

We've Each Got a "Talent"

"Your Gifts, His Glory" Series, October 4 & 5, 2025 | Matthew 25:14-30 (esp. 14-15)

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God gives each of us gifts, but we don't all use them wisely.

Milton Hershey used his God-given gifts to amass great wealth.

Born shortly before the Civil War, Milton came from humble beginnings. His dad was often far from home and not providing for the family. As a young man, Milton seemed to have inherited his dad's lack of business sense.

But it turns out that Milton Hershey did have gifts. He had a gift for making candy. And persistence. While his first candy-making business failed, he learned a secret—milk can make great candy. He used that idea to make caramels and his first million dollars.

Along the way, he found chocolate, which became one of his life's passions. He sold his caramel business and located a site in central Pennsylvania with plentiful water, fresh milk, and hard workers. Hershey Chocolate was born.¹ It turns out that Milton Hershey had the gifts of insight and good business sense.

He would go on to build a chocolate empire and a fortune. But how?

Other barons of the Gilded Age used their gifts to amass great wealth through shady means.

They built monopolies, kept wages low and working conditions harsh, and at times violently suppressed efforts by laborers to get better wages.

A few even worked children as young as 5-10 years old in mines and factories.

All while amassing vast fortunes. Do you think that's why God gives us the gifts He gives?

Only later did they develop a desire to use their wealth wisely.

Think of Andrew Carnegie. He built a vast business empire.

His wealth came from a mix of good guidance, hard work, business sense, and ruthlessness.

But he also knew that his immense wealth was a problem. He wrote in "The Gospel of Wealth," "The man who dies thus rich dies disgraced."²

Wealth was a trust to be used for the common good, so he sold his company in the early 1900s and gave most of his fortune away—building libraries, putting organs in churches, funding schools, and doing other good things. Late to the party, but better late than never.

Like those figures, God has given each of us gifts.

¹ <https://hersheystory.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Milton-Hershey-The-Man-Behind-The-Chocolate.pdf>

² <https://www.medalofphilanthropy.org/andrew-carnegie/>

In the last series, we talked about the fact that God created each human being—every one of us—in His image. He created us as we are, on purpose, for His purposes.

In this series, we want to think about the gifts God has given us. As Christians, we quickly think about spiritual gifts, and we want to talk about those. But God also gives us many types of gifts. All of them are given for His purposes (not just ours).

Are we using them wisely?

The robber barons of the Gilded Age were probably not using their God-given gifts wisely.

When it comes to Milton Hershey, we'll see. There is more to his story.

But the real question is whether or not WE are wisely using the gifts God has given us.

That's the central question of the Parable of the Talents. We'll be looking at it over the next three weeks. And I hope it causes each one of us to take inventory of the gifts God has given us and ask ourselves, "Am I using the gifts God has given me the way He wants me to use them?"

God gives each of us gifts we tend to undervalue.

The man going on a journey symbolizes Jesus returning to the Father after the Resurrection.

Jesus was reaching the end of His earthly ministry, and opposition to Him was at a fever pitch.

Jesus frankly predicted His own betrayal, arrest, and death. He added that He would rise again, then go to His Father in Heaven. It was difficult to comprehend.

Jesus warned His disciples that judgment was coming on Jerusalem for rejecting Him. He looked further ahead to judgment coming on the entire world at the end of time.

He said that He would come again and told His disciples to be ready! At the beginning of chapter 25, He told a parable about always being ready for His return.

He told this parable, the Parable of the Talents. It starts with a man going away on a journey. The man symbolizes Jesus. The journey is Jesus going to be with His Father until His Return. This parable is all about what we—Jesus' disciples—are to do until His Return.

The man entrusted three servants with a vast sum of money.

He gave one servant five talents, one servant two, and a third servant one.

But how much money was it? A talent could be a measure of weight. By the first century, it was a unit of money—6,000 denarii. A denarius is a day's wage, so a talent would be 6,000 days' wages: twenty years' worth of income. That's roughly \$600,000 in today's money.

The man turned over \$600,000 to \$3 million to these servants.

The man expected his servants to DO SOMETHING with their talents.

Matthew 25:14 says that man "... entrusted to them his property." The Greek word means that he handed his property over to them and put it in their control. It's the same word that describes the way Jesus was handed over to the Romans. These talents are now in these servants' hands.

Matthew 25:15 adds that the man traveling didn't give the talents randomly. It was "... according to his ability. ..." The Greek word translated "ability" usually means "power."

So, the man put his property and wealth into the hands of his servants and expected them to use their power to DO SOMETHING with it.

This parable teaches us to DO SOMETHING with our own talents.

We don't think of talents as 75 pounds of silver or \$600,000.

Our concept of talents, though, comes from this parable.

In the late Middle Ages, people read this parable and heard a clear calling to use their God-given gifts to DO SOMETHING. The word "talent" suddenly stood for all of our God-given gifts, our skills, aptitudes, and abilities.

And they were right. That is exactly what Jesus is saying to us. Until He returns, we are to use our God-given gifts—our talents—to DO SOMETHING.

But we don't always DO SOMETHING with our own talents because sometimes we can't see them.

Sometimes you can't see what you're good at because you don't think it's very important.

Or because you're close enough that you don't notice it.

Or because what you do comes naturally to you. You assume that everyone can do what you do, so you miss the value in it.

You may not see or know what you're good at. But God sees you and what you're good at. Because God made you and gave you those gifts!

God gives each of us a unique "SHAPE."

Our SHAPE involves five things, and four of them we almost never think about!

SHAPE is an acronym that stands for spiritual gifts, heart, abilities, personality, and experiences. When we think about God-given gifts, we think quickly about spiritual gifts.

But God also gives us the other four, and we easily overlook them.

Spiritual Gifts: God-given "superpowers" that can be difficult to identify.

Spiritual gifts come to us when we become Christians.

They are put in us by God the Holy Spirit for the building up of the Church.

Our spiritual gifts sometimes come on top of things we are already good at. Other times, they take our lives in dramatically different directions.

Spiritual gifts include things we might expect like leadership and hospitality. But they also include things like prophecy and craftsmanship.

The list is not 100% set, and discovering your own spiritual gift sometimes takes time, prayer, and counsel from others. Don't let uncertainty about your spiritual gifts keep you from using your other gifts to do something.

Heart: the love God has given us that can at times break our hearts.

Marilyn Faulkner and her team lead GriefShare here at Valley.

They have a deep love for people who are going through grief.

And most of the team members understand grief because they walk with grief daily. Marilyn has lost multiple loved ones, and she knows how it can hurt. So, she wants to help people deal with their grief AND find hope in Jesus. Which makes GriefShare an encouraging, life-changing ministry.

Abilities: *ordinary things God created us to do in extraordinary ways.*

It may be difficult for you to believe that the ordinary things we do in extraordinary ways matter to God. This may be the most difficult piece of your SHAPE for you to wrap your mind around.

But think about this: Here at Valley, we have an incredible accounting department.

It may be a stretch for you to think about the way that processing purchase orders and reimbursement requests can impact the Kingdom of God, but it can.

Our accounting department makes it possible for us to keep the lights on, make sure that there is food in the kitchen, and pay for camp when we send our students away.

They are really good at what they do. We just passed another audit without problems. It happens every year. That may not mean much to you at first, but it means that we handle money honestly. Which is incredibly important!

Making music, fixing machines, building things, shipping, writing, doing business, teaching, understanding finance, growing things ... these are all given by God and important!

Personality: *the God-given why behind the way we do what we do.*

Tammi and I could not be more different.

I am an extravert, and she is an introvert.

I am a dreamer, and she is a problem solver.

Our different personalities give us different whys behind the way we do what we do.

But God uses each of us in our own, unique way to do things for His glory.

And God makes us into a team that is better than either of us alone.

What is your personality like? Sin can take our natural wirings and lead us to do and say counterproductive things. But our personalities are God-given gifts. They make us fit to do something significant for God's glory.

Experiences: *events that have molded us and (sometimes) broken us beautifully.*

A couple of years ago, LoriAnn Mancuso shared with us by video a story about loss. She talked about suffering a stroke, being diagnosed with cancer, and losing her mother to cancer.

You may recognize LoriAnn because she leads worship at times at all three of our services.

These haven't been the last or only losses, hardships, or struggles in LoriAnn's life. But these losses have molded and shaped her. They have made her who she is today and have shaped her faith.

Recently, she has been struggling with seizures. She was in the hospital for a week, hoping to observe the seizures, diagnose them, and treat them. That must have been frightening.

But while she was in the hospital, LoriAnn's pain merged with faith and hope in worship. She connected with a nurse. They shared a love for music and for Christ. They ended up singing together. Together they filled the floor with joyful music. It touched lives on the floor.

The experiences in our lives are gifts. They make us who we are. And God can use them—even the painful ones—to bring Himself glory.

LoriAnn is getting married in a couple of weeks, and if suffering brings that kind of fruit through her life, I can't wait to see what joy does for her!

God's gifts advance the Gospel.

Creation: *God gave us gifts so that we might reign.*

In the beginning, God created human beings and gave us gifts for reigning over creation.

Now, God knits each one of us together in our mothers' wombs. We are fearfully and wonderfully made, and that means that God creates each one of us with gifts.

Brokenness: *God's gifts and image are marred but not destroyed.*

When humanity first sinned, that obviously damaged creation. It also damaged us as human beings. It brought the penalty of death, and it distorted God's image that we bear. And the gifts God gave us for His good were sometimes twisted to other ends.

This is humanity's story, and it is our story. It is the story for each one of us.

But the gifts God has given us are not destroyed. They need to be redeemed, and they CAN be redeemed.

Jesus: *God's gift of Jesus reconciles us to God.*

Jesus is the greatest gift God has ever given us.

His death on the cross paid the price for our sin so that we can be made right with God.

His Resurrection means that we can be given a new start and new future.

We can be made new. Our gifts can be made new.

Church: *God renews, supercharges, and uses our gifts to advance HIS Gospel.*

When we accept God's offer of salvation through Jesus, we are adopted as God's children.

We are filled with God's Spirit, made new, and given a new and spiritual gift.

We are then sent out—powered by God's Spirit—to bring God glory and join Him on His mission to build His Kingdom and bring people to saving faith.

And that's what we do with those gifts! We use them to bring God glory and advance HIS Gospel.

That's the reason why God has given us these gifts. That's why Jesus entrusted these talents to us while He is away with the Father. But Jesus is also coming again!

Return: *God will show us what He accomplished through our gifts.*

Jesus will return. Just as He said and just as He showed us in the Parable of the Talents.

When He does, we will see the Kingdom of God coming in all its fulness.

We will see why God entrusted us with these gifts and told us to use them.

We will see everything God did through us. We will see everything we left undone, too.

What if we used our gifts for God's glory and mission?

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 12:7 that our gifts are not ours to hoard.

In chapter 12 Paul says that all spiritual gifts are given by God and powered by Him.

Then in **1 Corinthians 12:7** he tells us that we all get gifts and why: To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

That word "common good" in our Bibles is even more powerful in the original language.

The Greek word is **"SYMPHERO"**. Literally, it means that "we carry together."

To the ancient Greek philosophers it meant what was good for the city. You did what was good for the city even if it wasn't best for you.

Imagine! The ancient Greeks understood something that is fundamental to the Gospel.

And here, Paul picks up that concept and applies it to our gifts.

God gives us our gifts for the good of the Church, for the good of all, for the good of God's mission. Our gifts are not ours to hoard.

Thinking about the common good led Milton Hershey to do astounding things in Hershey, PA.

Like others in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, he built a massive business making and selling chocolate.

But he spread his success around. He built the town of Hershey, Pennsylvania. From the start, he wanted to build it for the benefit of everyone who worked for and with him.

He built a bank, a hotel, a school, churches, parks. He added a golf course and zoo.

He wanted his employees to have a high quality of life.

When the depression hit, he kept building to keep people working.

Hershey and his wife even started a school for orphans that still exists today.³

Milton Hershey used his God-given gifts for the common good.

Thinking about God's glory and mission led Fred and Kasandra O'Brien to the Dominican Republic.

Fred and Kasandra were living comfortable lives here in the United States, here at Valley.

But then, as they went to the Dominican Republic on mission trips, they sensed a calling.

God was calling them to move to the DR to use their gifts with Kids Alive. And they did.

Yes, they are providing homes for orphans, sharing the Gospel, and making disciples.

They are also providing school (would the word "education" be better here?) to many more children and reaching out to families.

Kasandra has become an expert in trauma-related care for children and is equipping workers across the Americas to make them more effective in their work.

Fred is using his baseball expertise to help boys play, avoid pitfalls, and possibly build a future for themselves, all while learning about Jesus.

So many gifts! So much glory for God! All while advancing the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

³ <https://hersheystory.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Milton-Hershey-The-Man-Behind-The-Chocolate.pdf>

What would it look like for YOU to use your gifts for God's glory and mission?

God has given you spiritual gifts.

He has shaped your heart, given you unique abilities, created you with a personality, and given you one-of-a-kind experiences. Trust me. What God has given you IS a gift. It's a miracle really.

And it's all to be used for His glory and mission. What God can do through you is amazing!

What is it? I can't wait to see!