

I didn't like to practice the piano every day when I was a kid. I didn't like doing homework either. My parents also had a rule that us kids had to read one hour every day. It seemed like there were better things to do with my time, like playing Parcheesi or digging holes. But my parents and teachers knew better. Looking back on it, they knew me better than I knew me. What abilities I have I developed not because I thought it was a good idea, but because somebody else did.

In the parable of the talents, a master is checking out the abilities of his servants. From the beginning, he seems to know them better than they know themselves. A talent was a sizable unit of money in Jesus' day - probably worth about 15 years of income. Today it could translate into half a million dollars - one talent. So these servants get quite a bundle when the master goes away. The guy with ten talents has \$5 million - not enough to buy a baseball player for one year, but still a lot of money. Our word "talent" meaning "ability" was influenced by this parable; it comes from an old word for money. In the Missouri Senate, the word "talent" does not pertain to the money needed for a campaign, but we hope it does pertain to ability.

The master disperses the talents to see which servants are reliable. Then he rewards the good servants with more responsibility, and invites them to share his joy. The servant who buried the talent says he did so out of fear. But the master thinks otherwise; he thinks this servant is wicked and lazy. The master knows the servant better than the servant knows himself.

The talents are given not for the sake of the servants, but for the sake of the master. The servants receive the talents, not to keep, but to be stewards of them. They will be held accountable for the talents they have. When the master returns, they don't dare have less, and even if they just have the same they're in trouble. If they have more, the servant does not pocket the change; the new talents benefit the master.

God has given each of us abilities and resources. We are stewards of them until the Son of Man returns. One of the most challenging and exciting goals in life is to figure out what abilities God gave us and why. Our deepest satisfaction comes from using our gifts in ways that please God. Sometimes it is hard for us to figure out what our gifts are. It takes other people to point them out. Sometimes it is hard to accept our gifts. We'd rather not develop some of them. Sometimes we develop only those gifts that bring pleasure to ourselves, instead of those that help others and build up God's kingdom. The Son of Man will come again to give judgment. When he does, he'll want to know what we did with all the talent we have.