Living For Giving: Gifted By God

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Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0:00] Welcome here for this Sunday, January 23rd. And this morning we're continuing in our sermon series, Living Forgiving, Perspectives on Christian Stewardship.

Each week we're looking at a different aspect of the idea of stewardship. And last week we considered the time that we've been given by God. And how best to manage or invest it as stewards.
And over the course of the series, as we explore this concept of stewardship in the various areas of our lives, my hope is that you'll develop this new perspective that what's yours is not actually yours at all, but God's.
And I hope you're also developing a sense from a biblical point of view that stewardship is all-inclusive. It includes everything that we have in every area of our lives.
And it touches every area of our lives, including our time and our talent, as well as our treasure.
Stewardship is faithfully using whatever God gives us.
[1:11] Opportunities, interests, skills, employment, family, talents, spiritual gifts, financial resources. Using all of these things for his glory.

And if biblical stewardship involves every aspect of our lives, it requires a basic commitment on our part. We must present ourselves as servants to God with no conditions or exclusions.
The real issue of stewardship is whether we're managing our affairs and our possessions as though they're ours or as though they're God's.
And our sermon this morning is titled Gifted by God. And so while our sermon is titled Gifted by God, we're actually going to be looking at the concept of talents, skills, abilities or aptitudes, and gifts.
And I want us to recognize as well that what we're looking at this morning is a much bigger concept than we can cover thoroughly in one Sunday. But we're going to do our best.
[2:25] And I want to begin this morning by reading one of Jesus' parables and then we'll unpack some of the concepts of it together. This was a parable that we covered in our sermon series on parables last year.

So it'll be a bit familiar. And it may just be familiar because you know it well. I'm reading from Matthew chapter 25 verses 14 to 30. And it's the parable of, it's known in some cases as the bags of gold.
But most of us are familiar with it as being the parable of the talents. It begins, Again, it will be like a man going on a journey who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them.
To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put the money to work and gained five bags more.
So also the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master's money.
[3:35] After a long time, the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. Master, he said, you entrusted me with five bags of gold.

See, I've gained five more. His master replied, well done, good and faithful servant. You've been faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things.
Come and share your master's happiness. The man with two bags of gold also came. Master, he said, you entrusted me with two bags of gold. See, I have gained two more.
His master replied, well done, good and faithful servant. You've been faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness.

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Then the man who had received one bag of gold. Master, he said, I knew that you're a hard man, harvesting where you've not sown and gathering where you've not scattered seed.
[4:38] So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you. His master replied, you wicked and lazy servant.

So you knew that I harvest where I've not sown and gather where I've not scattered seed. Well, 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.
So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. For whoever has will be given more and they will have an abundance.
Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. And throw that worthless servant outside into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
When I shared this parable in our parable series, I believe I said to you at one point that a member of our young adults group said to me, I have a challenge.
[5:42] I struggle with this parable. And I said, Kate, shoot. And she said, so the guy who held on to the money and took the least risk gets in the most trouble.

She said, I don't get it. And I said, well, look at it from the perspective of if you're given something, you're entrusted with something and you do nothing with it, playing it safe is not playing at all.
And she went, okay, I get it. So I'm not saying for a second that I get the entire depth and breadth of what Jesus was after there. But I think that's the point of the parable is that regardless of how much or how little you're given from your perspective, it all has value to God and he's asking you to act on his behalf.
So the parable that we've heard this morning again refers to talents. And in the context of the story, we recognize that it refers specifically to a weight of measure or a weight of value.
So talents were actual forms of currency. And so this is why some translations refer to it here as gold, not talents.
[6:59] So lots of translations will refer here to gold because it's a literal item of value. But do you recognize how that word talent has changed over time?

We still use it all the time. But it's taken on a totally different meaning in some ways. So while talent is used to reflect a unit of weight or currency that was used by the Romans and Greeks in Scripture, the way we've come to define it now, I think we'd recognize is as a natural aptitude or skill.
Is that how you perceive the word talent more often? So isn't that interesting how that has changed over time? So while Jesus was referring to literal money in his parable, his deeper meaning was actually about the faithfulness of the stewards.
It was about the faithfulness of the people who were entrusted with the treasure by their master. How those gifts were used then, how they were put to work for the ultimate benefit of the one who gave them to them in the first place.
Do you see that? Does that make sense? I find it fascinating as well that the inherent value of what we consider to be talents has its origin traced back to being like gold, to being like money, to having real value.
[8:28] And in that way, I think it's similar to our time. We may tend to discount or disregard or take for granted our talents as much as our time. So identifying the fact that your talents have literal value, where do we go from there?

Well, if you reflect on your life for a moment, you may quickly realize that some activities or tasks that you have in your life give you joy.
As many people say, they fill your bucket, right? So perhaps you're able to, you're blessed to use your natural talents and your God-given abilities in the work that you do.
And as my dad used to say, if you can find a job, you've heard a variation of this before, if you can find a job doing what you love, something that you love, and that you're naturally skilled at, naturally gifted at, you will never work a day in your life.
Have you had that experience in your life? Have you worked at a job where your natural gifting and natural abilities synced completely or closely with what you were doing as a vocation?
[9:48] Perhaps your job is something that you do to pay your expenses. We all do that, right? You pay your expenses with your job, the income from your job, and then maybe you use your talents in other ways.

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Ways like baking or cooking or writing or painting, drawing, working on cars, acting, working with numbers or finance. God bless those people.
But maybe those areas, you can recognize a resonance of your gifting or your talents, either in your job or in other areas of your life. And there are as many unique combinations of talents that God has given as there are individuals he's created.
Isn't that great? To me, we're as unique as snowflakes and infinitely more valuable. Your combination of talents, while they may be similar to or compatible with someone else's, are unique to you.
You may be good with numbers and know someone else who is good with numbers, but you may not be gifted in communicating what numbers will say in a different way.
[11:08] I, personally, would rather pay someone to fix my vehicle than try and do it myself. I'd love to have that ability, that aptitude, that gifting, but I just don't have it.

And so rather than beat ourselves up about what we don't have, it's about recognizing the value of what we do have, what God has given to us.
And if it's helpful, think of your talents or your abilities as things that come naturally to you. When you feel like you're operating in, you're functioning in, your comfort zone, in a lot of situations, that is because you are in a sweet spot.
You are using your gifting and your abilities in the way God has wired you. And I don't know that we recognize that enough. You may also recognize that you share your talents, you might share them, some of them, with your parents or your siblings or other family members.
And that's not coincidence. I believe that there really can be a genetic connection there and that you don't share those qualities merely by chance.
[12:23] I believe there's a good chance that you do share things genetically with other people. But again, I'm not saying that's merely human wiring.

For sure not. So for me, and you've all heard me say this before, working with words and communication are hardwired into me.
I chuckled the other night. We were watching some, I think it was a news story, and I just started to laugh. And Michelle said, the wording was wrong, right? And I said, it was just really passive.
So I said, the structure of the sentence they just used was reversed. And that is just naturally hardwired into me. I can hear something and it just doesn't sound right.
And nine times out of 10, I know how to restructure it. It's just a wiring I have. It's partly training, but it's also just natural wiring that God has given me. And God has given each of us talents that we are to use in two ways.
[13:26] By blessing others and by furthering God's kingdom and furthering his plan for humanity. So the talents that we have, the personal gifts that we've been given, have been given intentionally and personally to us by God himself.

So last week, just last week, as we reflected on the stewardship of our time, that each of us have the exact amount of time available for us to accomplish what God has intended for us to do while we're here on earth.
Friends, we have exactly the combination of talents that can make a difference in the lives of others and for God's perfect plan for humanity.
You play a role. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 4, chapter 4, verse 7, For who makes you different from anyone else?
What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not? The Apostle Paul is not suggesting here that we're all exactly the same and none of us are unique.
[14:53] He's drawing attention to the fact that the talents and aptitudes that we have, we need to recognize they come from God. And we need to give credit where it's due.

They are not ours inherently. They've come from God. We can't take the credit ourselves. So then where does the idea of skills fall into all of this?
And how do we distinguish our skills from our talents? Maybe you use those words interchangeably even. So I found it helpful to think of talents as being given by God.
And then skills as things that we grow and develop over time, but through opportunities God has given us.

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Skills and talents both result from God's gifting. God's gifting situationally when it comes to skills, and God's natural wiring of us when it comes to our talents.
[16:00] Does that make sense? Our skills may directly relate to our natural talents and abilities. That's not surprising that you gravitate towards situations and circumstances where your gifting draws you, but not necessarily.

Our skills may be directly related to our talents, but not always. And our skills, we can also probably all recognize this, may be passed on by a parent, a teacher, another mentor in our lives.
And we might follow our talents or our natural abilities into an educational path or a career path. That's not by chance. But we follow that leading.
As we follow that leading, we're likely to develop new skills along the way. Do you see how those things work together so beautifully? Our talents and our skills are not mutually exclusive things. They work together in a lot of situations. And as I said before, when your skills, the opportunities that happen in your life and your talents all resonate together, feels pretty good.
[17:15] Feels pretty good. So regardless of the combination of talents and skills that we possess, we need to constantly remind ourselves that the purpose of those things is not to serve ourselves, but to bring glory to God and to be used to serve others.

And as God is our Father, just as God is our Father, we have brothers and sisters as we are here today. We're part of a larger family that's different from our family of origin.
It doesn't mean that our brother and sisters in Christ family is not dysfunctional at times. Just as a human family might be. But we are blessed to have two families, essentially.
And speaking of that larger family of God, using the analogy of a body, the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12, verses 12 to 27.
You can look it up or I'll read it for us. Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but as it's many, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.
[18:36] For we were all baptized by one spirit, so as to form one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, slaves or free. And we were all given the one spirit to drink.

Even so, the body is not made up of one part, but of many. Now, if the foot should say, because I'm not a hand, I don't belong to the body, it would not for that reason stop being a part of the body.
And if the ear should say, because I'm not an eye, I don't belong to the body, it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be?
If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? Hear this, but in fact, God has placed the parts of the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.
If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.
The eye cannot say to the hand, I don't need you.
[19:50] And the head cannot say to the feet, I don't need you. On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. And the parts that we think are less honorable, we treat with special honor.

And the parts that are unpresentable, we are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But hear this again, but God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the part who protect it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.
If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.
Now, you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. So while we've talked about gifting and talents and skills and all those things, I've not specifically addressed the subject of spiritual gifts this morning.
And these are the gifts that come when we accept Jesus as our Savior and Lord, when the Holy Spirit comes to live within us. And there are many, and perhaps you've had a spiritual gift assessment at some point in your life.
[21:20] I have, and I could share those with you. And we will do that at some point. I'd like to do that as a congregation. Do a spiritual gift assessment and then spend time exploring that together, just learning the richness of the ways in which the Holy Spirit's gifting is at work in our lives as well.

But as I said at the beginning this morning, this morning's topic is huge. So I hope to cover the topic of spiritual gifts in a future sermon series, perhaps.

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And Michelle liked that idea, so that's always a good sign. I believe it would also be valuable, like I said, for us to go through a spiritual gifting assessment in our church, and that's something we will do at some point.
The Bible reminds us over and over that our talents, our abilities, abilities come from God. And that He has equipped us for the specific purpose and plan that He has for our lives.
When we reflected back on that parable of the talents, we recognized that regardless of how big our sphere of influence is, how big are the number of people that we may impact in our lives or interact with in our lives, or however many talents we perceive that we've been given.
[22:44] We're still called to be faithful in managing and investing what God has given us. Paul adds a valuable perspective on the way we use our talents and gifts as well in Philippians 2, verses 3 and 4.

The Bible says, do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves.
Not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of the others. Our goal should always be not to please ourselves or to seek attention for ourselves, but to serve others.
I don't know about you, but I've often found that the greatest sense of personal joy for me comes when I may use my God-given talents to draw attention to Him or in serving someone else.
When God uses me to be a conduit for someone to be blessed or for them to hear His voice, that makes me glad.
[24:03] And it can be easy at times, let's recognize this as well, for us to be, we're human, for us to be discouraged by what we feel we don't have, what we wish we had.

You ever looked at someone else and gone, boy, I wish I could sing like Mariah Carey. I personally have not ever wanted to sing like Mariah Carey. But she's good. But do you see what I'm getting at there?
It can be very easy for us to say, oh, yeah, I know, I can do that, but oh, if only I could, oh. But it's humanity, right? We tend to look at what we don't have and long for what we wish we had rather than recognizing, celebrating, and valuing what we've been given, right?
My friends, God has uniquely gifted you. I've seen many of your gifts from each of you. He's gifted you. He's gifted you for the plans that He has for you.
So take comfort in that. Celebrate that. Have confidence in that. As you reflect on and recognize and celebrate your God-given talents, ask your Heavenly Father to help you to be a wise steward.
[25:22] help you to recognize opportunities to use the gifts and the talents that He's given you, the skills that He's led you to develop in your life. Ask Him to bring you the opportunities to use your talents, your skills, your abilities, the things that make you uniquely you.

help you to use those things to bless others and to bring glory to Him as the giver of every good and perfect gift.
Amen.

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