

Chapter 5

Relationship with God and Others: Being Good Stewards

Opening Question: What have you been given that you could use to love your neighbor or community or the world?

DEBRIEF and OPENING

Have group members share how they did with last week's "Respond" step (Observing the Sabbath) and repeat the memory verse (Luke 19:9-10) as they arrive.

Open with prayer for the Spirit to illuminate the group during the study.

Last week we saw that relationship with God involves our entire lives. This week we continue that thinking by considering those gifts God has given us: talents, education, resources, and how we can glorify God with them in all situations.

HEAR THE WORD

Context: In the Bible a parable is a short story told to illuminate a relevant truth. The larger context of our passage is all the kingdom parables. In the parable of the weeds (Matthew 13: 24-30; 36-43), Jesus teaches that the people of the evil one (the weeds) will be mixed in with the people of the kingdom until the very end, when those who reject God's love will be thrown into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The immediate context of our passage is Matthew 24, where Jesus taught his disciples about his second coming as King. Jesus said the time of his return was unknown, but his disciples must be doing their duty when he came. Matthew 25 opens with the phrase "the kingdom of heaven (a respectful way of saying kingdom of God for Matthew's Jewish readers) will be like..."

Jesus then told a parable about ten virgins awaiting a bridegroom, and followed it with our text, another parable.

Matthew 25: 14-30 (NIV)

¹⁴ "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

¹⁹ "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.'

²¹ "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!'

²² "The man with two bags of gold also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.'

²³ "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!'

²⁴ "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 sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

²⁶ "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.'

²⁸ "'So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

OBSERVE (What does the passage say?)

1. Check to see that everyone understands the words in the passage and then have the group read the parable aloud, taking different roles:
 - Jesus
 - The servant who received five bags of gold
 - The servant who received two bags of gold
 - The servant who received one bag of gold

Then, let people read the text quietly to themselves.

Q. What questions do you have about the text?

2. Though the text doesn't ask us to, imagine yourself as one of the characters.

Q. What is about that character that draws you?

If you can't relate to any, imagine yourself as the two bags servant.

Q. How do you feel as the Master hands out the bags of gold to each of you?

3. How do you feel when the landowner speaks to you in verses 21 or 23 and gives you more to do ("take charge of many things")?

INTERPRET (What does the passage mean?)

4. Why do you think the master uses the exact same words of praise for the servants who earned five more and two more bags of gold?
5. What does the fact that the faithful servants are given much more responsibility teach? How does this shed light on verses 28-29?
6. What do the third servant's words in verses 24-25 suggest about his relationship with the master? Considering how the master treated the other two servants, how well did the third servant know the master? How might this explain the harsh punishment he receives (verse 30)?

APPLY (What does the passage mean to me and my community?)

7. The English word talent comes from the Greek in this passage. We usually think of talents as natural abilities, but there are many things God has entrusted to us: natural abilities, spiritual gifts, education, and resources of various kinds. What has God entrusted to you that you can use to glorify Him?
8. How and in what different areas can you use those gifts now? After you graduate? When you go home (if you intend to)?

RESPOND

Spiritual Practice: Generosity

This week prayerfully look for ways, large and small, to use your gifts to honor God, and see how many you can find (treasure hunt)! Ask the Lord to show you opportunities for now and give you a vision of how and where you can use your gifts after you graduate. Write down the current opportunities and dreams for the future that the Holy Spirit gives you.

Memory Verse: Matthew 25:21(NIV)

"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!'"

Memorize the memory verse in your heart language and English this week.

CLOSING

Close in prayer to hear well from the Lord about ways to use your gifts now and later, for group member needs, and the needs of the world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This chapter was written by Katie Rawson of InterVarsity-USA. She became involved with international students as an international grad student doing research in Paris, where she was part of the GBU, the French student movement associated with the

IFES. Katie has served among international students in the USA for over forty years, and she has a passion to see students living in and glorifying Jesus wherever God sends them. Diane Tyndall, an IVCF-USA campus minister in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, commented on this chapter.

Facilitator's Notes

Objectives of the Study

- Help students to realize that their gifts and talents are part of whole life discipleship
- Help them see that faithfulness now can open doors to greater opportunity to honor God
- Help them envision how God can use them in various arenas of society now and later

Notes on the Questions

Question 5: If we long to serve Jesus and are faithful, he will entrust us with more of his shalom work, bringing flourishing to our communities and to the world. The promise is *abundance*, and *come and share your Master's happiness*. These are great gifts Jesus gives us, because Jesus loves to be generous with what he has.

Question 6: The master repeats the servant's words as a question. He doesn't agree that this is his character. The servant seems not to have known the master well. When we consider that a similar fate was given to the people of the evil one in the parable of the weeds (see context), it makes sense to think that this servant was one of those people of the evil one.