

OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

THE QUESTION OF TIME
APRIL 12-18, 2015



MAIN POINT

Using our time wisely requires seeing time as opportunity to seek Christ and invest in His kingdom.

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. Complete the following sentence, "If I had more time, I would . . ." Why would you choose to invest your time that way?
2. At this point in life, what responsibilities, goals, or pursuits most strongly demand your time? How do you allocate your time among these things? What values and priorities do you employ to do so?

Leader: We live in an incredibly busy world—it seems like there are countless events, people, and pressures competing for our attention and time. And unfortunately, we will never have "more time." Given that time is a limited resource, if we are not wise, these many competing pressures can overwhelm us, rendering us ineffective in Christ's kingdom. Therefore Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, "Be very careful, then how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:15). If we hope to cease from being overwhelmed by busyness and start using our time wisely, we must begin seeing the time as opportunity to seek Christ and invest in His kingdom.

DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 25:14-18.

3. Why is it important to recognize that the master entrusted the servants with *his* wealth? How does that truth relate to the way we think about the resources we have been given, including time?
4. Notice that the three men received different amounts of talents. Like the men in the parable, do you have different resources and responsibilities than others? What does that tell you about the heart of God? About stewardship?

Leader: This story demonstrates both the generosity of God and the responsibility of His children. God has generously entrusted resources to us to use wisely. Two of the stewards in this story did that, but the third did not. The first step in making the most of our time is to acknowledge that time itself is a gift of God. Every second we live on this earth is an opportunity gifted to us by God to be used to seek Him and build His kingdom.

5. How did each of the servants handle the talents the master gave them? What can we learn about wisely stewarding our time from their example?

Leader: “At once” the man with the five talents put them to work (v. 16). “At once” has a sense of urgency and passionate obedience. This was a sign of faithfulness— because he did not know how long his master would be gone, he did not procrastinate. The third servant received one talent (still a lot of money in that culture) because he had some ability to manage resources. But instead of investing it wisely, the third servant dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money (v. 18). He had an opportunity to do something significant, perhaps even doubling his master’s money as the other servants had done. Instead, he buried his talent and waited for his master to return. Not everyone faithfully uses what God has given them.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 25:19-23.

Leader: The master gave his servants a long time to work with the talents he had given them (v. 19). God gives us time to develop and make the most of what He’s given us. But we need to put it to work immediately as the first two servants did, and then we need to keep at it. When we fail or our efforts go unappreciated, we must not quit. God will reward faithfulness.

6. In the process of earning “five more” and “two more,” the servants risked losing some of it. How is it risky to invest our time and resources in God’s kingdom? Though risky, why are such decisions wise?

7. When the master returned and settled accounts with his servants, how did he reward those who had doubled the amount He gave to them? In what ways do you see investing your time in God’s kingdom as something that is rewarding in the here and now?

Leader: Notice that comparing servant to servant didn’t happen; instead, the master highlighted what each did with what they had. The master was just as pleased with the servant who had doubled two talents as the one who had doubled five (vv. 21,23). First, the faithful servants received their master’s praise and joy: “Well done, good and faithful servant . . . enter into the joy of your master.” This was the greatest reward. Second, they received greater responsibility: “You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much.” God rewards faithfulness with increased opportunities for service—the more faithfully we take advantage of the time God has given us to invest in His kingdom, the more He shares with us both His joy and the privilege of sharing in His kingdom work.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 25:24-30.

8. The third servant claimed to know the master (v. 24). Based on his actions, do you think he knew his master as well as he said? Explain.

9. Do you think it’s common for people to view God as the third servant viewed his master? Explain.

10. How might the way people view God influence whether or not we invest our time wisely?

Leader: The third servant blamed his actions on his master. For some reason, he concluded his master was cruel and selfish. There is no indication in any part of the parable, especially in the interactions with the other slaves, that these accusations are true. The third slave claimed he hid his talent in the ground because he feared his master. Lead your group to identify and evaluate excuses we might give for wasting the time God has given us. The biggest opportunity the slave squandered was to know the master. If we hope to use our time wisely, we must invest the time we've been given in seeking the Lord so that we will find joy in giving our time to the advancement of His kingdom.

DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

11. Why is it wise to recognize time as opportunity? How might this recognition change the way we utilize our time?

12. In what ways are you already using your time each week that could be redirected and refocused on God's kingdom? How has God specially shaped your life and prepared you for His service?

13. What do you need to change about your attitude toward or use of time so that Jesus will say to you, "Well done, good and faithful servant"?

PRAYER

Close in prayer. Ask God to help the group identify the weights and sins that keep them from seeing and seeking His kingdom. Pray that we would identify distractions in our overscheduled lives and focus on what matters most. Ask that as the work of Christ overwhelms all lesser concerns, joy and abundant life would be obvious in the people at OEFC.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - **How has your use of time changed since this past week's study?**
 - **Is there anything God's Spirit is prompting you to make more time for?**
- A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- The challenge to memorize Ephesians 5:15.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

MATTHEW 25:14-30

25:14-15. Matthew inserted the parable of the talents in a section of other teachings dealing with the consummation of God's kingdom (24:36–25:46). In the parable of the talents, Jesus challenged His followers to invest all that God has entrusted to them to advance His kingdom. He taught that living in God's kingdom includes waiting, but it is an active waiting, where people are provided resources by God, are expected to put them to use, and will be judged on their faithfulness.

Verse 14 begins with the word for, tying this passage to the previous parable of the 10 virgins (25:1-13). While the King James Version inserts "the kingdom of heaven," other translations simply have it, pointing back to the "kingdom" of heaven" in verse 1. This parable about the coming kingdom of God deals with a man going on a journey.

The master, before traveling, called his servants and entrusted to them his property. During Jesus' day, wealthy landowners often entrusted their property, possessions, and affairs to their trustworthy servants. These "bond slaves" enjoyed considerable authority and responsibility. The remainder of verses 15 through 18 highlights three important principles regarding the talents God gives to us today.

To begin with, God grants resources to all people. The master called three of his servants. Each was given an amount of a financial asset: To one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one. A talent originally was used as a measurement of weight (about 75 pounds) before later referring to money. Determining the exact value of a talent is difficult, but certainly it was a very large sum.

God determines who receives what resources and the amounts. While all of us are equal in terms of our potential to have a relationship with God, this parable suggests that functionally God treats some different from others. This point is made clear by the detail of the master giving the three servants different amounts of resources. They received five, two, and one talent respectively to each according to his ability. The master knew ahead of time the trustworthiness of each servant and acted accordingly. He determined who would receive how much. The same is true with God. He is sovereign, and we are not. In essence, God can do as He pleases, because He is God.

25:16-18. Finally, God expects the assets He provides to be put into use. The master expected that the servants do more with the money than simply hold on to it. He obviously intended they would treat it as he would, utilizing it in such a way that he might receive a gain on his investment when he returned. Two obeyed. One did not. The first two servants wasted no time in obeying the master's expectation to use their talents. They traded with them, probably setting up some businesses and working to earn more capital on their invested talents. They took a certain amount of risk—they could have lost the money entrusted to them—but reaped reward for their master in doing so. All believers should willingly take wise, faithful risks with their resources so God will provide a return on their investments. The third servant acted in exactly the opposite manner. He went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. By doing so, the servant chose a route that was (1) less work, (2) less time-consuming, and (3) less risky.

25:19-20. This next section of the parable makes another important point about God giving assets: the master returned after a long time. The delay implies that God may allow people a great deal of time to capitalize on the assets He grants to further His interests. The master came and settled accounts with his servants. Using a standard commercial term, Jesus underscored the master's expectation for the servants to put their talents to use. The slaves given five and two talents demonstrated faithful use of their resources in expectation of increase. Because of their ingenuity, the master rewarded them equally in three ways. The commendation likely would have been the same for the third man had he exercised faithful stewardship. God's criterion for reward is what we do with what we have, not how much we have or how much we gain.

25:21-23. First, the master commended them. To each he asserted "Well done, good and faithful servant" No doubt the servants gladly received the master's commendation. Second, the master gave them greater

responsibility. Following the commendation, the master continued, saying to both servants: "You have faithful over a little; I will set you over much." As a result of their faithfulness to their master, each servant was promised greater opportunity and responsibility in the future. Third, the master invited them: "Enter into the joy of your master." Both servants heard the same excited injunction to share their master's joy. This joy was the subjective possession of the master in which he then invited the faithful slaves to participate.

Scripture makes clear that all people will face God's judgment after death (Heb. 9:27). The fate of unbelievers will be based on their failure to repent of sin and receive Jesus as Savior, especially in light of God's blessing them throughout their everyday lives with gifts of natural abilities and resources. Christians will be judged based on their works for God after experiencing salvation and rewarded accordingly. Paul claimed, "If anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw, each one's work will become obvious, for the day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire; the fire will test the quality of each one's work" (1 Cor. 3:12-13).

25:24-25. What about those who don't act faithfully? We can safely assume the third servant would have heard the same commendation had he exercised faithful service. But he chose to act on fear. So he suffered judgment both for his faithless attitude and bad action. He sought to excuse himself and actually blame the master! He first asserted, Master, I knew you.... But his attitude and actions reveal he did not know his master. Notice the harshness in the third servant's justification of himself. He first called the master a hard man. "Hard" translates the Greek "scleros" (we get "arteriosclerosis" from this, which means hardening of the arteries). "Hard" can mean harsh, strong, over-bearing, oppressive, cruel, and merciless. He accused his master of greed and exploitation of others by reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed. What might lie behind such an accusation? He did state, I was afraid. Hiding the talent may mean his actions were spiteful. Whether his unfaithful actions were due to an inadequate knowledge of his master, fear, or spite, the master passed judgment on him.

25:26-27. The master identified the man as a wicked and slothful servant! The servant's problem was both moral and behavioral. He chose this path similar to the way the first two servants chose to behave in ways that were "good and faithful." Second, the master turned the servant's words back on him. Be careful not to see the master agreeing with the servant's assessment of his master's character. If the servant genuinely believed his master was greedy and exploitative, the servant's actions still should have been different! By depositing the master's money in the bank he should have received his money back with interest.

25:28-29. Third, the master declared, Take the talent from him. If he had been upset that another had five talents to his one, imagine the ignominy of now having that single talent given to his perceived rival!

25:30. Fourth, the master pronounced the most severe punishment. This worthless servant was to be thrown into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The expression "weeping and gnashing of teeth" refers to the result of God's judgment. In addition to verse 30, the expression "weeping and gnashing of teeth" occurs five other times in the Gospel of Matthew (8:12; 13:41-42; 13:49-50; 22:12-13; 24:48-51).

Often in Jesus' parables, the main point is found in the ending. Verse 29 provides the answer to, "What does being prepared for Christ's return actually involve?" It means refusing to play it safe, doing little or nothing, but instead serving with the goal of results.