

## **An Investment That Pays Off**

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**Rich Nathan**

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**Blessed to be a Blessing Series**

**Matthew 25:14-30**

I want to share with you a story from this congregation. About 16 months ago a member of our church, Scott Bell, was riding a dirt bike along with his son at a friend's house. He was going about 15 mph and he happened to hit a little rut that had been carved out by some rain. As a result of hitting that little rut, Scott went over the top of the bike, landed funny on an embankment and broke his neck. He broke his neck (if you know anything about the spine) at C1 and C3 to C5. He didn't injure himself in any other way. He wasn't otherwise bruised except he fell funny and broke his neck. Because he broke his neck, this 45-year old member of our church, with a wife, three kids, and a business, ended up as a quadriplegic.

For 15 months he had medical crisis after medical crisis. He nearly died innumerable times. His care ran through all of the family's health insurance. So along with being a quadriplegic, losing all of his mobility, losing his health suddenly, his family suffered a most severe financial trial. And then just a little over a month ago, Scott Bell, at age 46, finally died.

There have been several things that have been remarkable to me through the course of this great crisis in one of our church family's lives. One of the things that, in the midst of profound grief and pain, Scott's wife, Christy, has continued to serve the Lord. Christy has overseen a ministry of our church called "Mourning Touch." Many of you don't know that Vineyard does funerals for people in our community that are without any financial resource. Young adults who are shot in gang violence, babies who die at Children's Hospital – we've literally done dozens of funerals in this community and paid for the burial expenses – the coffin, the plot of ground. The money you put in the poor boxes in the back, following our services when I say: Will you put in a \$1 or \$2 in those boxes in the back for the poor, part of that money goes to pay for the funerals of the poor in our community. What a ministry Christy has overseen over the last decade.

With our pastors, she has stepped into some of the most painful situations facing families in our city. And we've had the chance to minister to thousands and thousands of people in the hour of their greatest need. Just a week ago, a 17-year old was shot and killed. There was Christy, who herself was obviously still grieving the loss of her husband, arranging for the funeral of this 17-year old boy.

Last weekend, a young woman gave her life to Christ here at church, and there was Christy up front praying for this woman, befriending her, helping her get connected with a small group and with a Bible.

You don't know what your life is built on, friend, until you face a crisis. Now, most of us are not going to face the size of crisis that the Bell Family faced. But there will be a curve in the road for every single one of us. The curve in the road might be the death of a spouse, or the inability to get pregnant, cancer, a heart-attack, the betrayal by someone close to you. The curve in the road may be your divorce, or a layoff, or a broken engagement.

Through this crisis I saw in flesh and blood Scott's wife, Christy, continually follow Jesus. I saw her continue to have joy in the midst of great pain. I saw her express faith. I talked with her the day after Scott's funeral and I said, "Christy, what's it been like the last 15 months?"

She said, "Oh Rich, it has been tough. But we received so much blessing from God for fifteen months. I could not turn around without having someone calling to encourage me and my kids. Every other day I got another card in the mail. I'd go to CVS or Meijers and someone would come up to me and say, 'I'm praying for you. I heard about your situation.' People came by saying they were worried about the kids and took them out."

Christians came over and retro-fitted the house to make it wheelchair accessible. A couple in our church gave them a computer and was training Scott in how to work on the computer through voice activation. During the 15 months following Scott's accident, there were countless meals brought to the Bell's. Whenever Christy needed to go to the grocery and couldn't because she was running back and forth to the hospital, someone went to the grocery for her. People picked up the kids for her.

She said that through the 15 months and all the roller-coaster rides of up and down with Scott's health, the crises, and the financial problems that she constantly had the feeling before God of, "God, why have you been so generous with me? Why are you providing so lavishly? Why are you blessing us so much? I'm almost embarrassed by how supported you've made me."

I could go on and on talking about what individuals did. Tree of Life Christian School held a gigantic garage sale for the Bell's and raised a whole bunch of money for the family. I can tell you this, though, that support and blessing would not have been there had Christy not been obedient to God for years in developing deep relationships with other Christians, had Christy not been involved for years in ministry to many, many other people in the community, when she came to a time of need, she would have had no one to turn to.

Parenthetically, we sometimes have people complain and say: You know, I turned to the church during my time of crisis and I was not helped. Friend, the church is just people. It isn't any entity or organization apart from people. And if you've invested yourself in people and in relationships in this church, then in your time of crisis, God will bless you through those invested relationships. But if you haven't, what you are going to discover is that there is a thinness of support. There is a general principle that as you have sown, so shall you reap. Christy gave a lot to a lot of people for a lot of years. Christy lives an invested life. In her time of extreme need, her investment paid off.

I've called today's talk, *An Investment That Pays Off*. Let's pray.

Matthew 25:14-30

#### SLIDE

Mt 25:14 "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them.

Mt 25:15 To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.

Mt 25:16 The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more.

Mt 25:17 So also, the one with the two talents gained two more.

Mt 25:18 But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

Mt 25:19 "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.

Mt 25:20 The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.'

Mt 25:21 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

Mt 25:22 "The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.'

Mt 25:23 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

Mt 25:24 "Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed.

Mt 25:25 So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

Mt 25:26 "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed?

Mt 25:27 Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

Mt 25:28 " 'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents.

Mt 25:29 For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.  
Mt 25:30 And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Jesus is in Jerusalem. His disciples have followed him down from Galilee in the North through Samaria and into Jerusalem. Despite Jesus' warnings that what he would face in Jerusalem was rejection, suffering and ultimately death on a cross, the disciples' expectation of the immediate overthrow of the Roman oppressors and the reestablishment of Jewish rule over the land of Israel was at an all-time high.

Just think about what the disciples had seen and heard. Wherever Jesus appeared in public, huge crowds gathered from everywhere. And everyone he touched was healed. Demonized people were delivered from life-long oppression. People who were blind from birth received their sight. The deaf heard. Crippled people stood up and walked. And the dead were raised. In fact, just a few days before Jesus gave this teaching in Matthew 25, he called a man named Lazarus out of a tomb. Lazarus, his friend, had been dead for four days. And the disciples watched as Lazarus walked alive out of a grave. Then Jesus rode into Jerusalem to the shouts of a great crowd of people who heralded him as Messiah, the Conquering King.

What do you think the disciples expected despite Jesus' warnings to the contrary? Imagine if you experienced what the disciples experienced. Do you ever imagine what it might have been like to hang out with Jesus? Imagine if you actually got to hang out with Jesus and you saw hospitals empty out, kids getting off of their dialysis machines and being healed of leukemia, transplant patients no longer needing transplants, cancer being healed. You drive around the city with Jesus and he stops funeral processions and you get to see the dead person climb out from in back of the hearse.

Imagine if you sat in the audience and got to hear Jesus teach. You hear him speak the most penetrating and insightful, wisest words that anyone has ever spoken. Imagine if you got to see him up close and watched the way he interacted with people. And you noticed that he stops talking to senators when a child draws near. "Excuse me, Senator," and there is Jesus stooping down to welcome a child. Over and over you watch Jesus get up from power lunches to talk with a busboy to swap jokes with him, and to pray with him for his family.

Imagine if all of this happened in the midst of an extremely volatile political situation, say in the weeks and months immediately following 9/11. And further imagine, if you expected your whole life, like the disciples were, that when Messiah came, he would immediately usher in a new world. No more tears, no more sickness, no more sorrow, no more death, there would be peace on earth,

no more wars, hunger, poverty, or violence. Food for all, justice for all, housing for all.

Why does Jesus tell the story that he does in Matthew 25? He tells this parable specifically to confront the overheated desires and the imaginations of the disciples in every age. He tells this parable to warn us against our utopian visions and our all too human ideals. Jesus was looking ahead and he saw in front of him the shadow of the cross. He saw the darkness that would come over the city of Jerusalem at noon time. He saw that he was about to have to drink the cup of the wrath of God to the very last drop. He still had to become the sacrificial Lamb of God who would pay for the sins of the world.

And his disciples had to be prepared for pain and disappointment, and a very long delay before the kingdom of God would come in its fullness. This parable was told to assist Jesus' followers in every age to deal with the delays in the coming of the kingdom. Vv. 14-16,

#### SLIDE

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Mt 25:15 To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.

Mt 25:16 The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more.

And, according to v. 19, his return was going to be delayed for a long time.

#### SLIDE

Mt 25:19 "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.

Brothers and sisters, we are embarking on a great adventure together as a church. Over the last month and a half, I've talked with you about Vineyard's plans to build a community center that would serve our community by offering a daycare center, medical and legal services, vocational training, and expanded sports program, tutoring, arts, dance, an expanded after-school program. We want to use this community center as a launching pad into our city. We want to start businesses and to really impact the structures and landscape of Central Ohio. We want to do training for parents, and work with single moms and unattached fathers to assist them in assuming the huge responsibility of being a parent.

The prospect of what God will do through our obedience to his will, is incredibly exciting.

We are also planning to raise up entire teams from this church to go to Africa and Asia and to plant churches among unreached peoples. The prospect of what God will do internationally as we obey him is also truly exciting.

We've been holding personal contact meetings here at the church every night of the week. If you have not been to one of these informational meetings about this campaign and the role you can play, I want to encourage you to please go this week. Take an evening and come out. In fact, we scheduled an additional meeting at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday. So come out and get involved in what your church is doing.

In one of our personal contact meetings the other night, a long-time member of our church listened to individuals' questions and then he very wisely said, "You know, I've been part of this church since we were less than 200 people and we were meeting in a small building on Lehner Road, south of Morse Road. I've watched this church risk and stretch itself out to build the original building here on Cooper Road. We had no idea then what God would do. I watched the church risk and stretch itself out when we built this new auditorium. I watched this church send out church plants all over America and around the world. I frankly don't think that we have any concept regarding the scope of what God will do, if we take this step, but I think we need to take this step. It is really exciting to consider what the Lord will do as we obey him by building this community center and sending out missions teams around the world.

But this parable is a warning to us. It is easy for us to project our ideals and our utopian dreams up to the sky and to suggest that all of our dreams are God's dreams; that all of our thoughts are God's thoughts. It is easy to go into this project like the disciples and assume that our timing for someone's life to change is the same as God's timing.

Let me put it this way. I believe that nothing will be ultimately more destructive to the long-term success of this community center and our world missions plans than a lack of preparedness on our part for delay and disappointment and difficulty. I say this with all affection, but I believe that most Christians have no mechanism, emotionally and spiritually, for dealing with disappointment and delay. We attend a healing seminar that trained us to pray for the sick and then a loved one get sick. We pray for them just like the healing seminar taught us to, but they don't immediately get better, so we say: What's the point? I feared this healing business was too good to be true. Jesus doesn't heal. Nothing has changed in the world as a result of Jesus' first coming. People still get sick. People still go to the hospital. People still die at the time doctors predict. I'm not going to get my hopes up ever again by praying for another sick person expecting God to answer my prayers and heal them.

Or we invite someone to church. We meet someone in our workplace or at school, or a family member. Perhaps we've even been praying for them for months. And this person agrees to have lunch after church in our home. We are really looking forward to it. We straighten up our house and prepare a nice meal. We stand in the church lobby at the place we agreed to meet, but they don't show up. We quickly walk to the other side of the lobby looking for them; worship starts and we're still waiting. We wait all the way until the announcements are given, but our friend never shows up.

Many of us, friends, do not have a worked out mechanism emotionally, spiritually, or theologically to deal with dashed dreams and unfulfilled hopes. We go to marriage counseling and talk and talk and talk and nothing ever seems to change. How do you handle a lack of change in your marriage where you pray and pray for a loved one's salvation, but nothing seems to be going on. In fact, things seem to go from bad to worse. How do you deal with unanswered prayers or unfulfilled dreams?

How many of you are familiar with the name James Stockdale? Admiral James Stockdale was the highest ranking, US military officer in the "Hanoi Hilton" POW camp during the Viet Nam War. Jim Stockdale was tortured over 20 times during his 8 year imprisonment from 1965-1973. Stockdale lived out the war without any prisoners' rights. No Geneva Convention applied to him. No set release date, no certainty that he would survive to see his family again.

He also had responsibility for the other prisoners in this camp. He fought a war against his captors who wanted to use him and other prisoners for propaganda purposes. At one point, he beat himself with a stool and cut himself with a razor deliberately disfiguring himself so that he could not be put on video tape as an example of a well-treated prisoner.

He came up with a system for prisoners to communicate with each other secretly. He instituted rules that helped people to deal with torture. Stockdale said no one could resist torturers indefinitely. Eventually, you will break down. So he set up rules to help people emotionally deal with the fact that they were being forced to disclose things. After so many minutes you were allowed to say certain things. After more minutes you were allowed to say other things. It gave men a set of guidelines and milestones – something to shoot for, to aim for.

Admiral Jim Stockdale became the first 3-Star Officer in the history of the Navy, to wear both Aviator Wings and the Congressional Medal of Honor. Jim Stockdale was asked: How were you able to make it? How did you get through the delay and disappointment, when you didn't know the end of the story?

Jim Stockdale said: "I never lost faith in the end of the story. I never doubted not only that I would get out, but also that I would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining event of my life. In retrospect, I would not trade it."

He was then asked: Who didn't make it out?

Stockdale said: "Oh, that's easy. The optimists. The optimists were the ones who said: We're going to be out by Christmas. Christmas would come and go. Then they would say: We're going to be out by Easter. Easter would come and go. And then Thanksgiving, and then Christmas again – and they would die of a broken heart." Stockdale summed it up. He said: "This is a very important lesson. You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end—what you can never afford to lose—with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality whatever they might be. We're not getting out by Christmas. Deal with it. But we will prevail in the end."

Brothers and sisters, there are going to be people who come to our community center who will most certainly try to work the system. We will encounter people who are users and guilt-manipulators. There will be folks we reach out to who will slip back into drugs and alcohol. There will be kids who come who threaten our kids. There will be angry, demanding, utterly self-centered folks who have no boundaries and who never show gratitude.

And in world missions, one of our church plants may grow slowly, much more slowly than we like. And a missionary may get sick. A marriage may blow up. Financial support may evaporate.

We're not getting out by Christmas! But we will win in the end! That is Jesus' message. The kingdom of God is not fully here. Jesus, in this parable, is emotionally and spiritually preparing us for delays. Whatever you are disappointed about today, friends, whatever you are struggling with regarding delays, listen to the wisdom of this parable and the wisdom learned in the fire of torture by Jim Stockdale. Face the brutal facts of reality and delay, but always, always have an unwavering faith that in the end you will prevail.

Jesus says: In the end, after the delay, the kingdom of God will triumph and we will triumph with it. Vv. 19-23,

#### SLIDE

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Let’s realistically face the brutal facts. Our city has problems. Schools in our city are woefully under-funded. We face a medical crisis in Columbus, tens of thousands of people have no medical insurance and no access to decent medical care. Many young men in our city have not had positive role models and are on a train that will surely deposit them in prison. There is very little good fathering training in our city.

Around the world there are billions of people who live without Christ, without hope, in poverty and hunger. Some sell their own children; their own bodies into slavery and prostitution. There are so many brutal facts that we must look at in the face and accept. We will not overcome these brutal facts by Christmas. But we will prevail in the end. The Kingdom of God will triumph. And you who choose to be obedient to God’s will in your life will triumph with it. We will prevail in the end!

Now, I want you to notice that the people the master distributed the talents to are called “servants.” V. 14,

#### SLIDE

Mt 25:14 “Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them.

Servanthood is the most powerful force of transformation this world has ever known. If those of us who call ourselves Christians simply adopted this identity, I am a servant on assignment in this world from my master, Jesus Christ, we would turn this world upside down. If the 6000-7000 of us who gather at Vineyard on the weekend went into our homes, workplaces, schools, and ministries with this mindset: I am a servant on assignment from my Master, Jesus Christ, our city would never be the same. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “Jesus gave us a new norm of greatness...He who is greatest among you shall be your servants, that’s a knee definition of greatness...you only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love to change the world.”

As we serve people through our community center and in what we are doing in world missions, barriers to the gospel will melt away. There is an old saying, there is only one way to God, that is through Jesus Christ, our Savior, but that there are a thousand ways to Jesus.

- Some people may come to Jesus by being helped to find a job.
- Some people may come to Jesus in a parenting class.
- Some may come to Jesus because a lawyer helped them with their legal crisis.
- Some may come to Jesus because they joined a recovery group.

By building a community center, we want to offer the city of Columbus thousands of opportunities to come to Jesus. Because it is only through Jesus that a person is going to be able to come to God.

By sending missionaries out around the world, we also adopt his mindset: I am a servant on assignment from my Master, Jesus Christ. We want to create thousands of opportunities for people around the world to come to Jesus. Because it is only through Jesus that a person can come to God.

Now, what did the master give his servants? He gave his servants talents, v. 15.

#### SLIDE

Mt 25:15 To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.

A talent was a measure of weight in the ancient world that weighed somewhere between 58-80 pounds. It could be made up of different kinds of metal. A talent could be 60 pounds of gold, silver, or copper. And it became a kind of coinage. A laborer in Jesus' day could make a talent of money after 20 years of labor. That is why the NIV notes at the bottom of your page that a talent was worth more than \$1000 is woefully inaccurate. If a laborer today makes \$25,000 a year, in 20 years we're talking about \$500,000. This is a huge amount of money.

If you read the commentaries, you will find a dozen opinions on the contemporary application of what a talent would be today. Some say your talents are your gifts, your natural gifts, or your spiritual gifts. Some say your talents are your opportunities for service. Some say your talents are the opportunities you have to share the gospel. Some say your talents are your money.

I think Jesus left this deliberately vague because he wanted us to apply this parable to our entire life. A talent is all that God has given you – good and bad. Your talents include your gifts, natural and supernatural. Your talents include your opportunities to serve and to share the message of the gospel. Your talents include your money.

But your talents also include the negative experiences of your life. What God has saved you out of – promiscuity, drug use, a divorce, depression, eating disorders, unemployment – whatever God has done in your life to deliver you, to redeem you, to teach you and grow you, and to mold you through negative experiences, that is what he wants you to invest in other people's lives. Those learning, growing, and saving experiences are some of the greatest talents you have.

Jim Stockdale's life-defining moments took place in a POW camp in Hanoi Viet Nam, some of the things that will change your life for the good will be God's deliverance of you from places of sin, pain, and grief in your life.

The reason I underline the negative stuff you have been saved out of as one of your talents is because this is so often neglected. God wants a return on everything, literally everything he has done in your life and my life. Someone else can benefit from the school of hard knocks that we've been too. There are people who can receive comfort from the comfort the Lord gave you in your hour of need. Whatever you have learned from, whatever you have grown from – misunderstanding, unfair treatment, rotten jobs, and sudden lay-offs – if you say to the Lord: Lord, let me learn from this. Let me grow from this. Don't let this pain go wasted in my life. That friend, can become a talent to invest in other people.

Now, the Lord gives talents according to his evaluation of his servant's capacities. Apparently, the Lord evaluates people's capacity differently. He loves us all the same. He doesn't have favorite children. If you have trusted in Christ, you are a dearly loved son or daughter. But the Lord does not give us all the same capacities. Some people are what I would call high capacity people. Vv. 16-17,

#### SLIDE

Mt 25:16 The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more.

Mt 25:17 So also, the one with the two talents gained two more

Do you know any high capacity people? Let me share with you two stories of high capacity people who invested their talents as God directed them.

Let me tell you about a man named Don Harris. Don Harris recognized that in the US most net worth was found in people's homes. Homeowners get better tax breaks than renters. A home is one of the few appreciating assets that people own. But Don realized that many people with full-time jobs and good credit are unable to obtain home loans because they are never able to save enough money for the down payment.

Then Don noticed something else. Most sellers sell their homes for 3-7% below their asking price. He put these two pieces of information together and began the Nehemiah Corporation, built around a 3-way cycle. Nehemiah Corporation gives potential homeowners with good credit, but no savings, 3% of the asking price under these conditions: The homeowner pay the asking price of the house; and the seller rebates 3% to Nehemiah Corporation.

It is a brilliant solution that required the right guy with a good head on his shoulders and a desire to use his position to help the poor. Since 1997

Nehemiah Corporation has assisted over 160,000 families to buy homes. And they've provided more than \$600 million dollars in down payments.

Does the name Bill Gates, Senior mean anything to you? He is the father of Bill Gates, Jr., the founder of Microsoft. He also helps to run his son's multi-billion dollar foundation. He is a very active Episcopalian. He co-authored a book titled *Wealth and Commonwealth: Why America Should Tax Accumulated Fortunes*. Here is what Bill Gates, Sr. says:

"Judaism, Christianity and Islam all affirm the right of individual ownership and private property. But there are moral limits imposed on absolute private ownership of wealth and property. Each tradition affirms that we are not individuals alone, but exist in community – a community that makes claims upon us. The notion that 'it is all mine' is a violation of these teachings and traditions...society's claim on individual accumulated wealth is a fundamentally American notion rooted in recognition of society's direct and indirect investment in an individual's success. In other words, we didn't get here on our own."

Gates, Sr. goes on and says:

"I believe that one's obligation to society grows in proportion to how much one has benefited. In other words, the more you have, the more you owe."

I believe God has given the Vineyard a treasure chest full of high capacity people. There is so much talent here in this church.

- Some of you are artists
- Some of you are musicians
- Some of you are athletes
- We have business people
- We have chefs
- Car mechanics
- Lawyers
- Medical personnel
- Great dads and great moms
- People who have overcome addictions and adversities and have really learned how to help other people.

In your bulletin there is an insert. It is titled "Opportunities to Serve." Listen, this community center will not open up for a year and a half. We're not going to break ground on it until late Spring. But many of you have already approached me or one of the other pastors or leaders in the church with ideas and dreams, things that God has put in your hearts. We don't want to lose those things.

So I'm going to ask you to take this home, if you need time to fill it out, or fill this out today and drop it by the information counter. There are a few specific areas where we have immediate needs, and you can check some of those boxes. In

any case, write down something that God has done and you will be getting contacted by our volunteers ministry department.

If you say: Rich, I really don't know where exactly I might fit. I would like to serve somewhere, but I'm not really sure what my gifts or talents exactly are and how they would tie to something in the church or community center.

We have a class here titled "Discovering Your Ministry" and I would like you to open your bulletin and circle it. It is hosted on March 5<sup>th</sup> here at the church at 9:00 a.m. Serving is one of the best ways you can grow. So many folks find that they try to read their bibles, they pray, they go to small groups, but they don't feel like they are really growing. The missing ingredient of growth in many Christians lives is serving, investing yourself.

I love seeing people investing themselves not only in the church, but in every area of their lives. I love seeing people invest themselves in their professions. Some teachers really invest themselves in their classes. They are continually learning and growing and reading. They care about kids. One music teacher in our church recently put on a music program at her elementary school. When she was giving out parts, she prayed and said: Lord, who not only has the talent for this part, but who needs to experience a "win" in their lives? Which of these children need to have an experience of achievement and accomplishment? Give me eyes to see who needs a "win." This is a teacher who has brought the kingdom of God into her workplace in a world of disgruntled bureaucrats and paper pushers and time wasters. I love hearing about how people invest themselves in their work.

We have high capacity people here. One of the talents that many of you have is the talent to earn a good living. Many of you have good jobs. Brothers and sisters, do you realize that your very capacity to earn money has been given to you by God? That's what Deuteronomy 8:18 says.

#### SLIDE

Dt 8:18 But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today.

Those of you who have been given the capacity to earn money beyond your immediate needs, you need to invest your money in the kingdom of God.

Let me share with you a story that I heard Chuck Colson tell here in Columbus several years ago: Many of you know that Chuck Colson was the chief legal counsel in the White House during the Nixon years when the whole Watergate thing came down. Colson was in severe crisis, facing a long-term prison sentence. He experienced a personal meltdown and came to Christ. He

eventually did go to prison and from that experience started a movement to minister to prisoners called "Prison Fellowship." It is one of the most effective prison ministries in the world today.

While Colson was raising money for Prison Fellowship, one of his young associates called a well-off farmer and solicited that farmer for a gift. When Colson heard what his young associate did, he was mortified. He called the farmer up and apologized. He said: You know, this young associate of mine is brash, new and a little forward. I want to apologize for his solicitation.

The farmer cut him off. The old farmer said to him: Chuck, I've got just two questions for you. Number one: Are you calling me to apologize because you don't think I have the amount of money that your associate asked for?

Chuck was really surprised. He said: Well, sir, I suppose you do have that amount of money.

The farmer said; Well, here's my second question. Do you have a better investment for me than the kingdom of God?

Chuck Colson said: No sir, I don't.

He said then: Why are you calling me to apologize about the best investment I will ever make?

I will tell you, friends, I can't apologize for asking you in this capital campaign to invest generously in the kingdom of God. It is the best financial investment you will ever make.

Jesus finally talks about the negligent investor. V. 18, 24-29

#### SLIDE

Mt 25:18 But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

Mt 25:24 "Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed.

Mt 25:25 So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

Mt 25:26 "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed?

Mt 25:27 Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

Mt 25:28 " 'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents.

Mt 25:29 For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.

You know, I believe our church, as a whole, can be a negligent investor. Vineyard can be the wicked, lazy servant who buries people's talents.

If you go to many large cities in the Third World, often in a downtown area there will be people with signs advertising their particular occupation. Someone might have a sign that says: Carpenter. Someone might have a sign saying: Electrician or Plumber, or Mechanic. There they sit in a downtown square waiting to be hired.

On good days contractors will come and hire them. It is a very efficient market – supply and demand abounds for the day.

In a church where we have thousands of people milling around, the church is always looking for laborers. We are always looking for people who have a sign saying: Children's Ministry; Youth Ministry; After-School Program; Usher; Greeter; Worship Team; Host Family for a Small Group. But lots of people have other signs: Doctor; Lawyer; Basketball Coach; Auto Mechanic; Business Person. And in lots of cases, the church can't use the jobs that people have in a ministry setting.

But you know when the Labor Department puts out figures and tells us that the unemployment rate is over 6%, America views it as a crisis. If the unemployment rate went to 20%, we would say we were in the middle of a depression. At Vineyard Columbus there may be something like 50% of our folks who have no ministry in the church and we feel great about that because it is so much better than at other churches.

Friends, we are guilty of burying the talents of so many people. What if we expanded our definition of ministry? What if ministry didn't simply terminate within the church, but we started to connect the talents here in the church with the needs in our city? We have people in our city with enormous needs and we have people in our church who are desperate to make a difference. What if we could link them together? What if there was a way to engage the passions and the talents of 100% of our church? What if 100% could invest?

Of course, this parable doesn't only apply to negligent churches. It also applies to individuals. Lots of people will not invest like this lazy servant, there is some reason many individuals hold back. Maybe they are afraid that if they invest, they will be hurt, they will put themselves at risk. Maybe they simply don't trust that the Lord will hold up his end of the bargain if they stretch themselves out. Maybe you are one of those uncommitted negligent servants.

I say this with all affection, but some of you won't commit to our church or to any church. Perhaps because you don't agree with every single thing, or you have been hurt in the past. You've had some relational bruises, or you just don't like commitment. Maybe you are the kind of person who likes keeping your options open, keeping yourself safe. You observe and critique, but you won't invest.

Jesus teaches here that whoever won't invest loses. V. 28-29,

#### SLIDE

Mt 25:28 “ ‘Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents.

Mt 25:29 For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.

Some of you won't invest in your marriages. You and your spouse just go through the motions. You may as well be business partners. But despite the fact that your marriage is way less than satisfying, you won't invest in counseling. You won't put yourself on the line and be really honest. You say: What's the point of counseling? What's the point of going to a marriage seminar and putting myself on the line? Why should I try to reconcile this marriage? Why should I end this separation? Some of you are separated, but you still hold yourself back and you won't reinvest. You say: Why should I? I'm going to keep my partner at arm's length. I'll avoid him or her by working an insane number of hours, by just skimming the surface and not diving into the tough issues that are between us. Let's be business partners. Keep a nice, safe, comfortable distance inside our own little bubbles.

Jesus says: If you won't invest in your marriage, you lose. Everyone who won't invest loses.

Some of you have very few friends. I talked with a colleague in ministry recently and I asked him: Who do you open up to? Who do you talk to about your marriage, your struggles, and your lust?

He said: No one. I have tons of acquaintances, but no real friends.

What are you going to do when your life hits a curve, like Christy Bell's life hit a curve? She had invested and when her family experienced crisis, her investment paid off. But for those of you who have not invested, when your life hits a curve, I say this with affection, but you may find yourself all alone.

Let me make a final point here. Jesus teaches that whenever we refuse to invest, we are making a statement about our view of God. The wicked servant said in vv. 24, 25,



## SLIDE

Mt 25:24 "Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed.

Mt 25:25 So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

If I invest, my master will leave me in the lurch. If I put myself on the line, I will get the short end of the stick. God will not come through for me. When you refuse to invest, or to commit to a church, you are making a statement about your view of God. When you refuse to generously invest money in the kingdom of God, you are making a statement about your view of God. When you refuse to invest in your marriage, you are making a statement about your view of God. When you refuse to invest in friendships, or in your work, or in your education, or in your kids, you are making a statement about your view of God. You are saying: I do not trust the Lord enough to hold up his end of the bargain. I don't believe that if I invest, I will prevail in the end and I will share the joy of my Master, Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, what kind of investment is God calling you to make regarding this capital campaign? What kind of investment is God calling you to make in this city through the community center or the world? What area of your life is God saying you need to invest more in? Brothers and sisters, do you believe, do you trust the Lord enough to thoroughly invest your lives? Let's pray.

## **An Investment That Pays Off**

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**Rich Nathan**

**February 19-20, 2005**

**Blessed to be a Blessing Series**

**Matthew 25:14-30**

- I. The Realistic Investor (Mt. 25:14-16, 19)
  - A. Wishes and Dreams
  - B. Disappointment and Delay
  - C. Reality and Unwavering Faith (Mt. 25:21-23)
- II. The High Capacity Investor (Mt. 25:16, 17)
  - A. All Are Servants
  - B. All Have Talents
  - C. Some Have High Capacity
- III. The Neglectful Investor (Mt. 25:18, 24-29)
  - A. The Neglectful Church
  - B. The Neglectful Individual