

## Maximize – Maximizing Your Treasure

Jan.25 – Pastor Randy

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Matt. 25:14-30

*“Again, the Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. He called together his servants and entrusted his money to them while he was gone. He gave five bags of silver to one, two bags of silver to another, and one bag of silver to the last—dividing it in proportion to their abilities. He then left on his trip. “The servant who received the five bags of silver began to invest the money and earned five more. The servant with two bags of silver also went to work and earned two more. But the servant who received the one bag of silver dug a hole in the ground and hid the master’s money.*

*“After a long time their master returned from his trip and called them to give an account of how they had used his money. The servant to whom he had entrusted the five bags of silver came forward with five more and said, ‘Master, you gave me five bags of silver to invest, and I have earned five more.’ “The master was full of praise. ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let’s celebrate together!*

*“The servant who had received the two bags of silver came forward and said, ‘Master, you gave me two bags of silver to invest, and I have earned two more.’ “The master said, ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let’s celebrate together!’*

*“Then the servant with the one bag of silver came and said, ‘Master, I knew you were a harsh man, harvesting crops you didn’t plant and gathering crops you didn’t cultivate. I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth. Look, here is your money back.’*

*“But the master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy servant! If you knew I harvested crops I didn’t plant and gathered crops I didn’t cultivate, why didn’t you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have gotten some interest on it.’*

*“Then he ordered, ‘Take the money from this servant, and give it to the one with the ten bags of silver. To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who do nothing, even what*

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*little they have will be taken away. Now throw this useless servant into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'*

Jesus' told this story as part of a lengthy teaching which was intended to prepare his disciples for how they were to live after he ascended to heaven. The big idea of this story is that followers of Jesus are responsible to carry on Jesus' work in the time between His ascension and second coming.

To understand Jesus' parables we need to identify the points of reference.

1. The wealthy property owner is a reference to Jesus. In Luke's Gospel, a similar story told by Jesus on another occasion. The important point that is being communicated in both stories is that the wealth being managed belongs to the man, and he is also Lord over those who are entrusted to manage his resources.
2. His departure on a journey refers to Jesus ascension.
3. The servants that are entrusted to manage the owner's wealth in his absence refer to Jesus disciples.
4. The return of the owner/king/lord to hold his servants accountable for how they managed his resources in his absence refers to Jesus future return to judge the world.

Let's review the story: The owner entrusts his servants with varying amounts of money which they are responsible to manage for the growth of their master's kingdom. The varying amounts are given "according to their ability". When the master returned two of the servants had put the money to work and realized a return on their investment for the benefit of the owner. The owner commends them both for being faithful to their responsibility. As a result, he entrusts them with greater resources to manage.

The third servant buried the money in the ground and gave the owner back the same amount he left him with. This third explains his actions by saying, "Since you are so harsh I was afraid that if I tried to invest your money but failed you would have punished me so I made sure I kept it safe by burying it." On the surface that sounds like a reasonable response but Jesus' telling of the story makes it clear that this was not a reason but an excuse. The owner

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exposes the servant's true motivation for burying the money: He was lazy. His explanation was really an excuse for doing nothing. An excuse is "the skin of a reason stuffed with a lie".

The Owner/King/Lord was not a harsh task master as he was accused of being. The servant described him that way as a means of manipulating the situation to try and justify his idleness or laziness. He compounded his laziness by implicitly blaming his master for his failure to do anything.

### Principle #1: We are Stewards, not Owners.

We are stewards *of God!!* How we manage our resources is as much of a "spiritual activity" as is praise & prayer, bible study, and sharing your faith. Jesus told his disciples that following him entailed surrendering all one's possessions to Him. (Luke 14:33) In 1 Corinthians 6 Paul wrote, "You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body."

The ultimate attitude of worship is to view your whole life as a gift from God, and then to respond out of love and gratitude by intentionally managing what he has placed in your hand to build kingdom of God.

### Principle #2: Stewards are Expected to be Faithful (Responsible)

God's Stewards *work* with what God has given them. Faithfulness is giving our best effort. In the parable the Lord commended the first two servants with these phrases: "Well *done*." "Faithful in *handling*". After commending them he rewarded them with...wait for it... *many more responsibilities!* More money brings more responsibility. Being given more responsibility is an honor because it's an opportunity to increase your impact. The third servant is scolded and punished, not because he tried and failed but because he failed to try, and he blamed his master for his laziness.

Faithful stewards respond according to the ability God has given them. Faithfulness maximizes one's ability to respond to what God has given.

### Principle #3: God Does Not Micromanage His Stewards.

The master entrusted his resources to his servants. That means he trusted

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them by giving them freedom to make decisions informed by motivated by love and influenced by the Spirit. We do not find in the Bible a universal budget that all Christians must follow. What about tithing? Didn't God tell us to give 10% to the church?

Most churches encourage their members to practice tithing in order to support the work of the local church. Others have argued that tithing is not taught in the NT and should not be practiced by Christians because it was part of the OT law and to encourage tithing is to place Christians back under a law from which Jesus has set us free. There are some merits to that argument. There are problems with suggesting that the practice of tithing is binding on Christians in the same way that it was on the Israelites. The tithing practiced by Christians today does not follow the specific commands on tithing found in the OT. Scholars aren't even in agreement as to whether there was one tithe or two tithes paid each year. This means the Jews in the OT possibly tithed up to 20%. Under the Mosaic Covenant, no tithes were paid in the seventh year. No church tells people to stop tithing every seventh year!

When we encourage tithing we don't do so because we feel the need to abide by the OT law. We encourage it as a scriptural principle rather than a law. First of all, the principle of tithing is found in scripture prior to the OT law. The OT tithing commands reveal the wisdom of God in providing a system for the regular support of the Kingdom of God.

You can practice tithing without doing it as if you are placing yourself under the Mosaic law. It can be practiced as a wise discipline, motivated by God's grace and the Holy Spirit. The problem I see with those who oppose tithing based on the premise that the NT teaches that we are not under the law but under grace is that this argument is almost always made as a reason for giving less than 10%. Behind the argument often lies the attitude that giving is a burden put upon us rather than a blessing to us. The OT tithe established a bare minimum. God's grace shouldn't lessen our generosity, it motivates us to be more generous and less selfish.

There are some very practical benefits or blessings of tithing.

1. Tithing is a regular planned offering. A good steward plans his spending. A

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financial budget is not only for those whose spending is out of control. Planning is what wise, responsible, Spirit-led, people do. Tithing helps Christians to establish a consistent starting point for their giving.

2. Tithing turns giving into a habit. Our habits form our character. The habit of giving makes giving a part of our character. Tithing is almost always most difficult for people when they first start practicing it. After a while it becomes second nature.

3. Giving the tithe of the first of one's income was a directive from a wise God who wanted his people to learn to place God first. When you give to God first your actions preach about the priority of God's kingdom. The 10% minimum is a good way to preach to ourselves that we value God's work.

4. Giving the tithe of the first of one's income was a directive from a wise God who wanted his people to learn to trust him. Giving a tithe to God first teaches us to trust him. There is no trust involved in giving leftovers.

5. The command to tithe created a consistent and clear expectation for everyone regarding their responsibility to the community.

Problems with Tithing:

1. Some people oppose tithing because they feel it removes the heart and spontaneity from giving. It can, but it doesn't have to. Giving doesn't have to be spontaneous in order for it to be Spirit-led. You can plan your giving and still be led by the Spirit in your planning. Pray about your %.
2. Tithing only out of obligation. Giving nothing less, AND nothing more!!
3. Tithing, or any giving, practiced under compulsion is contrary to NT teaching. *"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."*

Back to my initial point. God does not dictate the details of how the steward manages his/her resources. We already established that everything we have belongs to God and needs to be stewarded for His glory. Tithing can be a problem if it leads to us leaving God out of the picture when managing the other 90% of our income. All our resources need to be managed for God's

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glory, our good, and the good of others. We will talk more about that next week. God has given us freedom because ultimately he wants us to be led by His Spirit which means we will be motivated by love; love for God and for people.

Consider the workplace. When a boss has an employee who believes in the mission of his company he doesn't need to make the employee account for every minute of his work week. He doesn't feel the need to look over his shoulder every two minutes. He can assign him a job and trust that the employee will do his best because his heart is in it. He has bought in the mission and the vision and values That is how God wants us to serve in His kingdom.

I'm glad I don't need to present God with a resume in order to be accepted into his eternal kingdom. I am glad my acceptance is because I am his child through faith in Jesus. But I would love to hear God say, "Well done!" I pray that one day when I stand in God's presence and He shows me the impact of my stewardship, I will not look back with regret and realize that I squandered my resources. I hope I will hear him say, "Well Done, well done"!

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