

I was just polishing off a delicious bowl of mint chocolate chip ice cream when I ran across an article about the olympic teenage girls who compete in gymnastics. It takes them years of preparation, and if they're serious about trying out for the olympics, they can never eat ice cream. So I put my dirty bowl in the dishwasher, walked past the M&M's, sat down to complete the article and learned that one of the girls who had spent all these years in preparation lost her footing in the competition, and along with it, her chance for a medal. I wondered what she ate for dessert that night. Her story taught me two lessons: If you never prepare you can never compete, and if you do not concentrate you may never win.

Strangely enough, these are the two lessons in today's parables. The first lesson comes from the story of the servants. While the master is away some of the servants eat, drink, and argue. They never make it to the olympics. But others stay awake and open the door when the master gets back. They received a reward because they prepared. The second lesson comes from the story of the master. If masters are not on guard, thieves will come and break into their house. ~~All the years of~~ ^{years of} ~~preparations in the~~ ^{years of} ~~world~~ had brought them many possessions, but they will lose them all on the day they break their concentration, and admit thieves to their home. If you never prepare you can never compete, and if you do not concentrate you may never win.

Luke tells us these stories not to make us better athletes, not to increase our wealth, nor to make us more powerful. He tells us these stories to help our spiritual lives. The story of the servants tells us to prepare. We prepare through prayer, through service, and through charity. The story of the master tells us to concentrate. Once we have made spiritual discipline part of our lives, we still need to be attentive lest some thief steal it away. This could be the thief of selfishness, the thief of workaholism, or the thief of brooding over past injuries. By concentrating each day on the treasure of our faith, we can protect it from harm. Then heaven will be ours, plus all the ice cream we can eat.