



## TALENTS

*Sermon script to go with the PowerPoint slides.*

### **Opening Story – Matthew 25:14-30**

“The Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. He called together his servants and entrusted his money to them while he was gone. He gave five bags of silver to one, two bags of silver to another, and one bag of silver to the last—dividing it in proportion to their abilities. He then left on his trip.

The servant who received the five bags of silver began to invest the money and earned five more. The servant with two bags of silver also went to work and earned two more. But the servant who received the one bag of silver dug a hole in the ground and hid the master’s money.

After a long time, their master returned from his trip and called them to give an account of how they had used his money. The servant to whom he had entrusted the five bags of silver came forward with five more and said, ‘Master, you gave me five bags of silver to invest, and I have earned five more.’

The master was full of praise. ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let’s celebrate together!’

The servant who had received the two bags of silver came forward and said, ‘Master, you gave me two bags of silver to invest, and I have earned two more.’

The master said, ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let’s celebrate together!’

Then the servant with the one bag of silver came and said, ‘Master, I knew you were a harsh man, harvesting crops you didn’t plant and gathering crops you didn’t cultivate. I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth. Look, here is your money back.’

“But the master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy servant! If you knew I harvested crops I didn’t plant and gathered crops I didn’t cultivate, why didn’t you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have gotten some interest on it.’

Then he ordered, ‘Take the money from this servant, and give it to the one with the ten bags of silver. To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who do nothing, even what little they have will be taken away. Now throw this useless servant into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

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This amazing parable of Jesus contains many lessons, but, as with all parables, we need to start by seeing what the central, the most important lesson is. In its simplest form, Jesus

was saying that His followers are expected to faithfully use the gifts and talents that God entrusts to them. We are to be good stewards of the talents He gives us. This includes our material talents, like the talents of silver in the parable, and also our skills and abilities, the talents that God gives us.

Today we will look at the way God invites us to use and grow our talents for His glory.

**SLIDE:** The 21<sup>st</sup> Fundamental Belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church states, “We are God’s stewards, entrusted by Him with time and opportunities, **abilities** and possessions, and the blessings of the earth and its resources. We are responsible to Him for their proper use. We acknowledge God’s ownership by faithful service to Him and our fellowmen, and by returning tithes and giving offerings for the proclamation of His gospel and the support and growth of His church. Stewardship is a privilege given to us by God for nurture in love and the victory over selfishness and covetousness. The steward rejoices in the blessings that come to others as a result of his faithfulness.”

**SLIDE:** As with all things in the Christian life, we are to follow the ways of Jesus. As disciples of Jesus, we are to become more like Him in every way. So, we can ask, ‘How did Jesus manage His talents?’

Jesus clearly said that of Himself He could do nothing. He simply did what His Father told Him to do. He followed ‘God’s Blueprint’, God’s plan for His life, even in the use of His talents.

**SLIDE:** Let’s look at the Great Controversy that is raging around how we use the talents God has entrusted to us.

- God’s blueprint says that we should acknowledge that all good gifts, including our talents, come from God. But Satan plays to our pride and says, “God might have given you the seed of a talent but look what you’ve done with it!”
- As a Christian I admit that all that I am or can be belongs to God. But again, Satan tells us to look to self and tries to convince me that, “All that I am or can be is a result of my focused determination and my hard work.”
- This next one is really important. All the applause, praise and profits that come from my talents are God’s. Satan wants me to keep it all for myself. There’s ‘self’ popping up again.
- God has entrusted me to care for and grow the talents He has given me. But Satan says I can use my talents to gain respect and praise so that I can feel positive about myself. Self, self, self.
- For my own good, God invites me to I commit to using my God-given talents for His glory because I love Him, and He only wants what’s best for me. But Satan tries to dilute God’s invitation by saying that God is happy if I use my talents all for myself as long as I give Him some credit.

It’s a Great Controversy, a battle, that rages in the heart of every man, woman and child. The desire to use talents to serve my self, instead of God, is part of our very human nature and it is only by God’s grace and His indwelling power that we can overcome and be faithful servants.

**SLIDE:** Author and Professor Leo Buscaglia described talents beautifully when he said, “Your talent is God's gift to you. What you do with it is your gift back to God.” That’s worth writing down!

**SLIDE:** In writing to the Ephesian church members Paul reminded them that, “we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” *Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)*

Isn’t that amazing?! Let’s read it through again slowly. “For we are God’s handiwork [Wow!], created in Christ Jesus to do good works [we have a purpose], which God prepared in advance for us to do [before we were even born, God prepared good works for us to do with the life and talents He gives us—amazing!].”

**SLIDE:** As always, Ellen White summarises the message powerfully. “Our means, our speech, our influence—all are talents to be used in the Master’s service and to be multiplied by wise investment. We must increase our capabilities for service. It is a terrible mistake for a professed Christian to devote his time and means and energies to the service of self. We are to deny self, that we may follow Christ.” *Ellen G. White, Letters & Manuscripts, Vol. 22, Letter 190, 1907, par. 12.*

Isn’t it so true that when we devote our time and talents to serving ourselves we end up miserable, but when we use our time and talents for God we have incredible peace and satisfaction? Our Creator certainly knows what’s best for us!

**SLIDE:** The Apostle James described this with a very interesting use of words, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, ...” *James 1:17a (NKJV)*

God is the source of all good gifts, including the talents He gives us. He is the ‘Father of lights’. The Apostle John describes God this way, “God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all.” *1 John 1:5* Wow! I want to come out of darkness and use my talents to serve the God of light, what about you?

Let’s take a moment to learn what a ‘talent’ is and to discover whether we each have them.

**SLIDE:** In the beautiful book, Christ’s Object Lessons Ellen White has a chapter where she ‘places a magnifying glass’ over the Parable of the Talents, and it is beautiful chapter to study. There we read, “The special gifts of the Spirit 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. In becoming His disciples, we surrender ourselves to Him with all that we are and have. These gifts He returns to us purified and ennobled, to be used for His glory in blessing our fellow men.” *Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, 328*

**SLIDE:** And in Exodus we read about a man with talents that we might describe as a trade today. “And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in

silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship." *Exodus 31:3-5 (NKJV)*

**SLIDE:** Back in Christ's Object Lessons we read, "God desires that His workers in every line shall look to Him as the Giver of all they possess. ... The skillful touch of the physician's hand, his power over nerve and muscle, his knowledge of the delicate organism of the body, is the wisdom of divine power, to be used in behalf of the suffering. The skill with which the carpenter uses the hammer, the strength with which the blacksmith makes the anvil ring, comes from God. He has entrusted men with talents, and He expects them to look to Him for counsel. ..."

**SLIDE:** "... Whatever we do, in whatever department of the work we are placed, He desires to control our minds that we may do perfect work. Religion and business are not two separate things; they are one. Bible religion is to be interwoven with all we do or say. Divine and human agencies are to combine in temporal as well as in spiritual achievements. They are to be united in all human pursuits, in mechanical and agricultural labours, in mercantile and scientific enterprises. There must be co-operation in everything embraced in Christian activity." *Ellen G. White, Christ's Object Lessons, 349*

Let's keep looking at this eye-opening reality, that all of us have gifts and talents that are to be used for God in the service of others.

**SLIDE:** "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms." *1 Peter 4:10 (NIV)*

This is a very 'high calling' that God has invited us into, so it's no surprise that this next statement comes from a book by that name. Here we learn that it's not just trades or professional skills that count as talents.

**SLIDE:** "Influence is a gift of God . . . Intellect is an entrusted talent. Sympathy and affection are talents to be sacredly guarded and improved, that we may render service to Him whose purchased possession we are. All that we are or can be belongs to God. Education, discipline, and skill in every line should be used for Him. The capital is His, and the improvement is the usury [profit/interest] that rightfully belongs to the Master. Whether the amount entrusted is large or small, the Lord requires that His householders do their best." *Ellen G. White, Our High Calling, 289*

**SLIDE:** Going back to Christ's Object Lessons we read, "Talents used are talents multiplied. Success is not the result of chance or of destiny; it is the outworking of:

1. God's own providence,
2. the reward of faith and discretion,
3. of virtue, and
4. persevering effort." *Ellen G. White, Christ's Object Lessons, p. 353*

**SLIDE:** Here's another reason for ensuring that we use the talents, large or small, that God's entrust us with. "Use what talents you possess; the woods would indeed be very silent if no birds sang there except those that sang best." *Odd Moments, Sunshine Private Press*

**SLIDE:** If you want to learn more about God's invitation to you to be a faithful steward of all He gives you, I encourage you to read *Counsels on Stewardship* by Ellen White. You can find it online for free or you can purchase a copy.

In conclusion I'd like to share a story about our need for all sorts of talents.

Author and theology professor Haddon Robinson tells the story of a concert violinist whose brother was a bricklayer—very different talents for two brothers to have. One day, a woman began telling the bricklayer about how wonderful it must be to be the brother of the talented violinist. Not wanting to insult the bricklayer, she added, "Of course, we don't all have the same talents, and even in a family some just seem to have more talent than others."

The bricklayer replied, "That is so true! That violinist brother of mine doesn't know a thing about laying bricks. If he couldn't make some money playing that fiddle of his, he couldn't hire a guy with skills like mine to build a house. If he had to build a house himself, he'd be ruined."

What's the conclusion? "If you want to build a house, you don't want a violinist. If you're going to lead an orchestra, you don't want a bricklayer. No two of us are exactly alike. None of us has every gift and ability. Our responsibility is to exercise, improve and use the gifts that God has given us."

**SLIDE:** So, how can we be faithful with the talents God has entrusted to us? A faithful steward does what their Master would do if He were present.

Let's look to Jesus as we seek to grow and use the talents God has given us in serving the people around us.