

STEWARDSHIP IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

THE
GENEROUS
LIFE

ROB PACIENZA



CONTENTS

Prologue	5
1 Introduction	9
2 Owners of Nothing	11
3 A Worthy Purpose	13
4 The Master's Favor	15
Epilogue	17
Reflection Questions	21

A Generous Life

by Rob Pacienza

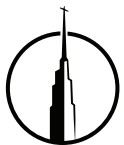
Copyright © 2021 Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church

All rights reserved. Written permission must be secured from the publisher to use or reproduce any part of this book, except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a ministry of Good News Publishers. All rights reserved. Used by permission. Scripture quotations marked as NASB are from the the New American Standard Bible. Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

Printed in the United States of America.

Published by:



Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church
5555 N Federal Hwy
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33308
(954) 771-8840
crpc.org



PROLOGUE

When Jesus came to earth over 2,000 years ago, He revealed God’s heart for humanity in His life, death, and resurrection. He came to serve rather than to be served. He came to die so that we might live. He came to give us abundant life and teach us how to live as citizens in God’s Kingdom.

Rather than teaching about the Kingdom of Heaven through scholarly language, Jesus taught with parables because He wanted to challenge worldly wisdom and awaken listeners with an entirely new paradigm.

In “The Parable of the Talents” found in Matthew 25, Jesus illustrates what it means to be God’s stewards as we navigate life on earth. It is an exhortation to the Church, a story characterizing God and His people.

The master in the story is likened to God while the servants represent those who belong to His Kingdom. The master has significant wealth, which he entrusts in various portions to three of his servants. He is the owner, but he chooses the servants to be his stewards. Their role is to care for, manage, and invest the owner’s possessions. It is the steward’s job to take that which belongs to the master and advance it for the master’s purposes.

But in order to be a steward who invests wisely and without fear, we must see our Master for who He really is—not an owner who gives sparingly, but an outrageously generous God.

Let’s examine the parable together:

The Parable of the Talents

14 “For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. **15** To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. **16** He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. **17** So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. **18** But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money. **19** Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. **20** And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.’ **21** His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ **22** And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.’ **23** His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ **24** He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, **25** so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.’ **26** But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? **27** Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with

interest. **28** So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. **29** For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. **30** And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Matthew 25:14-30 (ESV)



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The portion of wealth that the master entrusts to his servants is significant. It is widely thought that one talent was worth 20 years of labor! In other words, during that time if you possessed even one talent, it was enough to be considered wealthy. The master does not give the servants a minuscule portion of his wealth; he entrusts them with a generous amount, each based on their ability.

The first servant takes the five talents given to him and willingly invests it for the master. At the master's return, the servant has doubled his profit. In response, the master commends the servant for doing well and bids him to enter his house with joy.

To the second servant, God entrusts two talents. This servant, likewise, understands that the master has entrusted the talents to him for the purpose of growing his wealth. Therefore, he invests them and doubles the master's profit. The master calls the servant "good and faithful," promises even more responsibility, and welcomes him into his house with joy.

To the third servant, the master gives one talent. But this servant takes a different approach than the first two. He accepts the talent, but believing the master is a tough man, he buries it in the ground. When the master returns and discovers what the servant has done, his response leaves no question. He calls the servant "wicked and slothful" and tells him that he will be cast out of His presence into utter darkness.

Perhaps the master's response seems harsh to us. Consider the third servant's mindset: he tells the master that he was afraid of retribution, so rather than invest his talent, he buried it in the ground for safekeeping. Rather than look to the master's interests, the servant feared for himself and hid that which the master entrusted to him.

It is here in the Parable of the Talents we understand that if we belong to the Master and His Kingdom, then we have a distinct calling to take what He gives us and use it for His Kingdom purposes. It is the key to living generously.



CHAPTER TWO

OWNERS OF NOTHING

Consider how God set the world in motion from the beginning of creation. Adam and Eve were entrusted with everything on the earth, but they were never the owners. God was and is the creator, owner, and master. He gave mankind dominion over the earth to subdue it and multiply their number—not as owners, but as stewards working on His behalf. We are His agents and representatives, meant to make His name famous throughout the earth.

In the Parable of the Talents, the master distributes his wealth to each servant *according to his ability*, but he does not give them specific instructions. He trusts that the servants know him well enough to make wise decisions with his resources.

The master never transfers ownership. He trusts the servants to manage what belongs to Him with wisdom and grace. This is a life-changing principle: our money, family, careers, possessions, indeed every gift and resource, does not really belong to us. God gives us the privilege of managing our wealth, gifts and abilities for His glory.

Have you ever handed a toy to a two-year-old, then tried to take it away? Most of us know exactly what to expect. “Mine!” Toddlers are good at claiming what belongs to them, and even that which doesn't. Nothing truly belongs to them, at least in the sense that they don't work for or earn anything. Ironically, we often act like sophisticated two-year-olds. We cling to our things with tight fists, forgetting that they are gifts

given by a gracious God.

Imagine a friend telling you, “Nothing is yours. You don’t actually own anything. No matter how much you’ve sacrificed or how hard you’ve worked, you are not the owner.” Even if you eventually agree, the initial response is one of offense and anger. It takes a shift in our hearts, a humble admission that God is the owner.

The one who is hard at work for the Master’s purposes is the one whom the Master rewards. He trusts us to handle His affairs. We are owners of nothing, but stewards of everything.



CHAPTER THREE

A WORTHY PURPOSE

Imagine that you are planning to go on a trip and you entrust all your wealth to a friend. When you return from your trip, you discover that your friend has taken your wealth and assets and blown them in Las Vegas. He did not invest or multiply them for you. He simply squandered the resources you entrusted to him.

Like the third servant, we often take the gifts God has given us and invest them in *us*. We actively determine how our relationships, money, talents, homes, and abilities best serve us and our own glory. Perhaps it seems counterintuitive that using our abilities for our own good and glory can lead to a joyless existence, but the principles of God’s Kingdom remind us that what we have been given does not belong to us. Our God-given purpose is to steward every gift for His eternal Kingdom.

Why does the master in the parable entrust his wealth to servants? Why does he give them this surprising role of caring for what belongs to him? God desires for us to partner with Him in the building of a Kingdom which is not subject to limitations like our earthly kingdoms. He gives us a meaningful purpose and promises that it is the unseen things which hold eternal value. When we steward what He gives us with courage and wisdom, He welcomes us into His house with joy.

Many adults are busy balancing marriage, raising children, careers, side jobs, hobbies, community functions, and a host of other activities. The hours of their days are so fully appropriated that it’s hard *not* to

reach the point of a “midlife crisis.” They may think to themselves, *I have everything I wanted, but what is my purpose? Why am I really here?*

Eventually they enter retirement and then comes a season of reflection, *What have I made of my life? What have I accomplished in this world with everything that’s been given to me?*

If I asked you to state your life’s purpose, what would you say? Businesses, churches, and schools have purpose statements. But as individuals, we don’t often clarify our own purpose. In this parable, Jesus is helping His followers answer the question: What is the ultimate purpose of life?

In *Experiencing God*, Henry Blackaby writes, “Find out where God is at work and join Him there.” What have you been called to do? What has the Master entrusted you to steward for His purposes? As we wait for Christ’s return, we steward everything that He entrusts to us.

To pursue a worthy purpose we do not need to be a missionary or pastor. Every Christian has a unique calling to advance God’s Kingdom. It is our responsibility to discern where and how God intends to use each one of us. Is it in our family, our church, our workplace, or our community? Those opportunities which seem small to us are not insignificant to God. He sees what no one else does; He examines the heart.

For 24 years, Emma Daniel Gray took the bus into Washington, DC, to clean the Oval Office. In that time, six different presidents led the country. No matter who sat in the President’s chair, Emma ended every day by laying her hands on the back of it and praying for the leader of the Free World. She didn’t need a special title or revered position to serve God’s Kingdom. Emma Daniel Gray wasn’t simply a cleaning lady; she was a missionary to the Oval Office.

This is the calling of the people of God. Anyone who calls themselves a *Christian* is a servant of the Master. We are the salt of the earth and light of the world. Regardless of age, vocation, or season of life, God calls us to work in the family business of leading others to an eternal home where there is fullness of joy and peace. Advancing God’s Kingdom is truly a worthy purpose.



CHAPTER FOUR

THE MASTER’S FAVOR

The final, and most critical lesson we learn from this parable is that we can never earn the Master’s favor. We do not serve the Kingdom in order to earn God’s favor; we serve it joyfully and sacrificially because we have already received His favor freely through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son. This is good news!

Through their diligence and wisdom, the first two servants pleased the master. They stepped out in faith with their master’s wealth, and as a result they doubled his gains. Then, he welcomed them into his house with joy.

The third servant, however, perceived the master as a “hard man” and feared his retribution. His posture toward the master was not one of trust and genuine joy but of fear.

Perhaps it’s understandable that the servant was afraid. After all, the punishment for his laziness, as we’re told, was to be “cast into the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth” (v. 30).

The problem is that the third servant operated from a mindset of scarcity. He did not understand the generosity of the master. Would a *hard man* entrust his wealth to his servants in the first place? The least the servant could have done was to place his master’s talent in the bank where it would have gained interest. But he did less than that—he hid it in the ground!

Perhaps this option felt most safe to him because he feared the bank

would swindle him or lose his master's money. Yet even buried in the ground, someone could discover the talent—then it would most certainly be lost!

Sometimes, much like the third servant, we live from a place of fear. We don't want to disappoint or fail, so we tighten our grip around our time, money, abilities, and energy. The Master may give generously, but we give in measured ways. We cannot give freely because on some level we do not understand that the Master's generosity has been graciously poured out upon us.

The Bible tells us that our cups overflow, God's grace abounds, and we have an endless inheritance in Jesus Christ. He tells us not to worry about our clothes or food—the smallest of things—because God will supply our needs. He is a Good Father who gives good gifts. There is no scarcity in Him; there is always a surplus. The Master wants the servants to pour themselves out, to invest, to live in light of His generosity. Instead, we often play it safe, burying what He has given in order to protect it.

The good news of the gospel is this: God's ultimate act of generosity was that He gave us His Son to take the punishment for our sin. Jesus was cast into outer darkness—the place of weeping and gnashing teeth—on our behalf, and His sacrifice is now our model for how to live as stewards of God's Kingdom. Through the transforming power of the gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit, we can release our hold on earthly things and become the most generous people of all.

As God's stewards, we can operate with a spirit of joy because we have everything we need in the person of Jesus Christ. There is no reason to protect or hide that which God has given us. The favor and affection you long for is not given to you based on your work or your righteousness; it is given to you freely based on Jesus' performance on your behalf, and that realization will bring you joy.

Through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, we are not only God's servants, but His children. This is God's model of generosity—when we could not earn or deserve it, He made a way for us to be in relationship with Him forever. He invites us to steward every gift in order to build the His Kingdom on earth as it is in Heaven.

EPILOGUE

Terminally ill and confined to a wheelchair, David Ireland received the news that his wife was pregnant. David suffered from a rare neurological disease and knew that he would likely not live long enough to meet his child. He decided to write a series of letters in order to share things he'd never have a chance to say. The letters eventually became the collection, *Letters to an Unborn Child*. In one letter, David expressed his affection for his wife, the child's mother. He wrote:

Your mother is so special. Few men know what it's like to receive appreciation for taking their wives out to dinner, what it entails, what it does for us. It means she has to dress me, shave me, brush my teeth, comb my hair, wheel me out of the house and down the steps, open the garage and put me in the car, take the pedals off the chair, stand me up, sit me in the seat of the car, twist me around so I'm comfortable, fold the wheelchair, put it in the car, go around to the other side of the car, start it up, back it out, get out of the car, pull the garage door down, get into the car, drive it off to the restaurant. And then it starts all over again. She gets out of the car, unfolds the wheelchair, opens the door, spins me around, stands me up, sits me in the wheelchair, pushes the pedals out, closes and locks the car, wheels me

into the restaurant, takes the pedals off the wheelchair so I won't be uncomfortable. We sit down to dinner; she feeds me throughout the entire meal. When it's over, she pays the bill, pushes the wheelchair out to the car again, and reverses the same routine. And when it's over and finished and she tucks me into bed, with warmth she'll turn to me and say, "Honey, thank you for taking me out to dinner." I never quite know how to answer.

God's unconditional love and favor through Jesus gives us this kind of capacity for love, joy, and servitude. The good news of what God has done for us in Christ empowers us to proclaim, "I give my life away to the Master's service, to share His riches and advance His purposes because I believe that only His kingdom is eternal."

I see people every day wasting their life for things that don't matter. I see people with more wealth than you could ever imagine, who invest everything back into themselves. They are some of the most miserable people I've ever met. You could go to the mall and buy everything in it, and it would never bring you the joy that you long for. Do you live with a worthy purpose? Do you believe that God gives freely and generously and wants you to steward all that He has given? Lean in close to the Master and ask Him to reveal His heart to you. Ask God to reveal where He wants you to joyfully invest in His Kingdom.

"From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded, and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked" (Luke 12:48). The calling of God's people is extreme. Give your life away for the sake of the Kingdom ... and do it with joy. The only way you could ever do something as crazy as that is if you knew you already had the affection and favor of your Master. In Jesus, you do.

OUR PRAYER

Our Father and our God, teach us to live with open hearts and open hands. The world doesn't prepare us to live in this way, this radical living whereby we are owners of nothing, but stewards of everything. There is only one way: our hearts need to be captured by the radical life of our Savior, the Master who came down and put on flesh to die so that we could live. The Master who was cast out so that we could enter the house of the Lord with joy. Only that message can transform us from the most selfish to the most selfless.

Teach us Your ways, Lord. Inspire us to be people who live with a worthy purpose. As your servants, let us live not out of fear but out of sincere gratitude for Your generosity. Thank you for all that you have entrusted to us. Help us to steward our wealth, gifts, time, talents, skills, and relationships for your Kingdom's purposes, so that we may make your name famous to the ends of the earth.

We confess our sin and need for a Savior. Forgive us when we clutch too tightly or hold too closely the gifts You have given us. Once we lived in fear; now we live with unspeakable joy.

Amen



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

The Scriptures say that God gives all things to all people, even their breath (Acts 17:25). In order to be thoughtful stewards, each of us must possess a solid grasp of what God given to us to guard and cultivate—not only gifts and resources, but also responsibilities.

- 1. What are your primary responsibilities (church, family, work, schooling, volunteering, etc.)?**

- 2. What are the “talents” God has given to you:**
 - a. financial (what is your income/assets; how do you spend your disposable income; what money is set aside for helping others, etc.),
 - b. personal talents, passions, abilities (think broadly: accounting, history enthusiast, cabinet making, knitting, handy with basic repairs, gardening, penmanship, fly fishing, event planning, speaking, plumbing, etc.),
 - c. time (how do you use your time; how does your schedule impact what you can/cannot do); where is God in your schedule, etc.)?

The Bible is the story of how God is glorying himself by glorifying the world through image bearing people. If we reign wisely, we bring flourishing wherever we go. If we steward wastefully, we contribute to existing problems or create new ones.

3. **Reflecting on the previous questions, where are the highlights of your current situation (where are you currently experiencing growth; what are the areas, talents, and priorities you have that currently align with the Kingdom, etc.)?**

4. **If everything you have is given to you by God, how might that shift your perspective of your resources, work, responsibilities at home, and worship?**

5. **What responsibilities or areas in your life require correction or a change in course?**

After the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples on Pentecost, the first Christians committed themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship with one another, and prayer. Slaves and rich, educated and illiterate, Jew and Gentile, all gathered together as one family. Many even sold homes and property in order to ensure that the poor among them were taken care of (Acts 4:32-37). A new kind of humanity came to life when Jesus left the tomb. They were emboldened by the lavish generosity of God's grace in Christ in a way that revolutionized their perspective on everything.

The servant who failed to invest the finances given to him was guilty of a sinfully passive approach. Still others will work tirelessly to amass

large fortunes, spending it all on themselves, building bigger barns and storehouses (the first century 401K), but never consider that their resources are given to them not only for their sake, *but for the sake of the kingdom of God.*

6. **Considering your financial resources, disposable income, and ordinary spending habits, do you see any evidence that your spending reflects an intentional commitment to serve the kingdom?**

7. **What sinful tendency comes most naturally to you with regard to money or other resources: passive and unwilling to use it, or working in order to keep it (or spend it) all to yourself? What is an appropriate set of steps to take in order to address this tendency before God?**

8. **What would change in your life if, in faith, you began actively pursuing opportunities to practice audacious generosity in service of the kingdom?**

