

## REAL QUESTIONS, BIBLICAL ANSWERS: How Do I Overcome Fear of Failure? | Matthew 25:14-30

### INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, Trinity! It is so very good to see each of you this morning. I want to especially say welcome to those of you that are guest. Thank you for worshiping with us today.

We would love the opportunity to connect with you. You can help us with that in one of two ways. You can text the keyword "TBCMP" to the number 94-000. When you do, a link will be sent to you that you can click on and fill out a very basic form. Or stop by our information table in the Fellowship Area as we have a gift there that we would love to put in your hands.

Thanks again, for joining us today.

### SERIES RECAP:

We are in a teaching series called, "Real Questions, Biblical Answers." We are answering questions that were submitted by our church this summer. Today we are tackling the question, "How do I overcome my fear of failure?"

We all, to some degree, face fears. Let's play a little game here this morning. This is all skate, so we all participate. How many of you are fearful of heights? Snakes? That should be everyone in the room! Anyone deal with Claustrophobia? Get away from me! Those are very real fears.

But fear can also transcend what we typically think of as fears. We can be afraid of others. What will they think? What will they say? I bet we all have experience fear of failure. What if a business venture fails? What if I don't perform well at my job? And we are even often afraid of the future. What happens if... My point is that we all face fear.

### ILLUSTRATION: Six categories of Fear

Psychologist, Craig Massey, has said that there are six categories of fear. In other words, we all worry about six main things: poverty, criticism, loss of love or relationships, illness, old age, and death.<sup>ii</sup> These types of fears are universal. We all have them. And the fear of failure plays on a couple of those categories mentioned.

**Consider all the Bible characters that battled fear.** We see it all throughout the Scriptures. Noah had to face the fear of failure when God asked him to build an ark in a region that hadn't seen rain. Moses faced fear when he considered the task God gave him and his inability to speak well. Esther dealt with fear when she approached the King to ask for mercy on behalf of the Jews. Gideon faced fear when his army was whittled down and he had to face an enormous foe. Daniel faced fear when he was told not to pray. Mary, Jesus' mother, faced fear rejection when she was chosen to carry Jesus before marriage. The Apostles shared the gospel in the face of fearing for their lives.

The Bible is filled with examples of people dealing with, facing, and overcoming fear. And yes, even the fear of failure.

I want to invite you to grab your bibles and turn with me to the Gospel of Matthew. We are going to be in chapter 25 this morning as we attempt to answer the question from a biblical viewpoint.

Now, I have to tell you that at first glance, this parable of Jesus doesn't seem to address the question. But I believe there are some things within this passage that answers the question at hand. So, what I would like to do is teach the parable, then zoom in on fear and look at what fear does and then talk through ways to overcome fear in our lives.

### MESSAGE:

So, let's first examine what Jesus is teaching in Matthew 25. Let's take it verse by verse. Matthew 25:14. ***14"For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property."***

Now chapter 25 is part of what is called the Olivet Discourse. It is called that because Jesus is with His disciples on the Mount of Olives. The disciples asked a question. They wanted to know what the signs were of the end of the age. "How do we know, Jesus, that you are going to set up Your Kingdom?"

So, Chapter 24 teaches about the signs, the birthing pains of the end times. While we do not know the exact time, we are to be ready. Chapter 25 begins with a parable that talks about what it means to anticipate Christ's return. That's verses 1-13. Then, in verse 14, Jesus uses the parable of the talents to talk about what we are to do while we anticipate His return. So, when Jesus says, "it will be like," he is talking about His second coming.

This Parable begins with a man going on a journey, that is going away for some time. As a result, this man calls his servants together and entrusted to them his property while he is away. Because of the context of the passage, we understand this to be Jesus saying, while I am going away, I will be coming again. And while I am away, I am entrusting what is mine to us, His disciples. The idea here is that we are to invest, work, what He has entrusted to us.

Verse 15. *<sup>15</sup>To one he gave **five talents**, to another **two**, to another **one**, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.* A couple things here.

First, what is a talent? We often read the modern-day English into this passage and think ability. We know people that are talented. Jared Wood and our worship team is talented. Amen?! But in this parable, Jesus is not talking about talent as we understand it.

A talent was a measurement of weight.<sup>iii</sup> It is a significant amount of weight. Usually, it was a measurement of some currency like gold or silver. Several commentators I read this week said that one talent here was equivalent to 20 years' worth of salary.<sup>iv</sup>

Now, one way we can interpret this passage is to think of it in terms of money. And in this passage, it is obvious that it refers to money. But what I think is a more important way to look at it is in terms of resources we've each been given. I think it is appropriate in applying this text to our lives, to view what we have been given, our talent, as a totality of our time, our giftings, and our treasures. Spiritual and material assets.

The point in the parable, though, is that this is not a small amount of trust here. This is entrusting to these servants everything. And listen, Jesus has entrusted us with His Kingdom here on earth. And He has entrusted to us spiritual and material assets to steward His Kingdom.

The second thing that stands out here is the differing amounts. Each servant was given a different amount. They had no say in what they received, but they were each responsible to fully steward whatever amount they were given.

One can look at this as being unfair. But here's what I want you to know at the very beginning of this parable. And this is important to remember when we talk about the fear of failure. **These servants are not evaluated on the amount of**

**return, but on the investment they made.** Don't get caught up in the amounts here. That's not the point of the parable.

But, nonetheless, **we can relate to that thought.** Have you ever wondered why some people can sing like Jared Wood and then you have me? I promise you, if I sang, you'd all leave in a mad dash out of here. Listen, God, in His sovereignty has given each one of us talents. Your talents may be different than mine, and I guarantee you have more talent than I do. But the amount is not the focus. It's what we do with what we've been given that is the focus.

So, let's see what each of these servants do with what they've been given. Read along with me verses 16-27. *<sup>16</sup>He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. <sup>17</sup>So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. <sup>18</sup>But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. <sup>19</sup>Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup>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.' <sup>21</sup>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.' <sup>22</sup>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.' <sup>23</sup>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.' <sup>24</sup>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, <sup>25</sup>so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.' <sup>26</sup>But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? <sup>27</sup> 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 first two servants invested what they had been given while the third one didn't. The first two servants worked hard with what they had been given, and the third one didn't. The first two servants were excited when the Master returned, and the third one wasn't. This story is about what the servants did with the time and resources they were given. Same is true for us today.

What does this parable have to do with the fear of failure? Well, let's zoom in. Verses 24 and 25. ***24**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. **25**so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.'* The difference between the first two servants and the third servant is fear. Verse 25, "I was afraid."

I want to spend the balance of our time together talking through two things. First, what fear does to us, and second, practical tools to overcoming fear. Let's look, first, at...

### 1) What Fear Does to Us.

I believe the fear of the third servant demonstrates the effects fear of failure has on us. There are two things, in particular, that I see in the third servant that shows us what fear does. Number 1, ...

#### A) Fear Causes a Focus on Untruths.

When we allow fear to take root in our hearts and minds, we begin believing untruths. That was certainly the case for the third servant. What were the untruths that the third servant focused on? 2 untruths I'd say he believed.

He probably believed the Master to be unfair by seeing what was given to the others versus what was given to him. I imagine he thought, well, if they lose a talent, then they have more to keep going. But little ole me, I only have one talent. I can't do as much as they can so I'm just going to hold onto this.

We often think the same thing when it comes to taking Kingdom risks. I'm not as gifted as so and so. Therefore, there is no way I can do the things for God that they can. Do you see the untruth there? Listen, it is my experience, and my testimony, that God never calls the qualified to do Kingdom work. Instead, He equips those whom He calls! If you can't do it, then that's a good thing because you'll have to rely on God. Fear caused the third servant to focus on the untruth that he didn't have what the others had.

There's another untruth the servant focused on. Verse 24. ***'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed.*** He obviously had a different view of his Master than the first two servants, didn't he? Do you see what he is accusing his Master of?

He's saying that he was an unreasonable man. "I knew you to be a hard man." The others didn't think that. What else? That he stole and got what he got because he took advantage of others. "Reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed." Now, keep in mind, this is just the assessment of the Master.<sup>v</sup> It doesn't mean that it is a true assessment. It's just what he said. If it were true, don't you think the others would have said the same thing?

Look at verses 26 and 27. ***26**But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? **27**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.* In other words, The Master is calling his bluff. Oh, you knew I was that way? Then why didn't you at least invest my money with the bankers?! You would have at least gotten something in return. Do you see the untruth here?

Fear causes us to focus on untruths. Fear causes us to believe things that are not true. Fear creates worry. And we often worry about so many things that aren't true or that won't happen! Fear causes a focus on things that are untrue. The second thing we see that fear does to us is that...

#### B) Fear Paralyzes.

Verse 25. ***25**so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground.* In other words, "I was afraid, so I did nothing. It felt too risky!" Paralyzed. Do you see it?

What are the risks that God may be calling you to? Perhaps something in which fear has paralyzed you. A new ministry God has laid on your heart. Pursuing foster parenting or adoption. Joining our mission team on a trip. A new career. Tithing. Sharing your faith with your co-worker. Tackling a challenge in your marriage. Or forgiving that person that wronged you.

Truth be told, those things are risky. What if it fails? What if it's hard? What if I don't have enough money? What if I'm rejected? Seems too vulnerable. What if it doesn't work out? Those are all questions we ask when we fear failure in our lives. But here's the truth, it's always worth the risk when it's for the Kingdom!

So, I want to talk about practical ways to battle this. I want to look at...

## 2) Tools to Overcoming the Fear of Failure.

I want to offer 3 tools to overcoming the fear of failure in our lives. First, ...

### A) Realize You're Gifted.

This idea plays on what we will be talking about more in depth next Sunday, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but you need to realize that if you are in Christ, you are gifted. Your gifts are different from my gifts, but all gifts are equally important in advancing God's Kingdom.

In the parable of the talents, each servant was given gifts. The gifts varied from one another, but they were each resourced for Kingdom work. Why would God give us gifts only for us to be paralyzed by fear and never utilize them? He wouldn't.

I heard one pastor say, "God specializes in using ordinary people to do extraordinary things."<sup>vi</sup> God does not call the earthly gifted, He equips those that He calls with gifts. Success is only measured by how we invest our gifts, not by the outcome.

Everything in life is stewardship. Everything we have is given to us by God and He has entrusted it to us. Although assets may vary, faithfulness is constant. The Master in the parable was only concerned with 1 thing; how faithful they were with what He gave them.<sup>vii</sup>

If you are in Christ, you are gifted, resourced by God. So, realize you're gifted. Secondly, ...

### B) Focus on Your True Identity.

I think we often fear failure because we have too closely associated success or failure with our identity. No one wants to be a failure.

But consider the people that we would say are successful but failed before their success. Michael Jordan, Thomas Edison, Abraham Lincoln, and many others.<sup>viii</sup>

But for the Christian, our identity is not found in our success or our failure. Our identity is found in our position. See, identity doesn't come from who you are, it comes from whose you are. And whose you are determines who you are.

In the parable of the talents, we have one Master. But we see how the three different servants knew their Master. Two of them truly knew the Master while the third didn't know him at all. The third servant knew the Master to be completely different from what the other two knew.

The first two servants knew their Master to be good. The third servant knew his Master to be hard and unreasonable. Because the first two knew the Master to be good, they felt freedom and confidence. They were willing to take risk because they knew that the Master was concerned about the results, but about the effort.

Listen, the cross tells us how God feels about us. As a result, we ought to find our identity in how much God loves us. We know that we will not have to give an account for the failure as much as we will have to give an account for how we stewarded what we were given.

By the way, if we invest our spiritual and material resources in the Kingdom of God, how could they fail? If God is for us, who can be against us?

So, realize that you're gifted and focus on your true identity. Thirdly, ...

### C) Increase Your View of God

I would argue that the real reason we often succumb to fear of failure is because we have a small view of God. David had no guarantee that God would smite Goliath, but he did know that God would ultimately have victory. Queen Esther had no guarantee the king wouldn't have her killed, but she knew that God was working for the good of His people. The early Church is filled with people who risked everything, all because they knew God was moving.<sup>ix</sup>

The problem, if we're honest, is that we are stacking our fears up against ourselves instead up against our God. We need to increase our view of God and in so doing, our fears will shrink.

The great theologian, J.I. Packer, in his book, *Knowing God*, gave a great illustration regarding increasing our view of God. When we look through the wrong end of the telescope, everything is reduced to pigmy size proportions. However, when we look through the correct end of the telescope, everything is increased to large proportions. Packer suggests that we, too often, look through the wrong end of the telescope when it comes to how we view God.

As we close this morning, I want to share with you the time that my view of failure changed.

### **ILLUSTRATION: New Hope Church**

When Cathy and I got married, I had just finished one of my favorite Seminary classes, Models of Church Planting. We studied numerous church plants and the various models they used. One of the churches we studied in that class was New Hope Church in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Well, we were blessed by my parents to honeymoon in Hawaii and we spent a couple nights on the island of Oahu. We happened to be there on a Sunday. So, me and my nerdy church self, mentioned to Cathy that we should go to church at New Hope, the church I studied. So, we did.

It was incredible! Wayne Cordeiro is the founding pastor, if you've ever heard of him. But after the first worship song, Pastor Wayne came out and lead what was effectively a business meeting. He was proposing to the church an idea that the staff had to reach the islands for Jesus. They were going to put on a series of concerts on each island and present the gospel to everyone in attendance. He told the congregation that the idea was very expensive, as you can imagine the equipment needed and the means to get it all from island to island. So, he posed the question to the congregation as to whether or not it was something they wanted to do.

Now, there were ballots in every seat as they were going to vote on this matter. But, just as soon as he got the words out of his mouth, a gentleman stood up and shouted, "Let's do it!" Before we knew it, the whole congregation was shouting, "Let's do it! Let's do it!" I leaned over the Cathy and said, "This is the coolest church business meeting I've ever been to."

After the crowd died down, Pastor Wayne said words that have ever sense echoed in my heart. He told the church, "What I love about you, New Hope, is that you've never been afraid to fail when it comes to sharing the gospel."

I thought, wow! How many people and churches are paralyzed by the fear of failure? Those that choose fear over faith in those circumstances never get to see the hand of God at work.

I don't know if anyone came to Christ as a result of their efforts, but I have always told myself that I want to be a part of something where we are not afraid to fail. Amen?! Don't you? Never be afraid of failure, especially when it comes to advancing the Kingdom of God.

### **CONCLUSION:**

I want to take us back to the parable. Most of the scholars I read while studying this passage mentioned that this story really is a depiction of true followers of Jesus and those that are not. Not that what we do earns or keeps our salvation. We cannot earn or lose our salvation. We had two sermons in past few weeks address that. But most scholars tied this parable to James 2:17 which says, *"faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."*

The third servant obviously didn't really know the Master. If he had known the Master, he would have been about the master's business. It's not what the others did that made them believers, it's because they were believers that they worked according to the master's desires.

Do you really know The Master? Jesus? Is He the Lord of your life? If the answer to that question is no, then you can know Him today. If you have questions about what that means, I would love to share that with you.

In a moment, I'm going to pray. We are going to stand and sing. Our elders will make their way to the front, and we are here to visit with you about what it means to truly know Jesus as Lord.

Others of you have prayer concerns. You come as well. We are here for you. [PRAY].

## ENDNOTES:

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<sup>i</sup> Works consulted in preparation of this message: John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 24-28*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1989; Ray Hollenbach, *The Parable of the Talents*, Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, article published March 16, 2009; Skip Heitzig, *Expound: Matthew, Matthew 24:31-25:46* taught at Calvary Alberquerque on August 8, 2012, accessed online: <https://calvarynm.church/connectwithskip/teachings/#/compilation/45>; J.D. Greear, *Staying Faith: Risk*, message preached at Summit Church, November 24, 2013, accessed online: <https://summitchurch.com/message/risk-matthew-2514-30>; Jack Graham, *Power Point – August 11, 2006*, article posted on oneplace.com; Chip Ingram, *Authentic: Why God Uses Some People More Than Others, part 1*, accessed online: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=816056568765981>; John MacArthur, *The Tragedy of Wasted Opportunity, Parts 1 and 2*, published on Grace to You, accessed online: <https://www.gty.org/library/resources/sermons-library/scripture/1?book=40&chapter=25>; Michael Youssef, *Faithfulness vs. Performance*, published by Leading the Way, accessed online: <https://www.ltw.org/watch/teaching/faithfulness-vs-performance>.

<sup>ii</sup> Jack Graham referenced Craig Massey's work. I could not find the primary source in a simple search but wanted to give credit to where Dr. Graham found the information.

<sup>iii</sup> Skip Heitzig, *Expound: Matthew, Matthew 24:31-25:46* taught at Calvary Alberquerque on August 8, 2012, accessed online: <https://calvarynm.church/connectwithskip/teachings/#/compilation/45>.

<sup>iv</sup> Walter W. Wessel, Frank E. Gaebelin, and Walter L. Liefeld, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Volume 8: Matthew, Mark and Luke*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1984, page 516.

<sup>v</sup> This idea was mentioned both by John MacArthur and Pastor Skip Heitzig.

<sup>vi</sup> Chip Ingram, *Authentic: Why God Uses Some People More Than Others, part 1*, accessed online: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=816056568765981>.

<sup>vii</sup> Taken from Michael Youssef, *Faithfulness vs. Performance*, published by Leading the Way, accessed online: <https://www.ltw.org/watch/teaching/faithfulness-vs-performance>.

<sup>viii</sup> List found online: <https://www.lifehack.org/articles/productivity/15-highly-successful-people-who-failed-their-way-success.html>.

<sup>ix</sup> Examples taken from John Piper, *Risk Is Right*, Crossway Books: Wheaton, 2013, page 25.