertains to a sum of money. One talent was approximately 6000 denarii, or the amount of money an average working man would earn during a twenty year period of employment (a denarius is an average day's wage). Jesus used this valuable money measure to graphically represent the valuable physical and spiritual gifts that God gives people. The word "talent" in modern english has come to refer to skills, aptitudes, and physical abilities that a person possesses. Jesus is teaching the disciples and to us that nothing we have is truly ours. All that we have has been entrusted to us so that we may use it for God's kingdom. We all have been given "talents" not to waste, but that we might multiply that which we have given for God's glory. This parable speaks to the importance of stewardship but also speaks to the truth that Jesus will return and hold people accountable for what they have been entrusted with. The faithful stewards will be rewarded and the unfaithful will be punished.

Observation and Questions for Matthew 25:14-30

Observation of the text:

The master of the servants represents Jesus Christ. His long trip and return represents the time between Jesus' first coming and His second coming and that His second coming is a certainty. The servants represent all people and that all are created to serve the lord, whether they are aware of this fact or not. Keep in mind that although the last servant only received one talent, all were give a large sum of money. The first two servants worked hard and doubled the master's talents, while the last servant took the master's talents and hid it. He was fearful of the master and was lazy, disinterested in producing fruit. He failed to understand and know what his master's desire was while He was away. The first two were rewarded because they knew the

master's will and we faithful. But the third servant was punished because he did not truly know the master's will and did not do it. The master did not expect more than each servant had the ability to produce (v. 15), and for that reason He entrusted talents according to what each could handle. God does not give us more than we can handle, but expects us to be faithful with what we have been given. Jesus used this parable to reveal what the kingdom of heaven is like. This story is a vivid picture of what it takes to prove oneself fit for the kingdom. Those who are truly fit for the kingdom (true followers of Christ) will be faithful with what they have been given, but those who are unfit for the kingdom will waste what they have been given and have nothing to show for when the master comes to settle accounts. Jesus is showing us again as He does throughout the gospels, that a person's works or fruit does not gain an entrance into His kingdom, but a person's works or fruit is evidence whether or not they are a true follower of Jesus and therefore gain entrance.

Observation Questions:

1. Describe the events in this parable.
2. What is the main theme or the central point of this parable?
3. What is the significance of the amount of talents being given to each servant "according to his own ability" (v. 15)? What does this verse teach us about God?
4. What do we learn from Jesus about verse 19? If what Jesus is teaching us in this verse is true, why do you think so many waste the "talents" that they have been given?
5. Notice that the first two servants were not rewarded according to who had the most amount of talents, but according to their faithfulness of what they were given. What does this teach us about how we are created? What does this teach us about how God will judge each person? How can it speak to a person who is a missionary in an "unreached area" or a person holds babies in a nursery?

When our life is over, our eternal destiny will be based on our faith in Jesus. Salvation is by grace, not through our good works (Eph. 2:8-10). However, we will be held accountable for what we do with what we have been given by God. He has given us talents and made an investment in our lives and He expects a return on it. By God's grace, we are made aware of Jesus' return to settle accounts, but our motivation should not be from fear, but from the joy and gratitude of being entrusted talents by the Lord to serve Him and produce fruit for His kingdom and for His glory.

General Reflection:

- 1) What does this passage teach us about God?
- 2) What does this passage teach us about mankind?
- 3) What is a command to obey in this passage? What has God revealed in your life that needs changing? What truth can be applied to your life about the gospel?

Personal Reflection/Application

- 4) If you have ever struggled with what you have been gifted with compared to others, how can this parable help you gain a better perspective on this issue?

- 5) What are some ways that we can determine our “talents” or gifts that God has entrusted us with? Ask people in the group to share how they are using their God given gifts to serve Him. How did they identify those gifts?
- 6) The last servant went and “hid” his talent. What is Jesus trying to teach us about this servant? What are some ways that we “hide” our talents today?
- 7) What excuses are made by people who do not serve the Lord? How does this parable remove any excuses for serving the Lord and producing fruit for His kingdom?
- 8) What areas of stewardship in life could we apply from this parable? How we spend our money, how we use our time, how we use our gifts and talents, etc.. What area do you struggle being faithful with the most?

Close by reading Ephesians 2:10 to gain perspective on what God has created us for.

Prayer

Father, thank you for giving us your word and making us aware of your will for our lives. Help me to diligently seek what you have gifted me with so that I can faithfully serve you. Forgive me for the “talents” that I have wasted in my life. Help me to be found faithful as a good steward of what you have given me.