



## **THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS**

*“The kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his ability.... Then he who had received five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents.”*  
(Matthew 25:14-16)

In the parable of the talents, a man gave three servants talents to use in his absence. A talent was a huge amount of money, roughly equivalent to fifteen years of wages for a laborer in those days. After a long time, the master returned and found that two servants had made good use of the money and doubled the amount he gave them. To each of them, he said, “Well done, good and faithful servant.... Enter into the joy of your lord” (Matthew 25:21, 23). But the third servant buried his talent in the ground and never used it all. The master called this servant “wicked and lazy,” and took away the talent that had been given to him.

When we speak of “talents” today, we mean the potential abilities that we inherit and develop. But the talents in the story symbolize the wealth of good and truth that the Lord gives to us. We are free to use these gifts or bury them. But the Lord hopes that we will use these gifts wisely and become good and faithful servants. For then we can make our eternal home in heaven and enter into the joy of our Lord.

### **FAMILY WORSHIP: The Parable of the Talents**

Read the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30.

#### **Discussion Ideas:**

- What is a talent? (It is a measurement and refers to a huge amount of money.)
- Who does the man (or master) symbolize? (the Lord)
- Who are meant by the servants? (people)
- What do the talents symbolize in this story? (The gifts that the Lord gives to us—especially goods and truths that we can use in our lives.)
- The good and faithful servants used their talents for trading and doubled them. What does this teach us about the importance and rewards of using what the Lord gives us?
- What is meant by burying the talent? (Knowing truths but not applying them to life.)

**FOR FAMILY DISCUSSION: Using Spiritual Talents**

The parable of the talents explores how we can enrich our lives with good and truth from the Lord. This involves looking to the Lord by reading (or hearing) His Word and trying to apply it to our lives. In the parable, two of the servants doubled their talents by using them for trade. How can we use our spiritual talents—good and truth—for trade? One way is to reflect on how we can use or apply truths in our lives and then sharing our ideas with others. We can share our ideas through discussion and also by modeling the application in our lives.

**ACTIVITY: Dramatizing the Parable of the Talents**

As a parent or teacher reads the parable, let the children dramatize it. Props could include silver “talents” (cardboard circles covered with aluminum foil or large silver coins such as U.S. silver dollars), a bathrobe for the master, little sacks or pouches for holding the silver talents, a pot of dirt for burying the single talent, *etc.*

**READ: “Gifts from the Lord,” a family talk by the Rt. Rev. Thomas Kline.**

**READ: “Using Our Talents,” a sermon by the Rev. Eric Carswell**

**SING: “The Talents” by Lori S. Odhner**

**COLORING PAGE: The Parable of the Talents**

**ACTIVITY: Using Our Talents** (*primary and intermediate levels*)

Use the circles to picture or write about ways you can use abilities that the Lord has given you.

**ACTIVITY: I Was Born to...** (*for ages 9-14*)

Think about what you enjoy doing or think that you would like to do when you are an adult and then finish this sentence: “I was born to....” Answers could range from helping take care of younger brothers and sisters, playing soccer, or writing stories to future goals such as being a wife and mother, being a concert pianist, or becoming a doctor.

**FAMILY ACTIVITIES: Identifying Talents**

The Lord gives all of us a wonderful array of gifts and qualities that we can utilize to serve the neighbor. Making good use of His gifts is one of the ways that we can express our love for the Lord. But first we must discover and develop our unique gifts and abilities. Here are some ideas as to how family members and friends can help each other identify abilities and qualities.

**Questions for Identifying Talents** (give everyone an opportunity to answer):

- What do you enjoy doing with your family? With your friends? When you are by yourself?
- In what way(s) are you a good family member? A good friend? A good team member?
- What things come easily to you?
- What kinds of things are you interested in learning about?
- Give one example of trying to do your best in your job(s) or uses. (Students can consider attending school as their occupation.)

**Talent Circles (or Using Our Talents)**

This is a project to affirm our loved ones. For a week or two, try to notice true and good things from the Lord in others. Think about what you appreciate about another family member or how the Lord touches your life through that person. Using a circle with that person's name on it, write down what you appreciate. Put the circles in a special container. After one or two weeks, open the container and read these aloud after dinner or during family worship.

**To make the circles:**

- 1) Trace around a jar lid or use the template to make circles on yellow or white cover stock.
- 2) Cut out the circles.
- 3) Put the names of each person in the family on several circles.

**Writing affirmations on the circles:**

You may want to facilitate this process by focusing on the circles each day—perhaps right after dinner or at bed-time. Parents will want to make sure that everyone ends up with same number of circles. One way might be to have everyone make one circle for each member of the family. Another option is for everyone in the family to draw a name each week and make a circle for that person.

## WHAT IS USE OR CHARITY?

To perform use is to will well to others for the sake of the common good,  
and not to perform use is to will well to others...for the sake of self.  
*(Heaven and Hell 64)*

How can we use the abilities and spiritual gifts we have from the Lord to help other people? In his sermon on "Responsibility," the Rev. Hugo Odhner suggests that we measure people not by their inherited gifts but by their devotion to developing and using their abilities to serve others. He also points out that our responsibility is proportionate to the ability we are given. How can we help our children meet their potential? How can we make better use of the opportunities we have to be useful to others?

**ACTIVITY: A Basket of Uses** *(for preschool and primary levels)*

Gather an array of tools, raw materials, and other things that help people serve in a variety of uses. Put them in a basket or box. Pull them out one by one and let the children try to identify how each thing could be used to help other people. (For a list of suggested items, click on the link above.)

**PROJECT: When I Grow Up...** *(for preschool through intermediate age levels)*

Picture or write about what you might want to do when you are an adult. In preparation, talk about a variety of uses or occupations.

**ACTIVITY: What Is Use?** *(for teens and up)*

The Lord gives us many teachings about charity and use in His Word. Here is a page of quotations for reading and discussion that can be cut apart so that people can take turns reading them aloud.

**ACTIVITY: Five Anchors of a Charitable Life—A Card Game** *(for teens)*

**READ: "The Value of Work" by the Rev. Brian W. Keith**

## REFLECTIONS ON PARENTING

We want to help our children develop their unique gifts and find happiness in helping others. Our goal as parents is to raise children for a useful life on earth and then in heaven. How can we help our children appreciate the importance of being useful? Here are a few ideas:

- It may be useful to talk about the various uses performed by people they know. What do their parents, grandparents, and other relatives do? (Look beyond occupations to other ways that people are useful.)
- Use rewards or other motivations to encourage children to do good things and then call their attention to how good it feels to help others. It is interesting to note that children being raised in heaven are given gold and silver coins as tokens of virtue or industry (see *Spiritual Experiences* 5666).
- Discuss the importance of *how* people perform their uses.
- Give your children verbal praise when they do a job well, praising how they do a job rather than praising them in a general way (avoid blanket phrases like “What a good girl!”). Try to be very specific about what was good about *how* they did their job, saying things like: “look how those dishes shine” or “these cookies are delicious.”
- Children may get the impression (from us or from the media) that success is defined in terms of honor, reputation, and gain. How can we help them develop a spiritual perspective? The heavenly perspective looks to the good of the neighbor, the common good (of society), the Lord's kingdom (heaven and the Church on earth), and especially the Lord (see *Arcana Coelestia* 1909). How might this teaching help us discuss the variety of ways that we can be useful and the true meaning of success?

## BEING A GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT

*Serving the Lord is performing uses (Heaven and Hell 112).*

To love the Lord is to serve Him by helping others. He is the one who inspires us to do good things for the neighbor, alerting us to people in need and helping us to see ways that we may help them. To become good and faithful servants is to make good use of the Lord's gifts so that we can be more useful to others. It also involves recognizing that all good is from the Lord rather than from ourselves.

### FOR REFLECTION: Becoming a Good and Faithful Servant of the Lord

- Read a portion of the Lord's Word, thinking about its application to your life.
- Think about someone you know who needs support. What could you do to help?
- *How* we perform our uses is important. How can we perform useful services honestly, rightly, justly and faithfully? (see *Divine Love and Wisdom* 431 and *Divine Wisdom* 10).
- What are some personal characteristics and habits that limit your ability to serve the neighbor? How could you work on these areas?

### ACTIVITY: Treasures of the Heart

How can we gather spiritual treasure and bring forth good?

## **ENTER INTO THE JOY OF YOUR LORD**

[A]ngels have happiness from the Lord according to the essence and quality of their use.  
(*Arcana Coelestia* 997)

What is the secret of being happy? The angels in heaven find happiness in being useful. In *True Christian Religion*, we are taught that to those “who faithfully perform uses, the Lord gives the love of use and its reward, which is internal blessedness, and this is eternal happiness” (736:3). This internal blessedness—this joy in making others happy—is the joy of our Lord.

By accomplishing things, angels find peace and satisfaction. “This satisfaction and peace produce a state of mind receptive of a love of useful service from the Lord” (*Conjugial Love* 6:6). If we are accomplishing something worthwhile, we may also find ourselves in a state of contentment and come to feel a deeper love for useful service.

### **JOURNAL: Finding Happiness**

Write about a time when you found great happiness in being useful. Perhaps this was a time when you were able to help a friend or family member who was having difficulty, initiate a new project, or reach someone you had been trying to help over a long period of time.

### **ACTIVITY: Let Love Guide Toward Uses**

If we let our loves guide us toward uses, we are more likely to find joy in doing them. Ask yourself: “What do I love?” Then think of something you can do that promotes this goal or cause, whether it is New Church education, your community, evangelization, music to enhance worship services, helping new mothers, *etc.* Rather than “should” yourself (as in “I should help the \_\_\_\_\_”), let your heart guide the way (as in I love \_\_\_\_\_ so I’ll help \_\_\_\_\_ cause).