

Blow It or Bury It, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. ²⁶⁰⁵¹¹¹³
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 and Matthew 25:14-30
Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ, 13 November, 2005

A certain church received its offering following the sermon, and the minister was known for his long sermons. One Sunday a young boy got restless as the pastor preached on and on, and turned to his father and whispered, "Daddy, if we give him the money now, will he let us go?" You should not have to ask that question this morning, because the sermon will be short. It is not a sermon to raise money, but to produce stewards. It is not a sermon to make you feel guilty, but to encourage you to share your discipleship.

My mother and father told me to be fair. When I see someone being treated unfairly, I get upset. Most of us want to see people treated fairly. What do you think of a wealthy business owner who distributed his wealth unequally to his employees? He gave one week's wages to one employee, three weeks's wages to a second, and five weeks's wages to a third. That is unfair. The story is reported in our Bible.¹ It is of a wealthy landowner who was going away on a trip and he distributed his wealth to his employees to invest during his absence.

The landholder in the story represents God. Does that make you uncomfortable? When we are taught to play fair, it is uncomfortable to think of God as unfair. The parable reflects the way life *is*, not the way life should be. It is not God, but life that is unfair. Some are dealt a better hand of cards than others. Some of us have been given five times what others have been given.

We are the servants who have been given the five talents. We are richer than ninety percent of the world's population. If you don't believe me, you have not seen television this week with the pictures of Pakistani refugees walking with all of their worldly possessions on their *heads!*

We live in mansions, and some of us own two. We have not gone hungry in years. Even if we suffer from ill health, we are able to have hip replacements, insulin, and other medical treatments. Because we have been given much wealth, we have been given much responsibility.

When we receive a large gift, we can blow it or bury it. We can blow it on gambling, on jewelry, or clothes. Or, we can bury it in bank accounts or under mattresses, waiting for that "someday" when we will need it.

Blowing our wealth and burying it are not the only two choices we have. We can use our wealth for building for God's kingdom. You, as a steward, as a disciple, have a voice in how we can do God's work here. Perhaps you know of project that can use our financial and physical help. Tell the church. Perhaps you have an idea about a new way of feeding the hungry or establishing justice. Tell the church. Perhaps you know a good way to reach non-Christians, or non-church-goers and publicize this church or preach to them the gospel that God loves them. Tell the church. You are a steward!

This story about the talents reflects the reality that Jesus had not yet returned by the time Matthew wrote his gospel. There is no doubt that the wealthy landowner, God, has entrusted talents to workers until Jesus returns. You and I have been given talents. Will we blow them, bury them, or invest them to build God's kingdom on earth?

The workers in the parable were stewards. They were not owners, they were caretakers. They were managers of that which belongs to God. We come into this world with nothing and we will leave this world with nothing. What we have while we are here is God's. You are I are stewards.

¹Matthew 25:14-30

We are entrusted with talents, abilities, money, and time. They are not ours to keep forever. We have a need to use the talents God has given us. Use them not for ourselves, but for God.

Stewardship is not fund raising; it is a matter of the heart. Asking you to give to the church is not about trying to make you feel guilty. It is to help you see all of the wonderful things you have, to be grateful for them, and to thank God. The rule of thumb for the Christian is to tithe: to give ten percent of what we have to the church and to other causes which are doing God's work in the world.

There was a young man who was desperately in need of a job. He asked God to help him find employment, and when he secured a job that paid ten dollars a week, the young man was so overjoyed that he promised God that he would always give ten percent of his income to the church. As time passed, the young man moved on to a higher paying job. Now he was making one-hundred dollars a week, and he dutifully put ten dollars in the plate each Sunday. Eventually, he earned a thousand dollars a week, and while he still put one-hundred dollars in the plate, it had become a grudging duty. Finally, he hit the big time, earning ten-thousand dollars a week. He could not bear the thought of putting one-thousand dollars into the plate each Sunday, so he sought out the pastor. "When I made that promise, I only earned ten dollars a week," he said. "My promise made sense back then, but now things are different. Would you please release me from my promise to give ten percent of my income to the church?"

The pastor thought about it for awhile and then replied, "I cannot release you from a promise you made before God. But I would be happy to pray that your income be reduced back to the original ten dollars a week!"

Sue and I give one-tenth of our income to do God's work, most of it through Elon Community Church. I have given one-tenth of my income to the church all of my life, and I have not regretted it. If you ask whether that is one-tenth *before* or *after* taxes, the answer is, our one-tenth is before taxes are taken out, and yes, ministers do pay taxes. If you ask whether that is one-tenth of my salary *and* my housing allowance, the answer is yes.

A missionary home on furlough was traveling around the country speaking to congregations about his work, and the need for all to participate in the great commission. Usually an offering was received to help with his work. At one such service, a man sitting next to the aisle, about halfway up, had folded his arms and sat with a grim look, a scowl and a frown. He evidently did not want to be there. Perhaps his wife had made him come. When the usher held the plate in front of him, he just shook his head. The usher leaned over and whispered, "It's for missions, you know."

Still, the scowl and a mumbled sentence, "I don't believe in 'em," the man said.

This usher was a sharp man. He leaned down and said, "Then you take some out. It's for the heathen, anyway!"