

# “Love Investments”

Matthew 25:14-30

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One time a miser hid his gold at the foot of a tree in his garden. Every week he would dig it up and look at it for hours. One day a thief dug up the gold and made off with it. When the miser next came to gaze upon his treasure, all he found was an empty hole. The man began to howl with grief so his neighbors came running to find out what the trouble was. When they found out, one of them asked, “Did you use any of the gold?” “No,” said the miser. “I only looked at it every week.” “Well then,” said the neighbor, “for all the good the gold did you, you might just as well come every week and gaze upon the hole.” From *The Heart of the Enlightened* by Anthony de Mello.

Hoarding is a sin that leads to worry, anxiety, fear, and misery. Those who are unable to give live in hell. They are captives, so scared at losing what they have that they don’t enjoy their talents.

Giving is a blessing that leads to joy. Those who give experience a snippet of heaven on earth. Givers are set free, they are grateful for what they have and discover delights in sharing, in seeing how their giving blooms and multiplies.

Jesus said. **Matthew 25:14-30** **14 “Again, 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.'**

Talents and treasures that we bury and keep secret are never really claimed, never spent, never shared; therefore never fully utilized, appreciated, savored, or enjoyed. Would it be accurate to say that a buried talent never truly belongs to us, because we lock it away in safe keeping?

Pastor Anna Carter Florence writes. "I'm guessing your setting, like mine, is literally strewn with buried talents and buried treasure. I bet you can hardly take a night time stroll without bumping into someone with a shovel. Go back the next morning and you will see a neat little mound of earth, marking the spot where yet another anxiety-driven soul has decided that it would be a really great idea to take what is most precious to her and bury it deep, lest she be called upon to offer it around. After all, if you bury it, no one else will ever know that you even have it! Get the idea?

Yes. It is really stupid.

The human instinct to hoard runs deep. Give into it and it will literally suffocate the instinct to share. Everything around you begins to look like uninsurable goods. What if you gave away your extra coat? You might need it—and then you would not have it. What if you shared your bread recipe? Everyone else could make it, too—and you would not be special. What if you gave away your heart? She might break it—and then where would you be?"

Hoarding and burying your talents might make a little sense if you took God out of the world. If there were no God then everything would be finite, limited, and scarce. However God is in our lives and in the world. Spend your entire life advocating for justice, to free slaves, and God may call you to be a leader to take slaves from Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land. Give away your life by answering God, "Here I am your servant" and God may bring hope to the world through you. Give away your time to God in grateful worship and God may use your life to show others how to enjoy the heaven of gratitude. Give away your lunch, 5 loaves and two fishes, and God may feed 5,000 people. Write a few letters about God's good news and God may use your words to transform the lives of billions. Giving away love makes everyone's lives grandeur for eternity for love endures forever. God sustains and resurrects every instance of love for all in heaven to enjoy for eternity.

Invest your talents and you will celebrate with God. Bury your talents and you will be declared worthless, thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. When we find ourselves teeth gnashing in the darkness by God's grace, we are brought back to church next Sunday. We get to start again, a fresh start, to decide again if we will give or hoard, if we will celebrate or be in misery.

What exactly is God asking us to invest in the parable of the talents? Clearly it is money, large sums of money. A talent was about 20 years' worth of wages. Talents are also our special abilities such as art, a smile, teaching, encouragement, cooking, compassion, writing, prayer, music, caring, athletic ability, auto repair, a hobby, laughter, etc. Talents are also joy, peace, grace, and love. Talents are also the gospel, the good news, the words, actions, life, and love of Jesus.

The parable invites us to ponder the future in our daily choices. We can choose to play it safe and save. We can choose to live in fear. Or, we can choose to share, to give with faith trusting that more of God's kingdom will be experienced through our giving.

Often when we give, we think of the benefits to those whom will receive our gifts. This is good; however, this parable seems to focus on the affect giving has on the giver, joy verses weeping, confidence verse fear, and celebration verse being paranoid.

Donald Armentrout writes. "God's reign is like finding treasure in a field, not burying it. Someone who unearths treasure risks everything to buy the field. Relationship with God—faith—means daring to risk. As we experience grace, we come to view life from a more gracious, generous perspective. God's love casts out fear. We can envision possibilities for growth by daring to use the talents we are given. To all those who have a sense of being entrusted with gifts by God, more will be given. If we live out a sense of giftedness or blessing, our awareness of God's grace will grow. Anticipating joy, we offer ourselves to God's service and dedicate our lives to the care and redemption of all that God has made."

David Steindl-Rast said. "This world was given to us to work on. Only in this way do we grasp the divine reality." Missionary Hudson Taylor said, "Unless there is an element of risk in our exploits for God there is no need for faith."

Our parable encourages risk taking. You don't double a large sum of money without a lot of work, overcoming scary moments, persevering through losses and failures and bold faithful giving of everything you have. Your investment may not yield back what you give, for instance money given may yield back joy. Your giving may not produce results in your lifetime. Moses never actually made it into the Promised Land. Mary was shunned and watched her son die on the cross for serving God. The leper suffered a great deal before he danced with gratitude. The Apostle Paul died in prison.

The parable teaches us to give extravagantly, to give in huge ways that come with great risks. Discipleship does not promise a safe harbor. On the contrary, discipleship calls us to weigh anchor and venture beyond the known and safe. Michelangelo said. "The great danger is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that our aim is too low and we reach it." Synthesis declares. "God's undeniable call demands that we take the risks that must accompany growth. Rather than just living safely, we are to risk acting in ways that reflect the creativity and commitment of our Creator." Our supreme example is Jesus. Jesus gave everything. Jesus emptied himself. Jesus stepped out of heaven into human flesh. Jesus died on the cross. Jesus risked everything for the hoped-return of our love. Jesus believes you are worth dying for. True love gives freely and joyfully.

Giving is grateful faith. Giving is realizing Jesus died for you, Jesus gave everything for you. Giving is savoring God's grace, God's blessings, God's giving to you, causing you to be in deep gratitude for God's gift of life, time and talents, causing you to believe passionately, love deeply, causing you to take risks, giving sacrificial. Giving is believing God will take a mustard seed of faith and grow it into the largest of shrubs. Giving is believing that through our giving the Holy Spirit will manifest and multiple the miracles of Jesus.

Pastor John Buchanan says. "Stewardship is essentially the issue of you and me knowing and appreciating the value of our lives and deciding to be responsible about how to use them, invest them...It is how much you are willing to give away to what you believe in."

Think of all the wonderful things God does through this church, through your giving and what your gifts will do. Think of all the ways God has blessed you. Be grateful. Think about what your giving will do to your heart, your life. Be risky and extravagant enough in your giving that you move beyond fear, weeping, anxiety, hoarding, controlling to faith, joy, freedom and delight. Be risky and extravagant enough in your giving that you thoughts are about how you can

give even more, partnering with God in yielding more and more blessings for more and more people.

Think about a person you love who is enjoying heaven. How did they give? God has said well-done good and faithful servant to them. God is celebrating and rejoicing with them.

Every week we gather to reflect on our giving and make another offering. Every year, at this time, we prayerful consider what God is inviting us to financial give and fill out our pledge card. Next week we will dedicate our pledge believing that our giving will bring more of heaven to earth resurrecting more joy in us as we celebrate with God. Amen