

In the children's devotion you heard about crayons. What do crayons have to do with our theme over the next couple of weeks, Christ's love, our calling? That's the catch phrase of our national church body. Under that theme we take a look at stewardship, specifically stewardship of our gifts and talents. But what about the crayons?

Just like always wanting a bigger set of crayons, human beings tend to want more of everything. That includes gifts and talents. We might think we have so few gifts, like only having 8 jumbo crayons. It would be so nice to have 16 or even 96. Then we'd be talented and could accomplish a lot. Or we might be the one with more crayons with fancy names but we let them in the box and don't use them. Sure people might know you play softball or soccer, but maybe you're hiding the fact you also sing or play an instrument. You've got 96 crayons in the box, but are only using 8.

Jesus tells a story about talents in the gospel. The picture uses an amount of property, but it's appropriate to think of the gifts and skills we have. His intention is for you to listen and to learn about stewardship. How do you manage the things God has given to you? That's not just about money or time. God wants you to manage the gifts and the skills that he's given to you because...

**You are a gifted servant  
How generously your master gives  
What a joy to use your gifts**

The rich master is leaving for an extended period of time. His extensive wealth and property should work while he's gone. Much to everyone's surprise the rich master gives it to the servants. He does this because he knows the servants, he's seen them in action, and he trusts them. **"To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability."** He knew them and he trusted them, but he recognized they had different abilities. Each received something, and that's important to note. But equally important is that not all received the same amount.

It's not a judgment of them. The reality is they have different abilities. The rich master would be foolish to give them more than they could handle. He didn't owe them anything, didn't have to give them anything. It was generous of the rich master to give them any, and he gave huge amounts. A talent was worth about 15 years wages. One talent was already worth more than they deserved much less five talents. But for the rich master it wasn't about the amounts. He was looking for faithfulness.

Jesus is under no obligation to give you anything. That much is true. Yet how blest are you? Start with spiritual blessings. You have faith to trust in Jesus and through Jesus you have forgiveness of sins and eternal life. You've been adopted into God's family and now are called his child. You have a church family that loves you and a pastor you called to preach and teach you more about God's Word and Jesus. Physical blessings are unique for everybody. Some are skilled with their hands. Others are capable of mental gymnastics in science, math, or music. Others are artistic and some athletic. Some volunteer, encourage, or lead.

If we expect God gave all this because we're good enough to deserve it we must think again. We're far from perfect, which is God's expectation. We've done and said the wrong things over and over. We've nothing in us or about us that would earn or deserve such wonderful treatment from the master, our God. More often than we care to admit we're burying our talent in the ground just hoping the master doesn't come asking for it.

The rich master gave the talents because he was generous. God gave us talents and blessings because of his love for us in Christ Jesus. Jesus substituted himself for us under God's judgment. Hanging on the cross Jesus took away each one of our punishments and each one of our sins. He took our place so that all our wrongs and all our sins were on him and the perfect life he lived was on us and is on us today. All our sins are gone. When God looks at us he sees Jesus' perfection. All we have is because of Jesus. It's all because of God's grace. Grace is the generosity of our Lord which he gives to us.

We have every reason to look around and marvel at what we have and what God has given. It is truly more than we could have ever hoped for or imagined. It would be like going to Bill Gates and asking for a small loan to cover your car payment and he instead gives you 10 million dollars. You had no right to expect it; he just gave it because he's generous. That's God's grace. But what about all these gifts and abilities? How do we use them? How do we use those gifts to serve with joy?

Those first two servants of the rich master got to work right away. There was no time to waste. The master wanted his money put to use because he could come back at any moment. **"The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also the one with two talents gained two more."** They were both faithful in how they used the master's money. They had no imagination it was theirs to keep. When the master came asking for it they would give it to him.

The third servant reacted differently. He thought he knew his master. He was given a talent but he didn't put it to work. **"The man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money."** He thought the master was harsh and would be mad if he lost his talent. His actions should have been exactly opposite of what we he did. If the master was indeed harsh wouldn't the servant work three times harder than the rest to earn more? Instead he shows just how lazy he is and how little he cares about the master's generosity. He had no joy in working for the master.

God expects we'll use our gifts and talents with joy. But we might compare ourselves to someone else and think what could be if we only had their talents. If we did then we could be successful. Because we don't we probably won't accomplish anything. We're tempted to sit on our talents and not use them. We might even think that God is mean and nasty to expect something from us. How could he judge us for using our talents or not? How fair is it that God expects us to turn our measly talents into more. We worry and bury our talent.

The master was gracious and God has been gracious with you in giving you talents to use. No matter how much or how little you think you have God is expecting faithfulness with whatever you have. So maybe you play piano but you're not the captain of the basketball team. Perhaps you star in the theater but you'll never make straight A's on a report card. And if you are able to sing, play baseball, or do math with no problem but you're not using those talents and gifts to God's glory it's just as bad. God is expecting faithfulness. That means using what he's given, no matter how much he's given, and finding joy in doing it.

God joyfully accepts joyful service. He knows it isn't perfect because we're still sinful. But God gave us more than we could count when he gave us his Son Jesus. He accepts our joyful service as perfect because when you do whatever it is, use your gifts and talents by faith in Christ Jesus, it's perfect in God's eyes. Then in everything we do and in every way we use our gifts and talents we'll do it looking forward to heaven. We'll ask how we can do this joyfully to God's glory. And after the work of this world and the failure at times we'll still be riding high with joy because of the promises God makes to us. Not of something earned for faithfulness but rather a reward of his grace.

You are a gifted servant. You may have 8 crayons or 96 with the special sharpener on the back. But no matter how many crayons, that is gifts and talents you think you have, really the greatest gift of all is knowing Jesus by faith. Through Christ God shows just how generous he is with his gifts, even granting us heaven. But he also gives gifts for this life too. His expectation is joyful use of whatever he's given. So whether you're using 8 or 96, use all your gifts and talents with joy for your generous master and Lord Jesus.