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## Chapter 6

# Practicing Stewardship

Matthew 25:14–46

**UNDERSTANDING**

Pages 74 - 77

**DISCUSSION**

Pages 78 - 84

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UNDERSTANDING

# WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

*Read Matthew 25:14–46*

## The Big Picture

Jesus gives us an eternal perspective by foretelling what God's judgment will look like.

This passage includes two powerful parables, where Jesus teaches His disciples about the end of the world and the judgment that will come. In doing so, Jesus wants us to see the eternal effect of our actions.

## The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14–30)

This parable focuses on stewardship, or what we do with the gifts God gives us. Three men are each given talents by their master. A talent is a coin that was worth 6,000 denarii—the equivalent of 20 years' wages for a laborer, or about \$2 million today. Even the man who is given one talent is entrusted with a huge sum of money. This parable is the origin of our modern understanding of the word "talents," which applies to our God-given abilities. More than money, God's talents include everything that He gives us.

Each of the servants is given a different amount of talents. This parable reflects the human experience generally, where we each receive different gifts and talents. This is frustrating to some, just as the servant who received one talent may have been angered about receiving so little. The Catechism reminds us, “These difference belong to God’s plan, who wills that each receive what he needs from others, and that those endowed with particular ‘talents’ share the benefits with those who need them” (CCC 1937). Even the supernatural gifts that God bestows on us are different from one another (1 Cor 12:4–11).

Two of the servants invest their talents and double their return to the master. The servant given the smallest amount buries his talent in the ground. This servant is judged by God to be lazy and wicked (Mt 25:26). Fear prevents him from multiplying the talents he is given (v. 25). Notice that the servant gives back to God what God gave him, and yet God is still angry with Him. God is not satisfied with merely giving Him what He has given us; He wants us to take what we have been given and multiply His efforts and gifts. The talent of the lazy servant is taken from him and given to the one with ten talents.

## **Stewardship**

The central theme of this parable is stewardship: giving back to God through our time, talents, and treasure.

With regard to money, the Old Testament had a law for tithing—giving 10 percent of your wages. In the Church today, there is no specific mandate governing the exact amount that we give. St. Paul notes in the New Testament, “Arrange in advance for this gift you have promised.... Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor 9:7, 9).

While no specific tithe is required, we exist in a new covenant that is greater than the old. It makes sense that we should give more than what was required in the old covenant. Therefore, while 10 percent is not required, it does provide a great baseline for what to give to the Church.

God asks us to use our talents and to give our time to others. As 1 Peter 4:10 notes, “As each has received a gift, employ it for one another.” Just like the lazy servant, we must not hide the talents that God has given us, but instead selflessly use them for the service of others. The next parable gives us some concrete examples of ways to use our time and talents.

### **Application to Jesus**

When we consider the eternal perspective, only Jesus’ opinion of us truly matters. We are living for this audience of one.

### **The Judgment of the Nations (Matthew 25:31–46)**

Matthew 25:31–46 gives us an even more sobering parable than the first. To help us truly understand what it means to help others, Jesus places Himself in the place of those in need (v. 40). In fact, Jesus’ own life was filled with His service to the poor and afflicted (see Mt 4:23–24, 8:1–17, 11:4–6). By serving the disadvantaged, we serve Christ Himself.

The Church calls these acts of service the Corporal Works of Mercy. They include:

- feeding the hungry;

- giving drink to the thirsty;
- clothing the naked;
- offering hospitality to the homeless;
- visiting the imprisoned;
- caring for the sick, and
- burying the dead.

Notice the gravity of our response to these actions. In the parable, this is the king's criteria for our eternal salvation. During the last judgment, the Catechism notes, "In presence of Christ, who is Truth itself, the truth of each man's relationship with God will be laid bare. The Last Judgment will reveal even to its furthest consequences the good each person has done or failed to do during his earthly life" (CCC 1039). This perspective helps us to reflect concretely on whether our lives have been lived in service for or against the Lord. Our faith isn't supposed to be lived out in a one-hour Bible study and one hour at Mass each week. As a Bible study, how can your group live out practically the Corporal Works of Mercy? Plan out a service project to fulfill one of these works in the upcoming weeks. The creativity of your group just might surprise you.

### **Application to Our Lives**

How can we live out the concrete examples Jesus gives us?

DISCUSSION

# DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

*Matthew 25:14–46*

## **STEP 1: OPENER**

Have you ever looked at an old photo or yourself and remembered something odd you used to do, or a strange perspective you used to have? How has the course of time helped you realize your mistakes?

## **STEP 2: BACKDROP**

This passage includes two powerful parables from Jesus. In both parables, Jesus is teaching His disciples about the end of the world and the judgment that will come. In doing so, Jesus wants us to see the eternal perspective of our actions.

## **STEP 3: PASSAGE**

Read Matthew 25:14–46. You may want to read the parables and their questions one at a time.

## **STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

Note that answers appear in italics.

## **Matthew 25:14–30**

### **1. Why do you think the master gives the men different amounts of talents?**

*Answer: Allow the group to discuss. Read CCC 1937.*

### **2. Do you think this affected the behavior of the servant with the least amount of talents?**

*Answer: The servant with the least amount of talents may have been discouraged by being given so little.*

### **3. A talent is worth 6,000 denarii, or about \$2 million today. Do you think the servant with one talent should have let this amount affect him?**

*Answer: Despite not having what the others had, the servant still should have appreciated the trust the master had in him.*

### **4. How does this parable apply to the talents God gives us?**

*Answer: At times, we can complain about the gifts God has or has not given us and be jealous of others' gifts.*

### **5. How can jealousy keep us from using the talents God has given us?**

*Answer: We can focus too much on what we do not have, which distracts us from seeing the wealth of talents God has given us.*

**6. What keeps the lazy servant from multiplying his talents?**

*Answer: The lazy man fears his master.*

**7. What causes us to be fearful about using our talents?**

*Answer: Sometimes we fear what others will think. It is easier not to try, and thus not fail, than to try and open ourselves up to the possibility of failure. Using our talents to their fullest capacity also takes an immense amount of work. This is why God calls the servant lazy.*

**8. God receives back what He gave the servant. Why is He still upset?**

*Answer: God expects us to multiply the talents and gifts that He gives us, not just to hold on to them.*

**9. What are some ways that we can give back to God?**

*Answer: Allow the group to discuss. Time, talent, and treasure are three categories where we focus most of our efforts.*

**10. Read Luke 16:10–13. What does God expect from us with regard to money?**

*Answer: God expects our hearts turned towards Him and not toward wealth or possessions. We should use our gifts for the service of others.*

## **Matthew 25:31–46**

### **11. What is the setting for Jesus' parable in Matthew 25:31–46?**

*Answer: The setting is the Last Judgment, where God judges all the people of the world.*

### **12. Why are some granted entrance into God's kingdom?**

*Answer: Some are granted entrance into God's kingdom because they took care of the disadvantaged. They exercise what the Church calls the Corporal Works of Mercy.*

### **13. Why do the others go into the eternal fire?**

*Answer: The others go into the eternal fire because they fail to take care of the disadvantaged.*

### **14. What is significant about Jesus' relationship to the disadvantaged?**

*Answer: Jesus puts Himself in the place of those who are disadvantaged. He makes them who He is.*

### **15. How are we able to see Jesus in the disadvantaged?**

*Answer: One way to see Jesus in the disadvantaged is to see the value of each and every person, to view them as sons and daughters of God.*

**16. Read CCC 1039. Think about how you are living your life right now. How can this eternal perspective change the way you think?**

*Answer: The eternal perspective can help us stop focusing on the here and the now. It allows us to see past all of the trivial things in our daily lives and to try to live for what really matters.*

**17. As a group, what are some ways you can practice some Corporal Works of Mercy together?**

*Allow the group to discuss.*



