

Sermon: Qualities of a Good Steward (Our Relationship With God)

Text: Matthew 25:14-30

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Introduction: If you are going to be a *good* steward for God, then your relationship with God must be one of trust. If you are a Christian already, God has given you the Gospel. Especially if you look at the parables, you see that the Gospel is worth everything a person has (pearl of great price, a treasure hidden in a field). But as you will see from this parable, just having something of value does not guarantee a good outcome.

Matthew 25:14-30 (NIV) ¹⁴“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. ¹⁵To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. ¹⁷So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. ¹⁸But the man who had received the one talent 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. ²⁰The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. 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 the two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two talents; 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 the one talent 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. ²⁵So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent 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? ²⁷Well 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“Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. ²⁹For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. ³⁰And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

When we become a member of the family of God, we sign on as a servant. We should not expect any better role in this life than Jesus who "... made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant," ([Philippians 2: 7 ab](#)).

Our relationship with God is a risk. I am betting my entire life that God is real and that His word is true. Some people are wagering there is no God. If they are right, nothing changes. But those who say there is no God, and live like it, if they are wrong - they have an eternal problem. Weeping and gnashing of teeth does not even begin to describe what awaits them.

What about you?

All of us take risks. Some are foolish. Some are calculated. Some require faith. Our relationship with God calls us to:

I. Risk Everything for Our Master.

When God asks us to risk everything for Him, He is asking us to follow His example. He gave His one and only Son to die for us. He is asking us to be guided by His heart, His mind, His will.

A. There is no room for half-hearted commitment.

No one wants to hear from the Lord: 'You wicked, lazy servant!'
οκνερος - slothful (KJV), lazy (NIV) (Sloth was one of the 7 deadly sins)

Little Kittel, p.681 - "Another instance of **οκνερος** is in Romans 12:11, where yielding to indolence is contrasted with being inspired and directed by the Spirit."

In *Purgatorio*, Dante follows Aquinas' lead by branding sloth "defective love," meaning that it was an inadequate concern for matters of mind and soul; meaning you can be "very busy" and still be slothful.

Slothfulness is the sin of disconnecting from the human family.

It is standing by while good people are made fun of for doing or saying what is right. It is Americans ignoring the needs of the poor and lonely in their own neighborhoods. It is a Christian who is focused on himself while the rest of the world is going to hell.

Slothfulness is disregarding the commands of God because we just don't have time, or because we don't want to exert the effort to follow Jesus' words:

Matthew 22:37-39 (NIV) ³⁷...“Love the Lord your God with *all* your heart and with *all* your soul and with *all* your mind.’ ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’

That is our sole purpose here on earth. Miss that, and we miss it all. Admittedly the word *all* is sometimes used as hyperbole, i.e. an exaggerated statement to make a point. “I am so hungry I could eat the whole turkey” would be a hyperbole for most people.

But, it is not an exaggeration when Scripture says we are to: “go and make disciples of ALL nations” (**Matthew 28:19**) or that “we will ALL stand before God’s judgment seat” (**Romans 14:10**). Because of this Paul says: **I Corinthians 9:22 (NIV)** ²²To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.

When we risk ALL for our Master:

B. We need to understand what is expected.

I think that one of the problems with Christianity today is that there is NO RISK. The modern church tends to water down what God demands. In this softening of the standards and requirements we do not make stronger followers.

Illus. Willowcreek adjustment to just a seeker-sensitive approach.

Illus. If children aren't doing as well on their S.A.T.'s, the modern answer is: you change the test. The test must be defective or somehow outdated.

In our parable, I believe if the first two servants had lost everything, I think the Master's response would still have been positive.

In our relationship with God, we need to:

II. Persevere to the End.

It says in the parable:

A. The master was gone a long time.

This parable was preceded by another parable commonly called the Parable of the Ten Virgins. In that story it says; “The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep”(**Matthew 25:5**).

The danger with delay in our stories is that discipline becomes lax. There is the feeling of: well, he isn't coming today, or worse, maybe He's not coming back at all.

B. There will be an accounting.

There will be an accounting either of our preparedness or our stewardship, i.e. "what we have done with what we have been given."

(Bausch, *Storytelling*, p. 135) "There was once a village chief with three sons. Each of them had a special talent. The oldest had the talent of raising olive trees and would trade the oil for tools and cloth. The second was a shepherd and when the sheep were ill he had a great talent for making them well again. The third was a dancer and when there was a streak of bad luck in the family or when everyone was bored during the hard winters and tired of work, this was the son who would cheer them up and dance.

One day the Father had to go away on a long journey and so he called his sons together and said, 'My sons, while I am gone, see to it that you use your talents as wisely and well as possible so that, when I return, I will find our village even more happy and prosperous than it is now.' He embraced his sons and departed.

For a while things went well. Then the cold winter winds began to blow and the blizzards and snows came. First, the buds on the olive trees shrank and cracked, and it was a long time before the trees could recover. Then the village, because of the especially long winter, ran out of firewood. So the people began to cut down the trees, but in the process they were denuding and destroying the village.

Then, too, the snow and ice made it impossible for the traders to come up the river or over the mountain pass. The result was that the villagers said, 'So, let us kill the sheep and eat them so we do not starve to death.' The second son refused for a time, but finally had to give in to the hungry villagers. His remark was, 'What good would it be to spare the sheep only to have the villagers perish?'

In this way, the villagers got just enough wood for their fires and food for their tables but the bitter winter had broken their spirits and they began to think that things were really worse than they were and they even began to lose all hope. So much so, that family by family they deserted the village in search of a more hospitable environment.

As spring began to loosen the icy grip of winter, the village chief, the father of the three sons, returned only to find smoke rising from his own chimney. ‘What have you done?’ he asked when he reached his house and spoke to his sons. ‘What has happened to the villagers?’

‘Oh, father, forgive me,’ said the oldest son. ‘The people were freezing and begged me to cut down the olive trees and so I did. I gave away my talent. I am no longer fit to be an orchard keeper.’ ‘Don’t be angry Father,’ said the second son. ‘The sheep would have frozen to death anyway and the people were starving and I had to send my flock to the slaughter.’

But the father understood and said, ‘Don’t be ashamed, my sons, you did the best you could and you acted rightly and humanely. You used your talents wisely in trying to save the people. But, tell me, what has become of them? Where are they?’ The two brothers looked with fixed eyes on the third son who said, ‘Welcome home, father. Yes, it has been a hard time. There was so little to eat and so little firewood. I thought that it would be insensitive and improper to dance during such suffering and, besides, I needed to conserve my strength so that I could dance for you when you came home.’

‘Then, dance, my son,’ said the father, ‘for my village is empty and so is my heart. Fill it with joy and courage once again. Yes, please dance!’ But the third son went to get up, he made a face of pain and fell down. His legs were so stiff and sore from sitting that they were no longer fit for dancing. The Father was so sad that he could not be angry. He simply said to the third son:

‘Ours was a strong village. It could have survived the want of fuel and food, but it could never survive without hope. And because you failed to use your talent wisely and well, our people gave up what little hope they had left. So now? Now the village is deserted and you are crippled. Your punishment has already fallen on you.’ And with these words he embraced his two sons and wept.

If we are to be accepted into the Kingdom, we must:

III. Demonstrate Responsibility.

Our Master is away. He has entrusted us with His Kingdom each of us according to our ability (v.15b). In his absence God has given us an opportunity to expand His Kingdom:

- A. So we can be productive for our Lord.

Throughout the New Testament the idea of producing is prevalent. John talks about a tree producing good fruit. The parables about seed, which is really a word picture for the gospel, talk about 30, 60, and 100-fold returns.

Illus. (Fred Craddock) - Can you imagine a man going into business thinking that the business may not succeed? So instead of buying a great building on a main street, he invests in an old dingy building on a back street.

So instead of a:

Computerized cash register

White Owl cigar box

hiring experienced sales clerks

have family help for no (low) pay

big inventory, attractive merchandise

just a few dark bananas, wilted lettuce, wrinkled bell peppers

He thinks: "I could lose a lot of money if I'm not careful."

So instead of a:

Grand opening

A little sign written in crayon on A piece of cardboard

He concludes you don't want to spend a lot of money on advertising because after all — this business may not succeed.

So the business fails of course. Nobody comes into the dingy little store, and he goes home and announces to his family:

I want you to congratulate me. I consider myself a wise man. Just think what I could have lost if I had put a lot of money into that place. But as it is I have lost very very little.

Is he to be congratulated?

Is that a mark of wisdom?

Responsible means careful, but it may not mean there is no risk. Many of us deal with the same tension everyday. Should I be careful, or should I risk? Because of fear of losing everything, we do nothing. We don't give ourselves to anything or anyone for fear of failure, embarrassment or being hurt. So we hold back! It is not as dramatic as burying something in the ground, but it is pretty much the same result.

One of the motivating reasons we produce results for our Master is so:

B. We will be rewarded by our Lord.

If I understand this parable, my reward comes when my Master returns. It also seems to me that what will be rewarded, is my *trying*, not just my successes.

What really is the difference between trying and failing and never having tried, never risking? Probably heart! Jesus says that it is “all or nothing.” I want your heart.

Before I close I want to say to you: “our church is a five-talent church.” I hope you know that. Our responsibility is not to preserve the church. Our responsibility is to multiply it. Jesus commissioned us to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations. The church exists primarily to grow and to win the lost to Jesus Christ. Seeing lost souls come into the Kingdom ought to be reward enough, but God has promised to come back and take us home to heaven with him.

Conclusion: Can we all agree? There is no more important quality in a relationship than trust. God entrusted His message to His Son. Now He has trusted us to see that His message is repeated ([II Corinthians 5: 19-20](#)). When the Lord comes again He does not want to hear that we have done nothing in the meantime.

It is not easy to risk it all, but won't it be great to hear:

“Well done good and faithful servant...

Come and share your Master's happiness!”

You've heard it said: “It's not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game.” When it comes to our relationship with God, we need to play to win. And it especially does matter how we play the game.

We are not saved by our works, though in the Bible, there is no such thing as a saving faith without a serving faith. Church is not a performance to watch. It should be preparation for ministry and service.

God wants people who are willing to risk everything for the sake of the Kingdom, willing to give their all for God.

Are you one of those people? Can our Lord count on you?