



Small Group Connect Use It or Lose It

Talk Tip: You don't have to be Dr. Phil to be a great discussion leader; just a good listener and questioner. You can be both! A good idea is to meet your co-leader(s) a half hour before group to pray and briefly go through the discussion with them, so you're all on the same page heading in the same direction. Or, call a student you want to connect with and practice the questions on them. They'll feel pretty important and you'll know if you need to adjust any questions.

Connectors

For this talk, supply the following:

For the Illustration, call four students ahead of time to act out Matthew 25.14-30, the Parable of the Talents.

For the Real Life Connection, provide pens and a pre-typed "My Gift: Use it or Lose it!" half-sheet:

My Gift: Use it or Lose it!			
singing	drawing	people	skills/friend-building
painting		sketching	science
decision making		volunteering/serving others	dancing
computers		video	graphics/designs
encouragement		giving	computers/programming
sociology		history	geography
language arts		optimism/encouragement	math
writing		mechanics	other:
cooking (prove it by bringing cookies to group next time!)			

When, where, and how can God use one or more of the gifts I circled?

Connecting verses: Matthew 25:14-30 (New Living Translation)

14"Again, the Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a trip. He called together his servants and gave them money to invest for him while he was gone. 15He gave five bags of gold* to one, two bags of gold to another, and one bag of gold to the last--dividing it in proportion to their abilities--and then left on his trip. 16The servant who received the five bags of gold began immediately to invest the money and soon doubled it. 17The servant with two bags of gold also went



right to work and doubled the money. 18But the servant who received the one bag of gold dug a hole in the ground and hid the master's money for safekeeping.

19"After a long time their master returned from his trip and called them to give an account of how they had used his money. 20The servant to whom he had entrusted the five bags of gold said, 'Sir, you gave me five bags of gold to invest, and I have doubled the amount.' 21The master was full of praise. 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'

22"Next came the servant who had received the two bags of gold, with the report, 'Sir, you gave me two bags of gold to invest, and I have doubled the amount.' 23The master said, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'

24"Then the servant with the one bag of gold came and said, 'Sir, I know you are a hard man, harvesting crops you didn't plant and gathering crops you didn't cultivate. 25I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth and here it is.'

26"But the master replied, 'You wicked and lazy servant! You think I'm a hard man, do you, harvesting crops I didn't plant and gathering crops I didn't cultivate? 27Well, you should at least have put my money into the bank so I could have some interest. 28Take the money from this servant and give it to the one with the ten bags of gold. 29To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who are unfaithful, even what little they have will be taken away. 30Now throw this useless servant into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Opening thought

When we hear people talk about "gifts" in church life, we often think of "the gifts of the Spirit" – prophecy, healing, discernment, etc. The Bible says that God distributes them at will, so everyone has at least one "spiritual" gift. But for our discussion today, we're going to talk about other kinds of gifts - talents. Things you're very good at. Even people who don't follow Jesus have gifts of talent – things that help them be better at certain jobs or in certain ways in life. You've heard people refer to certain musicians or athletes as "gifted".

One time Jesus talked to his friends about talents in the form of a parable. This parable tells us about how important it is to God that we use the gifts He's given us. Let's watch...

Illustration: Scripture Skit

This story from Matthew 25.14-30 can be a funny one acted out. Ahead of time, get four of your drama-heads to read through it and come up with a short skit based on the story. Or, if you only have two kids inclined and available, they can each do a couple of parts (which is sometimes funnier). If nothing else, pick a few students to act it out and repeat certain lines after you as you read the story from the Bible. Tell them to ham it up and use different voices. Have the group applaud wildly when your hams are cooked - er, finished.



Connecting questions

1. A few of you tell us about a gift you received but didn't end up using.
2. What if one year for your birthday you didn't get any gifts? How would you feel? (After students answer, say something like, "Imagine being told, 'You didn't get any gifts this year because you didn't use the ones you received last year.'")
3. Why didn't God just give everyone the same talents and gifts?
4. How do you think God decides on who gets what talents and gifts?
5. What are some talents people have that we don't usually consider "spiritual"?
6. If someone who doesn't follow Jesus has a similar God-given talent and gift as you, what's the point of you using your talents and gifts for Him?
7. Share one talent you know you have. (Leader: Here's a prime opportunity to encourage an unconfident student who doesn't know what their gift is. Reinforce the fact that God has wired them with specific gifts and talents, which, in His hands, will bless others beyond the practical use of them!)
8. How have you used that talent at home? At school? At church?
9. If Jesus had your particular talent, how would He be using it?
10. Who do you know who is gifted but doesn't use their gift?
11. Read Matthew 5.29-30. Why do you think this is harsh?

Real Life Connection

Pass out pens and the "My Gift: Use it or Lose it!" sheet. This is very similar to the 3rd point in Mark's sermon. For the students who heard it, this exercise will simply provide reinforcement.

Give students a couple of minutes to circle the talents and gifts they believe they have. Then ask, "Were you surprised at how many you were able to circle?"

Give students a couple more minutes to answer the questions at the bottom, then ask for volunteers to share their answers.

Challenge Point – Head to Heart Connection

Everything we have is a gift from God; we must use it all according to His heart and will. You'll know His heart and will as you spend regular time with Him, reading His word and listening and talking with Him.