

10.15.17 – 10.22.17

The 521 (Intro)

What are we doing with what we have been given? Are we giving life to others, or are we squeezing that life out of them? Are we maximizing and multiplying our time, talent, and treasure? What is our plan for using what God has given to us for leading growth, equipping believers, and enriching the lives of others?

We will begin the 2017 fall season at Reunion by answering these type questions with what we will call "The 521." The 521 is based on the parable of Jesus in Mathew's gospel chapter twenty-five. The Master gives talents (5, 2, and 1) to three different servants, each according to their skill and ability – and then he goes away. His return, response, and expectations are uniquely significant and entirely relevant to us.

Among the many messages, an overriding truth in this parable could truly be an understanding that the mere possession of the talents given by the master is not evidence of approval or salvation – everyone doesn't get a trophy. This message is not a contradiction – it is a confirmation (more on this later!)

I know the idea that we have **all been given some type or kind of gifts in this life** (as it relates to this story), is not a groundbreaking revelation. But it is interesting to unpack the reality that not everyone uses those gifts to do or share something valuable with what they have been given. It is also

interesting that the approval and salvation we often seek in this life is uniquely and intentionally attached to growing and multiplying that gift in encouragement, service, and leadership of others. And within that reality lies the message and the mission of the parable of the 521.

Hardly any parable has any more intrigue than the parable of the talents. We believe that there is a breath of new life in this parable, and that its message and mission are for us individually as leaders, and for the entire community at Reunion. Join me, in 'The 521.'

521 Story and Context

The parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30 is the sixth and final illustration that Jesus used to relate to being prepared for the second advent (coming). Like previous images and illustrations, the interpretation of the story is intended to connect with those who will be waiting and wanting Christ's second coming to the earth rather than the rapture of the church from earth. The practical application of the principles involved, however, may best be considered by those who are looking forward to not only the second coming and the rapture of the Church, but also the righteous judgment of Christ as well. Why piece it things together when ultimately we are going to need and face it all?

Just a thought... the context of the 521 is not about a master who takes his servants from earth to heaven, but rather a master who returns to the scene of earth and judges his servants.

The 521 story does not direct its message to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, like in the parable of the ten virgins, but rather deals with the expectation and judgment of works as they relate to loving and faithful service as the fruit (evidence) of right relationship with Jesus. The parable views life in relationship to service, and the proper use of a given opportunity as evidence of preparedness and expectation of the return of the master or as in our case, the return of Jesus.

John 9:4-5

We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.

The 521 begins in verse 14 of Matthew 25, where Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a man traveling into a far country who calls his own servants and gives them his own goods. The reference to **"the kingdom of heaven"** is not included from some translations/manuscripts, but the context for the 521 is obviously attached to the period time before the Lord's second advent/coming. It was quite customary in the ancient world for a man to turn his property over to a servant, often a slave, who would administer his business for him in his absence. According to verse 15, he called in three servants. To the one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, **"to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey."** A talent is a sum of money, which varied in its value at different periods of time in history. A talent was actually a literal weight of money ranging from 58 to 80 pounds. A silver talent

varied from \$1000 to \$2000 in value. A gold talent could be worth more than \$30,000. It is probable that these talents were silver talents, and that they were worth about \$2,000 apiece, but if they were gold talents, they were worth about \$30,000 apiece. The purchasing power of this money should be viewed in a context of a person who would work all day for 15¢. The value of a talent was much greater in proportion than it is in our modern world. So the five-talent man, if they were gold talents, received \$150,000, or if silver, \$10,000. In purchasing power today, this would be equivalent to a fortune. The two-talent man, accordingly may have received as much as \$60,000, and the one-talent man \$30,000, if they were gold talents. The idea of course is that the master gave them a gift of great value.

The value of the talents is important because it establishes the confidence and level of trust that the master had in these men. However, he did not have trust or confidence in them equally - so he gave them different responsibility, of different value, with the same expectation. In verse 16, it says that they immediately got busy. **"Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents."** Then as now in business, it is possible to make money, but it is also possible to lose money. It is obvious that this servant must have been a careful and shrewd businessman in order to be able to double his money. The two-talent man did likewise: **"And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two."** He also doubled his money. **"But he that had received one went and dug in the earth, and hid his master's money"**

(Matthew 25:18). Here the word for “money” is the word for silver (Grk. argurion), but in this context can mean any kind of money.

The story of the 521 is not over.

Matt 25:19-20

“Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.”

The work that was involved in this five-talent gain was extraordinary and not easy, but how proud was this moment for the servant as he gave account of what had been committed to him. He could report that he had gained five talents more. And the master commended him:

Matthew 25:21

“Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.”

Then we are told that:

Matthew 25:22

“And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.’”

In verse 23 the master commends the two-talent servant with exactly the same words as the five-talent man:

“His master said to him, well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things: enter into the joy of your master.”

This introduces us to the biblical principle that good stewardship is always connected to faithfulness. It is not always how much, but always how faithful. The five-talent man and the two-talent man had been equally faithful and they received equal commendation and reward. This should bring hope and comfort to anyone who truly and faithfully serves God. It is a comfort and hope because as anyone who truly and faithfully serves looks around they inevitably will find someone who is more successful, gifted, and talented. Someone more intelligent or wealthier - that is how it is. It is obvious, that God does not give everyone the same talents and gifts. And it is also not quite true that all are created equal - just, that all are given gifts with equal opportunity. Reality check: Men and women are definitely created unequal, and no two of them are exactly alike in their stewardship (response) to what they have been given. But the significant factor is that at the judgment, as in the 521, it will not be a question of how much or how successful, but how faithful. The expectations of this master of his servants is only in proportion to what he has given to them. So there is a sense in which everyone has an equal opportunity to be rewarded.

The 521 takes a sudden twist with the one-talent man. When it comes his turn to report the fruit of his efforts he quickly and falsely attempted to excuse and justify his inactivity and lack of faithfulness:

Matthew 25:24-25

"He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.'

Clearly there was some sarcastic innuendo in the reply from the one-talent man - probably why he was the one talent man. He describes his master as a very controlling, difficult, shrewd businessman. He tells him that he is the kind of a man who reaps where he has not sown, and gathers where he has not spread - this was not true. In those days, boundaries sometimes were rather indefinite and they did not always bother to plow a field. They would just scatter the grain and it would grow. When it came to reaping, they were not above taking a little of the seed that had fallen on the neighbor's property. The one talent man insinuated that his master was the kind of person that got everything he could. He implied that the master was not completely ethical or honest. Again, this was not the case.

The master of the one talent servant does not bother responding to the charge, although he does not accept the verdict that he is a "hard" or difficult man. If the one talent servant really believed his master was as shrewd and difficult as he tried portray him he would have been much

more diligent and mindful to please him. Regardless, his response was no excuse. Of course, whenever a person fails to meet reasonable expectations or to do his or her duty, the default is always to find some excuse or someone else to blame. That is what the one talent man was doing. The third servant's estimate of his master as a hard money-making Jew who enriched himself at the cost of others, gathering gain where he had not spent, was untrue; but the master's point is that the servant, believing (in a self-deceptive way) as he did that it was true, should have been all the more concerned to see that he had something more to bring to his master on his return from his travels than the same bag of gold that he had been given! It is probably reasonable to assume that the one talent man had full knowledge of what the other two servants had done with the talents they had been given.

So, the master answers him directly:

Matt 25:26-27

"You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest."

The master's expectations, evaluation and judgment of the servant is pointed and painful. Why didn't this man simply put his money out at interest? This minimal effort would have been safe to do, and he would have had at least some income to report on what he had been given. But

instead, the one talent man went in the backyard and dug a hole and put the money in the hole and buried it. Hmmm...

Even in our modern day when people bury money in the backyard, it usually indicates something bad or at the very least - that something's not right. Perhaps they are trying to avoid tax, or maybe it was illegally acquired of somehow, because the normal, responsible thing is to put it in a bank. Why didn't the one-talent servant put it in the bank? Most opinions are usually pretty vague on this point. His master said that he was not only lazy, but wicked. But what was there that was wicked about this? Good question.

How about this? This one talent man gives in to some twisted scheme or dishonest reasoning. It is much like the thinking of Judas when he sold out Jesus. Judas reasoned, if Jesus is really the Messiah, my betrayal will not hurt anything, and I will get my money from the High Priest. If He is not the Messiah, then at least I get paid and don't come out of the whole thing empty handed. I believe the one-talent man reasoned in somewhat the same way. His master was going on a far journey. If the servant puts the money in the bank, he would have to register it in his master's name. If his master did not come back (which often times happened), his family could claim it. He thought, however, that if he buried it in the backyard, there would be no record of the money. If his master did not come back, the servant would have it. If he does come back, he could not accuse him of dishonesty because he could produce the talent. It was a cunning plan that was built upon uncertainty (lack of faith) that the Lord was returning.

He just did not believe that his master was coming back - in fact by burying the talent, he bet on it. If he had, he would have handled the money differently. This is what the master meant when he said that he was a wicked servant.

In verse 28, the judgment is given,

Matthew 25:28-29

"So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."

Verse 29 has been the subject of some controversy and debate. When it says, **"for to everyone who has, more will be given,"** the reasonable question is, **"To everyone who has what?"** Does it refer to everyone who has works, or to everyone who has faithful and moral character? What is the difference between the one-talent man, and the two-talent man, and the five-talent man? In the next few weeks we will profile each one and answer that question while making the connection to ourselves and the community at Reunion.

To be sure, their works were definitely different, and their character was somewhat distinct as well, but the point of the 521 is the five-talent man and the two-talent man believed their master was coming back and they worked in keeping with their faith and commitment to faithfully serve. I

am convinced the one-talent man did what he did because he did not believe. Belief is a game-changer, just as unbelief is a game-breaker. So ultimately it comes back to the question of the reality of faith in the words of their master. The expression **"to everyone that has"** means to everyone who has faith, everyone who has expectation in his master and Lord. Works are not the foundation of salvation; they are simply the evidence (fruit) of faith, and love for God. Here works are presented as an evidence of true faith and belief in the promise of Jesus to come again. What do you believe?

Verse 30 finishes the story:

"And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Hard... This outer darkness could not refer to the destiny of true Christians - genuine followers of Jesus. This one-talent man, while he was given opportunity to trust in his master and to serve him, did not really believe in the master's return. Is this a true Christian and follower? It is however typical of those who have heard and rejected the truth concerning the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The unprofitable servant is one who was not saved, not redeemed, and therefore not rewarded for his service. The 521, brings us up close to the application and image of the truth of the return of Jesus. It makes clear the relation of future hope to present and real-time faithfulness to Christ and what He has given us. Belief in the promises of

Jesus is revealed to us as an important evidence and fruit of our faith and an exciting and practical motivation for faithful service.

Supportive Scripture in 521 Context

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 5:1-11

Ephesians 2:4-10, 4:1-16

Philippians 3:12-21

10.29.17

The 521 Profile: The Five Talent Man

Then the man who had been given the five talents... The largest measure of gifts, the most trusted, the most faithful, responsible and honest. This is a brief profile that we can build, based on how he behaved, and responded in his master's absence, and what he did with the gifts he had been given. From the profile, we can make important personal and community connections.

First, we have to fully understand, the five-talent man is not just about one man, but of many men and many women – not all, but many. The connection has to be made to ourselves and to everyone who confesses to be a follower or servant of Jesus – that He has indeed given, blessed or entrusted us with something solely for the purpose of doing something with it. This is a spiritual reality for us - not just a story about someone like us.

Second, the connection must bring personal recognition to who we are in Christ – know yourself. Ask yourself the hard questions, "Am I a five-talent, two-talent, or one talent follower of Jesus?" *"We must truly know ourselves before we can fully show ourselves."* There is no need to become sensitive, insecure, critical, offended or judgmental. This is the opportunity of our lifetime. We can push the re-set on what who we are, and what we do with the rest of our lives – and we can do it right now. What are the gifts, skills, abilities, and passions that I have?

Thirdly, what is the plan? What am I going to do? Where am I going to serve? How can I maximize, optimize, and be fruitful with what I have been given?

The five-talent man was given the five talents because he had already shown that he knew who he was, he knew what he had, and he knew what he was going to do about it. He was motivated and not lazily content, he was inspired and not satisfied with staying where he was, with what he had. He was not motivated by evil, greed or selfish pride. He was motivated by his love and loyalty for his master. He was not arrogant or cocky, he was confident because he had a plan and was prepared. *This is who I am, and so this is how I will live. I will not undermine my potential, my possibilities, my opportunities, with decisions, choices and actions that conflict with that purpose, and contradict with that reality.*

The five-talent man immediately went and did not wait. He was responsive and ready to the opportunity to use what he had been given. He did not procrastinate, or push the moment away from its momentum. He wisely used the timing, and maximized the inspiration from being given such a great gift. Seizing, or being in the moment isn't just an experience, it is an opportunity to do something with that experience... to make the experience more than a memory or feeling. Seizing the moment is capturing the momentum of the experience and doing something valuable and meaningful with it. In the story of the five-talent man he used the moment of being given the five-talents from the man he most loved and admired to double his gift. The five--talent did not waste time with arrogantly

boasting or boosting his brand, image or ego. He immediately maximized the brand, image and reputation of his master. The application is to business, but the context is to faithfulness, fruitfulness, and preparation. He had a mission and he fulfilled it.

Our connection to the five-talent man is important. Some of us know him because we are him – and have fully captured the moment and the momentum that comes with it. Some of us know we are not him, should be him, but are not him. The five-talent man seems to be defined by the moment in his life created by the parable of Jesus. But receiving the five talents from his master that is not his defining moment, but rather only one of many, many, moments that led him to the master's trust and the empowerment of the five talents. The lesson is here for us embrace. Faithfulness, character, integrity, temperament, humility, confidence, preparation, purpose, planning, and the dynamic of active faith all made the five-talent moment possible. Will we respond with our many talents, gifts, skills, abilities, and blessings and empowerment to go immediately to our mission to love with our whole heart, to make disciples, to preach the gospel to every person regardless of their race, color, creed, culture, genetic orientation, sin or sinner? Will we override the faithless impulses and weak arguments of our flesh and disbelief? To be the five-talent man we cannot give in or be derailed by difficulties and discouragements, nor were deterred by hostility to the cross, the reproach of critics and cranks. To go forward in faith to reclaim, rebuild and re-set our opportunities and possibilities with courage and boldness. The five-talent man did not maximize his gifts by using his own strength to create his own brand and

reputation, but did so in the name and strength of his master, who gifted, empowered, equipped and sent him. The five-talent man maximized his gifts within the promise, presence and belief of his master in who he was.

Our reminder of content and context of the 521 is this. The talents can be anything and everything. Ministry gifts, spiritual gifts, money, skill-sets, unique ability, creative talents, administrative expertise, and more importantly – availability and faithfulness. The ministers of the Gospel are not traders or traitors, not in their own name or fame, not on their own stock, and or for themselves, but for Christ, and for the good of immortal souls: they are attentive and sensitive, yet bold and responsive, they are all about it – not abandoning what is important but fully maximizing what is important; faith, family, community, career, development, truth and learning, loving and being loved, tracking and being tracked. Praying, believing, study of the word of God. The list is full and powerful, not laborious and boring.

Relatable Goal of the 521

How does the profile of the five-talent man relate to us? Increased awareness of the Holy Spirit in our daily life – God is at work in us with gifts and talents that can change lives. Improved insights (wisdom), spiritual knowledge, improved and enlarged vision and mission. Greater sense of divine movement and moments. New souls welcomed to Christ, and the clear evidence of God's Spirit in our lives.

Galatians 5:16-24

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

11.5.17

The 521 Profile: The Two Talent Man

Matthew 25:14-17

For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more.

Matthew 25:22-24

And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

The man given the two talents... the second largest amount of gifts. Obviously the two talent man is trusted, valued, and counted on to do something exceptional with what his master had given him. Like the five-talent man, the two talent-man is capable and possesses abilities and skills that have put him in unique place of opportunity. But, in spite of that... the potential for struggle and the implosion of the two-talent man to weave its way through every aspect of his life from the moment he receives his gift from the master is there. The danger of losing the

momentum from the moment is immediate simply because of the potential misperception that the master viewed him lesser than the five-talent man, by not giving him a gift of the same amount. This is real. I personally have a great admiration of the two-talent man for these very reasons. In context of the 521, let me explain.

First, the two-talent man must resist the temptation to *compare* himself to the five-talent man. If he does not, then he will miss the opportunity given him while he struggles down a path overcome with pride, jealousy, frustration, anger and then bitterness, while trying to answer the questions he does not need to ask, and answers that do not matter. Why, didn't the master give me five-talents? Does he not trust me as much? Haven't I worked just as hard? Don't I deserve the same amount of talents? To compare gifts, talents, and abilities to others is emotionally and spiritually unhealthy. Eventually, it will destroy any opportunity for significant growth, mature development, and meaningful achievement. The unhealthy comparison invites jealousy and anger that destroy the good heart and right attitude needed to capture and maximize the momentum of the moment. The opportunity given by the master to the two-talent man is incomparable, and has absolutely nothing to do with the five-talent man.

Second, the two-talent man had to *overcome* the self-doubt and disbelief that can quickly follow a moment of perceived unfairness, being overlooked, or of feeling victimized by preferential treatment. What's wrong with me? Am I not good enough? Does he know something I don't know? What did I do wrong? Is anyone ever going to give me my chance?

The struggle of self-doubt is devastating and crippling at its worst, and it is distracting and undermining at best - either way it is not good. The seeds of self-doubt must never be planted nor allowed to sabotage the momentum of the moment.

As with the five-talent man, **seizing the moment is about capturing the momentum of the experience and doing something valuable and meaningful with it.** This is a good time in the 521 process to ask ourselves two very important questions.

What is, or what was that moment for me?

Did I seize the momentum from that moment?

In the story of the five and two-talent men, they each used the momentum of the moment to do something extra-ordinary with talents and gifts they had given. The moment was that instance they were given the five and two-talents from the man they each loved and admired. They used the momentum to double his gift. They knew he would return with an expectation of what they had done with what he had given. They realized the talent was more than money - it was opportunity to grow, to prepare, to show who they had become as trusted and valued servants. The neither wasted time with the typical and inherent stumbling blocks and obstacles that naturally come with a circumstance such as theirs. They moved past their past and prepared for their future. They overcame any temptation to arrogance and prideful behavior - this is a significant obstacle and should

be recognized as such. They did not allow themselves to go there, instead the five and two-talent men immediately maximized the brand, image and reputation of their master - not their own. The illustration is to business, the application is everyday all-day living, but the context is spiritual and the commitment being loyal, faithful, fruitful, and prepared. They were given more than money, talents, and gifts - they were given a mission with meaning and of genuine consequence. Yes, different gifts. Yes, different amounts and not equal. More importantly, equal opportunity, equal expectation, and, yes, equal trust.

Our connection to the five-talent man is important. The two-talent man is one who must not only seize his opportunity and multiply his gifts - but must be one who overcomes the reactive obstacles presented by human nature and emotion. A nature and emotion that often takes us sideways and derails our mission and purpose. Many of us can see ourselves in the two-talent man. This not a bad thing - it is a good thing. Important to be reminded that... You are trusted, valued, needed, talented, skilled, and determined not to let pride, envy, jealousy, frustration, anger, and bitterness ruin the moment provided and the opportunity given to do and to be something that will bless and enrich not only your life, but the lives of everyone you love. You are not less, you are valued and loved. And that is certainly more.

Ephesians 4:1-17

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility

and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

11.19.17

The 521 Profile: The One Talent Man

Matthew 25:24-25

"He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.'

Matthew 25:26-27

"You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest."

Matthew 25:28-29

"So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The man given the one talent... the smallest amount of gifts. Even so, the one talent man is (like the others) trusted, valued, and counted on to do something exceptional with what his master had given him. Like the five and two-talent men, the one talent-man is also capable and possesses

abilities and skills that have put him in unique place of opportunity. Unfortunately the master sees more in the one-talent man than he more than likely saw in himself. This really was his moment! This was his moment to finally prove to the master and to everyone who still doubted him that he was more than they thought. He had been given the same opportunity that the others had been given. Sure it wasn't the same amount - that stings a bit. And of course, the master still had some concerns - but, all truth told, it was with good cause. But, in spite of that... the master still chose to trust him, and to give him the opportunity of a lifetime. He too could multiply or double what he had been given just like the other two had, and he and his family would be set for life. He had the ability, he had the skill-set, he had the talent, and now he had been given the one thing he had always wanted - the chance. He could now control his own outcome. So, what was really going on inside the mind and heart of the one-talent man?

This is where the 521 gets twisted and goes sideways within the mind and heart of the one-talent man. Instead of going quickly and using the momentum of the moment he does the unthinkable - he goes out into his backyard and buries what the master gave him. This no longer about the master; this has become completely about the one-talent man. Who is he really? Though the master had some doubts and concerns, he still thought enough of him to give him the same opportunity as he had given the five and two-talent men. Somewhere in the ups and downs of the one-talent man's life, he had allowed himself to become bitter and broken. In his cynical and bitter brokenness, the one-talent-man could not see himself in

the way that his master saw him. The master saw something good in the one-talent man that he no longer saw in himself. Yet he passively aggressively continued on serving as if his heart and mind were ok - they weren't, and he wasn't. When it comes his turn to report and to celebrate the fruit of his efforts (what he had done, with what he had been given) he quickly and falsely attempted to excuse and justify his inactivity, unexplainable behavior, and lack of faithfulness. He wrongly and dishonestly made the moment about the master - when in reality it was only about him.

Matthew 25:24-25

"He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.'

Clearly his sarcastic and passive aggressive innuendo reveals who the one-talent man really had become - bitter, broken, and unbelieving. And now, we also know why he was the one-talent man.

He describes his master as a very controlling, difficult, shrewd businessman. He tells him that he is the kind of a man who reaps where he has not sown, and gathers where he has not spread. This was not true. In those days, boundaries sometimes were rather indefinite and they did not always bother to plow a field. They would just scatter the grain and it would grow. When it came to reaping, they were not above taking a little of

the seed that had fallen on the neighbor's property. The one talent man insinuated that his master was the kind of person that got everything he could from anyone he could. He implied that the master was not completely ethical or honest - he calls the master "a crook." Again, this was not true.

The master of the one-talent servant does not bother responding to the charge, but does not accept the one-talent man's accusation that he is a "hard" or difficult man. If the one-talent servant really believed his master was as shrewd and difficult as he tried portray him he would have been much more diligent and mindful to please him. Regardless, his response was no excuse. As I said a few weeks ago, "whenever a person fails to meet reasonable expectations or to do his or her own duty, the default is always to find some excuse or someone else to blame." That is exactly what the one-talent man was doing. The painting of his master as a hard money-making Jew, who made himself rich at the expense of others, and profiting off of money that was not his, were all untrue accusations. The self-deceived one-talent man should have been thankful and motivated to have another opportunity to turn his life's disappointments and frustrations into a new life. This could have gone so much differently than it did. It is probably reasonable to assume that the one talent man had full knowledge of what the other two servants had done with the talents they had been given.

So, the master answers him directly:

Matt 25:26-27

"You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest."

The master's expectations, evaluation, and judgment of the servant is pointed and painful. Why didn't this man simply put his money into the market at interest? This minimal effort would have been safe to do, and he would have had at least some income to report on what he had been given. He very easily could have done something, but instead, the one talent man went in the backyard and dug a hole and put the money in the hole and buried it. Hmmm...

Even in our modern day when people bury money in the backyard, it usually indicates something bad, or at the very least, that something's not right. Perhaps they are trying to avoid tax, or maybe the money was illegally acquired somehow, because the normal, responsible thing is to put it into a bank, retirement, or investment opportunity. Why didn't the one-talent servant put it in the bank? Opinions usually vary on this point. Listen how his master now speaks of him... lazy, slothful, deceitful, and wicked. In our world today the strong-voiced agenda driven minority would demand to know what was there that was wicked and deceitful about this? But is this the real question to be asked?

How about this? In his bitterness and brokenness the one-talent man gives in to some twisted scheme and dishonest reasoning. It is much like the thinking of Judas when he sold out Jesus. Judas reasoned, *if Jesus is really the Messiah, my betrayal will not hurt anything, and I will get my money from the High Priest. If He is not the Messiah, then at least I get paid and don't come out of the whole thing empty handed.* I believe the one-talent man reasoned in somewhat the same way. His master was going on a far journey. If the servant puts the money in the bank, he would have to register it in his master's name. If his master did not come back (which often times happened), then the master's family could claim it. So, he likely thought if he buried it in the backyard, there would be no record of the money. If his master did not come back, the servant would have it. If he does come back, he could not accuse him of any dishonesty because he could produce or even return the talent. For the condition of the heart and mind of the one-talent man this scenario is more than just a sketchy theory. To be given so much, and then to do so little, was a faithless and thankless reality. He just did not believe that his master was coming back - in fact by burying the talent, he was counting on it. If he wasn't, then he would have done something entirely different with what he had been given. And this is what the master meant when he said that he was a wicked servant. It is also why the one-talent man was judged harshly and decisively, justly, not just fairly. Verse 29 has always been the subject of some controversy and debate - usually by one-talent people, passively aggressively justifying wrong and unfaithful behavior. When it says, **"for to everyone who has, more will be given,"** the reasonable question is, **"to**

everyone who has what?" Does it refer to everyone who has works, or to everyone who has faithful and moral character?

Although no one really wants to - we all must **make a connection to the one-talent man**. That connection does not mean that we are him. It only means that maybe we have been him, or are in danger of becoming him. It also means we do not have to remain as him, or better yet, never even become him. We have this moment to see the one-talent man for who he was, and what he did with what he had been given. The most significant thing about the one-talent man is this.

We can see him - we can come to understand him - we can learn from him - we can move forward away from him - we do not have to become him.

By doing this we can live in a way that the master has given us the opportunity to live. We can live in the 521, and actually become the 1042!

In the final analysis, who is, and what are the differences between the one-talent man and the five and two-talent men? I think we all know the answer to this now. I also believe that we all want to be five and two talent men/women? We should not second guess that, nor should we apologize for it. This is God's plan and desire for us, and that is why He has given each of us not His greatest gift but also the gifts and opportunities needed to flourish in life and prepare for His return! Next week we will make our

final search through the 521 to receive God's purest truth regarding what we do with what we have been given.

11.26.17

Living in The 521

Romans 12:6-11

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.

But we have a variety of gifts, according to the grace that is given us; one has prophecy according to the measure of his faith, and one has ministry in his service, and one has that of a teacher in his instruction. One has that of a comforter, which is in his comforting, and a giver in generosity, and a top leader with diligence, and that of caregiver with cheerfulness. And be not deceitful in your love, but hate evil and cleave to the good. Be affectionate to your brethren and love one another; be preferring and honoring one another. Be diligent and do not be lazy; be enthusiastic in spirit; be working for your Lord.

1 Peter 4:10-11

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

And let each one of you serve his neighbor with the gift he has received from God, as good stewards of the unique grace of God. Everyone who speaks, let him speak according to the word of God, and everyone who ministers, according to what power God gives to him, that God may be glorified in all that you do, by Yeshua The Messiah, whose glory and honor is truly to the eternity of eternities.

Most of us really want to connect with the five and two-talent men. And, we should. They are the model of what Jesus wants us to be - He said so in the 521 parable. Everything they about them - attitude, effort, interest, passion, loyalty, skill, purpose, faith, belief, response, strategy and vision! They had it all - they were parabolic rock stars! In spite of all this amazingness, we have learned that the five and two-talent men are reachable for us! They are reachable and do-able because of gifts and opportunity we have been given. Because our God has given to us His Son Jesus Christ, we too can live in the 521! Yet before we move on to do great things, we need to take a moment.

Although no one really wants to - we all must **make a final connection to the one-talent man**. Not to create a negative vibe, or to receive an obligatory spiritual beat-down, and not to drudge up old insecurities and insufficiencies. But rather to embrace a reality that keeps our faith, belief, and life on pace with the daily expectations of God, as well as those opportunities we have been given through the great gift of His Son Jesus Christ. **What are we doing with what we have been given?** The connection to the one-talent man does not mean that we are the one-talent man - though we know some that are. It might only mean that we have been him in the past, and simply need a reminder of who we are now, and who we intend to be moving forward. Perhaps, some are in danger of becoming the one-talent man, and need to connect to him only so that you can then turn around and disconnect from those one-talent man thoughts, and those one-talent man behaviors - you can do it. Connecting to the one-talent man can also remind us once again that in Christ, we are free to move away from the one-talent man, or better yet, to never ever become him. We have this moment together to see the one-talent man for who he was, and what he did with what he had been given, and then once and for all to reject him, his poor decisions, and losing attitude. We are going to discover that to **live in the 521** means many things, but one of the most significant will be to know this truth about the one-talent man.

We can see him - we can come to understand him - we can learn from him - we can move forward and away from him - and thank God, we do not have to become him.

By doing this, we can fully live in the 521! And that is to live in a way that our Lord, and Master both accepts and expects. The best part of that is that He has given us the gifts and the opportunity to live that way. To live in the 5-2-1 is in reality, us becoming the 10-4-2! That is funny to some... but, it is possible to all!

In the final analysis, what will become most important will be to answer the question of *who is*, and *what are* the differences between the one-talent man, and the five and two-talent men? I think we all know the answer to this now. The answer tells us clearly **how to live in the 521.**

"Living with a determined belief and an active faith in God, characterized by the will to prepare, the desire to please, and the love to obey Him with what has been freely given to us from Him."

To live in the 521 I also believe that we all should (as I said earlier) want and work to be five and two talent men/women! We should believe that way, think that way, decide and choose that way, each day live that way. We should not spend one minute second guessing that way - nor should we ever apologize for being that way. The 521 is God's plan and desire for us, and that is why He chose to give each of us not only His greatest gift, but also the gifts and opportunities that we need to flourish and multiply our gifts and talents in this life as we prepare for the life to come! The practical path for us to move forward begins now by asking and answering two important and essential questions:

Am I, or are we, a five, a two, or a one?

What am I, or are we doing with what we have been given?

Living the 521 in 3-D

Once we have asked and answered those questions we will need to look at **living the 521 in 3-D** (three dimensions):

Self - Family - Community

These three dimensions need practical and attainable applications. That is both simple and biblical.

Strategies - Possibilities - Outcomes

John 15:1-11

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If

anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

From this red-letter word of truth we begin the daily practice of processing those three dimensions into three applications. It looks like this...

Living in the 521 as Me

(Use Biblical Strategies - Reach for Biblical Possibilities - Expecting Biblical Outcomes)

Living in the 521 as a Family

(Use Biblical Strategies - Reach for Biblical Possibilities - Expect Biblical Outcomes)

Living in the 521 as the Community of Christ (Reunion)

(Use Biblical Strategies - Reach for Biblical Possibilities - Expect Biblical Outcomes)