

The Law of Use and Disuse

by J.R. Miller

The sermon emphasizes the importance of using our gifts and talents to their full potential, as neglecting to do so can lead to decay and loss.

Scripture: Luke 19:15

Topics: "Faithfulness", "Stewardship"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the importance of actively using the talents and opportunities God has entrusted to us, as illustrated in the parable of the pounds. He explains that life is a trust, and we must account for how we have utilized our gifts, with the expectation that faithful use will lead to greater responsibilities and rewards. Miller warns against the dangers of disuse, highlighting that failing to engage with our gifts can lead to their loss and spiritual stagnation. He encourages believers to strive for growth and to make the most of their lives in service to Christ, as true fulfillment comes from diligent effort and faithfulness. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a proactive approach to living out our faith and maximizing our potential for God's glory.

Transcript

"He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it.

"The first one came and said, 'Sir, your pound has earned ten more.' "Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'

"The second came and said, 'Sir, your pound has earned five more.' "His master answered, 'You take charge of five cities.'

"Then another servant came and said, 'Sir, here is your pound; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.' "His master replied, 'I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? Why then didn't you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?' "Then he said to those standing by, 'Take his pound away from him and give it to the one who has ten pounds.' "Sir,' they said, 'he already has ten!' "He replied, 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away. But those enemies of mine who

did not want me to be king over them--bring them here and kill them in front of me." Luke 19:15-27

In this world--we are doing business for Christ. Each one of us has something of His, a talent, which He has entrusted to us to trade with, as His agent. Our life itself, with all its powers, its endowments, its opportunities, its privileges, its blessings, is our talent. We are not our own. We are not in this world merely to have a good time for a few years. Life is a trust. We are not done with life--when we have lived it through to its last day. We must render an account of it--to Him who gave it to us. Our business is to show gains, through our trading with our Lord's money. We are required to make the most possible use of our life.

People often speak of the solemnity of dying. But it is a far more solemn thing--to live. Dying is only giving back into God's hand--His own gift; life and if we have lived well, dying is victory, is glory, the trampling of life's vanities, as our soul bursts into infinite blessedness! But it is living--which is serious and solemn. Life, to its last particle, is our Lord's property, entrusted to us to be used so that it shall grow. Then comes the judgment, with its accounting, and its rewards and punishments. We shall have to look up into our Lord's face and tell Him what we have done with the talent, the life that has been entrusted to us to keep and to use.

The Lord does not put a large amount of His money into the hand of anyone to begin with--only "one pound", as the parable has it. It is not much--but it is as much as we are capable of using well at first, until we have acquired more experience. Besides, it is enough to test our faithfulness. If we do well with the little--He will trust us with more. Doing business with a small amount also trains us so that by-and-by we may care for a larger sum. Most successful business men had very little to begin with. They handled the little well, and it increased into more. Meantime, the men themselves grew into greater ability and wisdom, through experience, until now they manage a large business as easily as at first they managed the little they had.

It is the same in all life. The child at school has but little mental ability--but it has enough to begin with, enough to show its spirit and test its faithfulness. If it uses the little well, the ability will increase. God gives into no man's hand at the beginning, a finely-trained, fully-developed mind. The great poets, artists, philosophers, and writers of the world began with only one pound. Christ gives no one at the start--a noble, full-statured Christian character, with spiritual graces all blossoming out. The most saintly Christian, began with very little saintliness. The most useful man in the church, began with a very small and imperfect sort of usefulness. Those whose influence for good now touches thousands of lives, extends over whole communities, or fills an entire country or the world--had nothing to begin with, but one little pound of capacity, which the Master entrusted to them.

The growth of the life, depends upon the degree of energy and faithfulness shown by each person. In the parable, one man's pound made ten pounds more; another's made five pounds.

The first of these men is a type of those who make the most possible of their life. This man did not fret because he had so little to begin with. He began with enthusiasm, with energy, and with the utmost diligence and fidelity, to make the most of his one pound. As he used it, it increased. The increase he also used, and the money grew, until, when his Lord returned, he laid down at his feet a gain of a thousand per cent.

The high places in life have not come to men by chance, or by any providential partiality in the distribution of the gifts and favors of life; for the most part, they have been won by energy, faithfulness, and toil.

We find these ten-pound servants also among the followers of Christ. They are those Christians who from the beginning strive to reach the best things in divine grace. They set their ideal of obedience to Christ--at the mark of perfectness. They seek to follow Christ with their whole heart. They are faithful to every duty, without regard to its cost. They strive to be like Christ in all the elements and features of His character. They give their whole energy to the work and service of Christ. So these men and women grow at last into a saintliness, a spiritual beauty, and a power of usefulness and of influence by which they are set apart among Christians, shining with brighter luster than other stars in the galaxy. Their one pound--has made another ten.

The other servant whose one pound made five pounds, also did well--but not so well as the first. He did not do all that he might have done with his master's money. He was not so earnest as his fellow-servant, not so active, not so diligent, not so unsparing in toil, not so persistent in endeavor, not so heroic in conquering obstacles and difficulties. This man is a type of a great mass of people in the world. They are good--but not so good as they might have been. They do well with their life--but not so well as they might have done. They might have made ten pounds for their Lord, while they made only five.

It is so in trades and all business. Many are satisfied just to get along. They work as few hours as possible. They are self-indulgent. As a consequence they make little progress through the years. They are no better workmen, no better business men, no better physicians or preachers, at fifty--than they were at thirty. They are fairly prosperous--but they do not do their best.

The same is true in schools. There are many who do well--but who might do far better. They are easy-going, indisposed to toil and struggle. They come at last with five pounds gain in their hand--when they might have brought ten.

Many people do not make the most possible of their spiritual gifts and privileges. They grow in grace--but their path might have been like the shining light. They might have more of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, more of the gentleness, the sweetness, the beauty of the Lord, in their lives. They might be of more use to Christ. They bring five pounds increase--when they might have brought ten!

The principle on which the rewards of life are given, may be called the law of use. One man brought his ten pounds, gained by diligent and faithful using of the one which had been entrusted to him to trade with. He had shown such ability and fidelity in caring for the little that had been left in his hands--that his Lord now put more of his interests in his keeping. He had done well with money: now the care of cities was entrusted to him. That is, one who does well with a small trust--is rewarded with a larger one--and the reward is proportionate to the diligence and faithfulness one has shown in the smaller trust.

The law of increase--is the law of use. "Your pound has made ten pounds more." By using the little we have--we get more. This is true in all of life. It is true in the business world. The poor boy uses his first shilling wisely, and soon has two shillings. He goes on investing, trading, toiling, and his money grows until he is a millionaire. It is the same in mental growth. The young people start in school with nothing. They struggle with hard problems, year after year, until at last they come out with trained minds, disciplined powers. Use has brought its reward. The same prevails in spiritual life. The way to get more love--is to love: love grows by loving. The way to become stronger in resisting evil and overcoming temptation, is always to resist and to conquer. Every battle we win, makes us braver and a better soldier. Every effort we make, lifts us a little nearer to God.

The way to become more gentle and loving--is to keep our heart's affections always in exercise. A kind feeling put into an act, does not exhaust the kindness and empty the fountain--but leaves more kindness in the heart.

A young man finds it hard to rise in a meeting and read one verse or offer a prayer of one sentence. He does his duty, however, and soon he is an acceptable speaker, and in a few years he is preaching the gospel with eloquence and power. Use developed his gifts.

The building of character should be our central aim in life. Business, school, home, church, reading, pleasure, struggle, work, sorrow--all are but means to the one end. It matters little how much money a man made last year--but it is of vital importance what mark last year's business made upon his character. The increase of one's fortune is of but small importance, in comparison with the growth of one's manhood. Everything we do, leaves an impression upon us as well as on the work we are doing. We are building life all the while. The thing we do may be a blessing in the world--but apart from this it affects ourselves. A man's work may fail; yet even in failure, the work on his character goes on. If we do our very best, though nothing else may come of it in the world--yet in ourselves there cannot but be noble result. Faithfulness and energy never fail of their reward in character, even though the hands be empty when life is done. "He who does the will of God abides forever." The reward comes in the doing--not in what we gather in our doing.

Thus it is, that using produces growth, increase. Use what you have--and it will become more; trade with your pound--and it will multiply. The law of growth--is the law of use. So we see that the reward that God gives for faithfulness, is not ease--but enlarged responsibility. So long as we do well what God wants us to do, and are faithful in what of His He entrusts to us--He still gives us more duty and adds to our stewardship.

Then loss comes through disuse. One man brought his pound carefully wrapped up. He had done nothing with it. This man is not described as especially wicked. He was not condemned for what he did--but for what he did not do. He did not use his gift in harming others. He did not misuse God's gift. His sin lay in 'not using'. He did not embezzle. He did not gamble away his pound. He did not waste it in any foolish speculation. He kept it securely.

One day the master returned. The servants were all called to report what they had gained, with the portions left in their hands. Then this poor man hunted up his pound, and brought it out from its hiding-place. Unrolling the napkin, there was the money, bright, shining gold, undimmed. "Here is your pound which I kept." But that was not what the Lord wanted; he wanted gains made by trading. So the pound was taken away from the servant who had made no use of it.

Here then we get our lesson. Not to use--is to lose. The penalty upon uselessness, is the loss of power to be useful.

There is an Oriental story of a merchant who gave to each of two friends, a sack of grain to keep until he should call for it. Years passed, and at last he claimed his property. One of his friends led him to a field of waving grain, and said, "This is all yours!" The other showed him a rotten sack full of wasted grain. Use yielded a golden harvest and honor; disuse yielded only decay and dishonor.

It is something appalling, to think of the possibilities of people's minds, faculties which by proper use might have been developed to brilliant power--but which, because never developed by use, have lain wrapped

up in a napkin, and at last have perished altogether in the brain! Men fail to exercise their spiritual vision, and live in darkness until their soul's eyes die out, and they cannot see spiritual things, if they would. Not to love God in life's earlier days--takes away from the heart at length the power to love Him. This is the solution of that mystery of the hardening of the heart, which perplexes so many Bible readers. Long-time shutting of the heart against God--leaves it incapable of opening. The power to love, unexercised, dies out.

There is a truth here which ought to startle us--if we are not living at our very best. Not to believe on Christ, continuance in unbelief and rejection, is at length to lose the power to believe. Not to lift up the heart and the eyes to God, continuance in thus turning away from God, is at length to be incapable of loving God. Not to follow Christ, persistence in refusing to be His disciple--is at length to find one's self unable, even under the most fearful pressure of judgment and eternity, to become even Christ's lowliest follower! The spiritual powers long unused, die out, and then a man is dead while he lives!

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