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Title: A Culture of Giving: Talent

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Preaching: Dustin Hite, Promise Road Campus Pastor

Scripture: [1 Corinthians 12:4-6](#)

Text: [Matthew 25:14-30](#)

E-mail: [Dustin Hite](#)



I bet most of you in this room wouldn't recognize the names Pete Best, Stuart Sutcliffe, or Ron Wayne. In fact, I'm willing to bet only the most ardent audiophile or tech geek would recognize any of these men's names. So, let me help you out a bit. Pete Best and Stuart Sutcliffe were friends with Paul, John, George, and Ringo. In fact, Pete

played drums and Stuart played bass during the early formation of the Beatles.

Ron Wayne is a name only the most dedicated tech geek might know. Most of you in here would know at least one of his two friends named "Steve." You see, it was Ron Wayne, Steve Wozniak, and Steve Jobs who co-founded Apple Computers back in 1976. So, why do some of us know Steve Wozniak and almost all of us know Steve Jobs, but almost no one remembers Ron Wayne? That's because Ron Wayne, only 12 days after Apple Computers was formed sold his 10% stake in the company for \$800. Do you want to guess how much his stake would be worth today? Had he kept the bulk of his shares until this moment, they would be worth in the neighborhood of \$35 billion. \$35 billion dollars! Do you want to know why Ron Wayne sold his shares so early in the Apple endeavor? He felt as if he was in over his head. He was afraid he couldn't cut it.

Whether it is fear that keeps us from taking risks, or its accidents of history, like Stuart who left the Beatles to go back to school, there is often an opportunity cost when we shrink back from using our talents to our fullest ability and see where they can take us. For every great accomplishment, there's always a preceding risk.

Today, I want to talk about our talents--those God-given abilities we all have--and how we either choose to use them or not for the work of God. In fact, let's say it this way: ***We don't invest in the mission of God by burying our talents in the ground!***

What in the world does that mean? Well, let's take a look at a familiar passage of Scripture and then maybe that will make some sense:

"For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.'²³ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' (Matthew 25:14-30)

Clear as mud, right? Before we go making assumptions about what this parable means, I want to make a few points: (1) I don't believe this has much to do with economics or making money. I believe that's just the tool Jesus is using to make his point. (2) In some sense, we are supposed to understand the absence of the master in the story as the absence of Jesus after his ascension. Basically, as readers, we should put ourselves in the place of the workers, who are eagerly awaiting the return of their master in the same way the Church is eagerly awaiting the return of Christ. (3) The parable is less concerned with conveying ideas about the "master" or Jesus

than it is about challenging us. So, the third servant's description of the master is less about the master and more about revealing the character of the servant.

With this in mind, let's look back at the parable. First, we should note that the master gives of his wealth to all three servants. Yes, the amount is different--in fact, each amount, even the "one talent," was a rather large sum, more than any of these servants would have had access to in their lifetime. This master has such trust in each of these three servants that he's willing to give them his own wealth to use and to grow.

Second, the parable says the man goes away on a journey, but it never states how long he will be gone. Nor does it presume the servants know when he'll return either. This means they had to immediately get about using their talents to achieve a return, for they never knew when their master would return and ask for his wealth back. They always had to be ready.

Finally, I want to highlight something that lies just beneath the surface. All three of these servants no doubt feared their master; it was the basis of their relationship. It didn't necessarily have to be an unhealthy fear; rather one born out of respect and maybe awe at what the master had accomplished. But, it is only the first two servants who also loved their master. How do we know this? Well, because they took a risk. What the third servant did is exactly what you did in the ancient world if you were worried about losing your money. You buried it in the ground, in a place only you knew. But, what this parable is pointing out is that obedience is more than just following the directions. It's taking a risk, and I want to propose that the type of risk the first two servants took was born out of love they had for their master and the desire to see the master's fortune, and theirs as well, flourish. In the end, the third servant allowed his fear to paralyze him. Scripture tells us that "perfect love casts out fear," and if that is so, then the third servant couldn't possibly have loved his master. What does this have to do with you and me? Well, we are the servants--all three. We have been given "talents" by God to use for our Master's glory and the growth of His kingdom, and we must determine whether we will use them or not, because: ***We don't invest in the mission of God by burying our talents in the ground!***

God has given each and every one of you gifts and talents. Those gifts and talents are intended to primarily be used for the building up and strengthening of the body of Christ. How do I know this? Well, let's take a look at another passage of Scripture: "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and

there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.” (1 Corinthians 12:4-6)

According to Paul’s instructions to the Corinthians, we all receive gifts from the same Spirit, we are charged with different kinds of service by the same Lord, and each are given different kinds of work by the same God...AND it is all for the common good.

Why is this important? If you were given talents and gifts for just you, then if you chose to metaphorically bury them in the ground, then it wouldn’t matter all that much. The only person who would lose out is you. Let’s think back to our parable again. It is not only the master who loses out on the wealth that could have been gained if his servant had chosen to take a risk, it is the servant who loses out on further work. He’s not offered the chance to do more; he’s not entrusted with any more. It’s taken away from him. And that can happen to us. If God has blessed you with a gift and you simply hide it away and refuse to use it to strengthen God’s mission and work on earth, don’t be surprised if at some point you lose that gift...or you lose the platform on which to share that gift. That’s how the economy of God works: ***You don’t invest in the mission of God by burying your talent in the ground!***

There’s more to it as well. You’re probably wondering why each of you received a puzzle piece on the way into service today. When my oldest daughter was younger, she used to love to build this same giant puzzle over and over and over again. Somewhere along the way, we lost one of the pieces to the puzzle. No matter how hard we looked, we couldn’t find that dumb little puzzle piece. But that didn’t stop her from dragging the box out and wanting me to build the puzzle with her. And I kid you not, each and every time we finished the puzzle, she would be so disappointed that a piece was missing. She’d get this sad look on her face and search frantically all over her room to see if she could find the piece. Then, inevitably, when she realized it wouldn’t be found, she’d tear the puzzle apart in anger and storm off to her room, refusing to build any other puzzle she had. She was almost inconsolable from her disappointment.

I wonder if that’s how God feels. He’s made each of us, through our gifts and talents a key piece of the puzzle, necessary for His mission to achieve its intended goals. And yet, when the puzzle is pieced together, so many of us have chosen to take our puzzle piece and bury it in the ground. And then our puzzle is incomplete.

I wonder when we do that we realize we’ve become the third servant. And by becoming the third servant, we buy into his description of the master, a

description so accusatory, so judgmental, so audacious, and yet seemingly so ungrateful.

You are a piece of our puzzle. Your piece is vital to the mission of God and God desperately wants you to help complete the puzzle, to be a part of the work that this church has been charged with doing. If you've buried your puzzle piece in the ground, it's time to dig it up. Ask yourself how you believe God has gifted you. Pray about it. Ask those around you, who know you the best, to help you identify the gifts and talents and strengths that God has uniquely given to you. Spend some time studying how God used people like you and me in scripture, and how each of their talents and gifts became an important part of how God used them. Reach out to me, to Randy, to Sarah, to Kyle, to Kelley, to Ryan, and we'd be happy to help you figure out how you can use your talents here at Geist Christian Church. In just a little bit, you're going to see how a few folks have done just this. They've discovered the shape of their puzzle piece and have faithfully plugged their piece into the puzzle God has created here. And what each of them would tell you, and what I would tell you, is we need your piece to make our puzzle whole. We can't do it without you. Your gifts are important, they are valuable, and in order to be the church God has called us to be, we need you!

I want to challenge you to take that puzzle piece with you. Use it as a prompt, a reminder, to pray this week about how you can share your talents and gifts here at Geist Christian Church. Don't be like Ron or Pete or Stuart. Take the risk. Trust that God can and will use your talent. Then, come here and invest in the mission of God. You're just the person we've been waiting for.