

**Pastor Jonna Bohigian**  
**Giving Our Best**  
Matthew 25:14 – 30

Every Saturday evening, she would bring out her coin purse and take out a quarter. The following morning, she would place that quarter in the offering plate at church. She didn't make much money, yet every Sunday morning, that quarter was faithfully placed in the offering plate. She was just a little girl.

Since she was my younger sister, my pride would not allow me to tell her that I was proud of her. But I *was*. I was *very* proud of my younger sister, for faithfully giving of the little that she had. I couldn't quite reconcile how she could give every week, whereas I couldn't seem to give *anything, ever*, and I made more money than she did. I didn't want to part from my money. I wanted to store it up and save it forever. I *relished* taking my money out of my piggy bank and counting every dollar, watching it grow.

As I became an adult and made an adult salary, I *still* didn't want to give. I can't remember coming up with excuses, but I know they were there. I couldn't give because I had student debt. I made an adult's salary, but I still didn't make *that* much, after all.

I carried with me the memory of my little sister giving, even when she had very little. I knew that I didn't *want* to give, that I had *reasons* not to give, but I knew I needed to start. I was working for a *church*, after all. Wasn't there something especially terrible about working for a church and then not giving, even to the church?

This morning, we are talking about stewardship. Stewardship with money, and stewardship with *all* of it, a *whole life* stewardship. I want to begin with a note of encouragement, because St. Timothy's is a congregation of *givers*. I have rarely experienced congregations who have given more. I *don't*, however, believe that talking about stewardship is therefore a moot point. Stewardship is *never* easy, and we can never graduate from the need to be good and faithful stewards. This is why we return to this conversation today.

In Matthew 25, Jesus is preparing his disciples for a time when they will no longer see him, a time before he will return. He tells them a parable about a master and his servants. The master is going on a journey, and he entrusts his property to his servants, each according to his ability. To the one with the greatest ability, he gives 5 talents. To the one with the second greatest ability, he gives 2 talents. To the one with the least ability, he gives 1 talent. 1 talent was approximately worth 20 years of wages for labor. So this is not some small amount of money he is distributing. The master is distributing money for approximately 150 years of labor combined.

He gives no instruction to the servants, but the ones who receive 5 talents and 2 talents, immediately know what to do. They are not going to be idle; they are going to put that money to *work*. When the master returns, they will have something to show him!

The servant who receives the 1 talent, however, doesn't think like the other two at *all*. He does not trust the master; he in fact *fears* him. He takes his talent, worth 20 years of labor, and *hides* it in the ground.

Having hoarded money for years, I have a natural tendency to sympathize with the third servant. *Poor servant, he didn't get as many talents as the other two. He also must have had a reason to fear the owner, right? His fear must have come from somewhere, and fear causes us to do all manner of things.*

Well, unfortunately for those of us who want to defend the servant, the master doesn't and neither does Jesus. Our efforts are better placed where we find the commendation, the "atta boy," in the parable.

After a long time, the master returns. He has come to settle accounts with his servants. The one who received 5 talents approaches him first, and tells him that he has gained for him 5 *more* talents. The master is so pleased, that he tells him that he is a "good and faithful servant." He was faithful with a little, and he will be set over much. He is invited to share in his master's joy.

The one who received 2 talents approaches him next, and tells him that he has gained for him 2 *more* talents. The master is so pleased, that he tells him the same thing. He tells him that he is a "good and faithful servant." He was faithful with a little, and he will be set over much. He is invited to share in his master's joy.

The one who received 1 talent approaches him last. He tells him, not that he has gained more, but that he knew that the master is a hard man, who takes what is not his. He therefore was fearful and hid the money in the ground.

The master has *zero* tolerance for this servant. He calls him a "wicked and lazy servant." If the master is as the servant describes him, the servant should have placed his money with the bankers so that he would at *least* have received interest. This would have been the *least* proactive measure he could have taken, but he didn't

even do *that*. So, the master has his talent given to the one with 10 and orders the wicked, lazy servant to be cast out. This parable ends as many of Matthew's parables end, with the most violent and fearful ending. In verse 30, Matthew writes, "And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." The servant is sentenced with a severe punishment for his wickedness and laziness.

But what does this story have to do with us? What's the point? Jesus told this parable to his disciples so that they would know what to do after he left and before he returned. We are living in that in-between time. We don't see Jesus in the flesh, and he hasn't come back yet. So this message is for *us* too. How ought we to live before Jesus returns, before "the end" is here? Jesus instructs with little ambiguity in this parable, essentially saying, "Be like the first two servants."

The first two servants have a lot of capacity and are therefore entrusted with a lot. The moment they receive money from the master, they know that he is expecting them to multiply his money. And they are *motivated*, but not by fear. They want to please him because they know that he is a *generous* man who has *high* expectations. They are motivated to do their best with what they have. They know that their master will be pleased with them. They understand their master and want to please him. They rightly understand that the talents entrusted to them are *not* theirs and that they are *responsible* to their master for the outcome.

How differently we might live, if we lived as these first two servants! How differently we might live if we knew that everything we have been entrusted with is not our own but is our *Master's*! How differently we might live if we trusted in His

pleasure and generosity! How differently we might live if we knew that He would call us to account for what we have been given, called to account for how we have lived our lives!

Scripture tells us that *everything* is the Lord's. He was present before there was time. He is the creator and everything is His. As David prayed in 1 Chronicles 29:11, "For all that is in the heavens and in the earth is Yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and You are exalted as head above all." *Everything* is His.

It goes against our very nature to admit that we are *not* the owner of it all. As soon as babies are old enough to talk, besides babbling words, the first words a baby will often say is, "No" and "mine." After months of waiting for those first words, parents are *grieved* when they hear the human condition coming from their angelic-looking babies. As those babies grow into children, instead of sharing and giving to other children, parents will often hear crying because their child doesn't want to share *their* toys. "Mine!" they say. As the child grows and learns that it's not nice to complain to grandma about the gifts she gave you, that child continues to use the word "mine" – "my house, my TV, my bike, my toys." We can lament the lack of generosity in children, but the fact is that we *don't* grow out of it. It is our natural *tendency* to think of everything as ours. "My husband, my children, my house, my car, my money, my time, my abilities, my body."

You and I can't simply try to convince ourselves out of this thought process; we need to *act* against it. We like to believe that everything around us is ours and that we can do whatever we want with all of it. But church, this is simply not the

truth. *Nothing* is yours – not your family, not your finances, not your body, not your church, not your time, and not your abilities. *All* of these, *everything*, is God's.

Everything is God's, and He has given each one of us a responsibility to steward well what He has placed in our care. He has entrusted to you a spouse. Honor your spouse; be faithful to your spouse; grow in faithfulness with your spouse. He has entrusted to you children. Raise up your children in the fear of the Lord. Teach them that they are not on earth to be happy, but to do what God has called them to do. You have been entrusted with many gifts and abilities. You did not earn them or work for them; they are *gifts* from God. Your gifts and abilities were not given to you to make you money or to give you status. They were given to you to serve God by serving others through the use of your gifts. So serve through the use of your gifts. You have been given *life*. This life is not for you to use at your discretion, but to use in faithfulness to God. So be faithful to God with your time.

In all of these areas, and in all of life, you and I will be tempted to give just “enough.” You and I will be tempted to give so that we are still comfortable, so that we don't risk anything, so that we look generous in the eyes of others, to get that tax write-off, to do ourselves a favor by our generosity. It is critical that you and I look at our motivations. Are we giving of the resources and time that has been entrusted to us to do ourselves a favor and to serve our own motivations? The answer for many of us will be “yes” in many cases. This is a normal function of our sinful human nature, but it doesn't mean that we simply accept it. Our calling is to do our best, to give our best, with what we have been given to steward.

Whatever it is that is most difficult for you to be generous with is that which has a power over you that needs to be broken. For many, this power is money. Money represents power, status, and security. It is therefore *very* difficult and *critical* that we are generous with money to break its power over us. You and I will know that we are being generous when it hurts. When you look at your checking account and wish that you *hadn't* given that tithe check to the church, wish that you *hadn't* given to that charitable organization. When you reason that that money could have gone toward your benefit or something that would have seemed reasonable to your secular friends. This is when you will know that you are being generous – when it hurts.

When I told my husband, Alek, that I would be preaching on stewardship, he invited me to share about his experience. Since we have been married, we have decided to tithe to the church. Alek is the financier in our relationship, the one who keeps a close eye on our finances. Every month, when he sees that tithe check clear, he feels the pinch. Every time that check clears, he is reminded of our aging cars, our apartment, and our student debt. But it's *because* it's painful that he knows that we need to give. If it weren't painful, if it didn't cause him to second-guess, he knows it wouldn't be enough.

We are in the month of November, the month of Thanksgiving, the month of being reminded that there is *much* for which to give thanks, *much* which is pure gift – family, friends, gifts and abilities, life, work, and resources. There is much for which to thank God, for His goodness and faithfulness to us, His many gifts to us which we did not earn, His many gifts He has entrusted to us for a time.

This is a month as a church, where we plan to be generous and plan to give back to God in thanksgiving for that which is already His. Everything is the Lord's, everything on earth and in heaven. Let us then be generous with all of which God has called us to steward – money, gifts and abilities, family, and life itself.