

GOALS FOR THE GROUP LEADER

Help the group members:

1. to understand that the measure of greatness in God's kingdom is service
2. to practise serving

I. WORSHIP (14 min.)

1. Prayer

Pray that God will guide us through his Spirit; that we will be aware of his presence and that we will listen to what he says.

2. Meditation

Worship is to thank God

Theme: To thank God that Jesus Christ is the Greatest Servant

Read the Bible verses mentioned below and the explanation. Or explain the verses in your own words.

Luke 22:24-27

²⁴ A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. ²⁵ Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. ²⁶ But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. ²⁷ For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

- What is regarded as greatness in the world?
- What is regarded as greatness in God's kingdom?
- Which example does Jesus give to his disciples?
- What do you think of the motto: "I am among you as one who serves"?

3. Worship

Let everyone in the small group take a turn to worship (in one or two sentences) God as the One among us who serves.

II. INTRODUCTION THEME (1 min.)

The theme for this meeting is: **Serving**

Read or explain in your own words.

Jesus Christ has come not to be served, but to serve. He is among us as one who serves. He calls his disciples to follow his example.

III. SHARING OF QUIET TIMES (30 min.)

Let everyone in the small group take a turn to share (or read) what he has learned from one of the assigned quiet times.

Theme: Serving

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| Day 1 | 1 Chronicles 28:9-11, 19-21
Serve God and his plan with wholehearted devotion and willingness |
| Day 2 | Matthew 20:25-28
Serving makes one great in God's kingdom |
| Day 3 | Mark 10:23-30
Whoever gives up something in order to serve Jesus will be rewarded a hundred times as much |
| Day 4 | Luke 16:10-16
Whoever is faithful in little will also be faithful in much |
| Day 5 | John 13:3-17
Be willing to serve in tasks no one else can or want to do |
| Day 6 ^{BS} | Matthew 25:14-30
Be faithful in managing your talents |
| Day 7 | 2 Corinthians 5:18-21
Serve unbelievers by sharing the gospel with them |
| Day 8 | Ephesians 6:5-8
Serve your employer with obedience, respect and sincerity ¹ |
| Day 9 | Philippians 2:5-7
Serve by following the example of Jesus Christ (Luke 22:27) |
| Day 10 | 1 Peter 5:1-4
The Bible teaches that leaders must serve and not rule |

¹ During the first century A.D. many employees were still slaves

IV. ADDITIONAL SHARING (15 min.)

Part IV is optional.
If after sharing quiet times there is still time left over, the following may serve as subjects for conversation.

1. Discussing the study

Discuss the study with reference to the questions mentioned below:

Theme: How you become a servant

- Why should Christians become servants?
- In which areas should Christians become servants?
- Which motives and attitudes make Christians to be servants?
- How can you become a servant?

2. Commitment

Let the group members consider the following question and record their answer:

- “If Jesus Christ deliberately chose to be is a Servant, what would you choose to be?”

3. Personal sharing

Discuss personal growth and commitment. Who would like to share a difficulty or blessing in his/her personal life? What are your thoughts or feelings?

V. MEMORISATION (5 min.)

1. Review of previous Bible verses

Let pairs of group members review each other’s previously memorised Bible verses (the last memorised Bible verse or the last 5 memorised Bible verses).

2. Memorisation of the new Bible verse

Explain the meaning of the new Bible verse.

SERVING
Mark 10:45

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served,
but to serve,
and to give his life as a ransom for many

Mark 10:45 (NIV)

VI. BIBLE STUDY (45 min.)

Theme: Being faithful in little

1. Bible Study

Make use of the parable method of Bible study and study:

Matthew 25:14-30

¹⁴ “Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five Talents (bags of gold), to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.

¹⁶ The man who had received five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two talents gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

¹⁹ “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’

²¹ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

²² “The man with two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.’

²³ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

²⁴ “Then the man who had received one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

²⁶ “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.’

²⁸ ““So take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. ²⁹ For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.

³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

2. Emphasis

A Christian ought to serve Jesus Christ with what has been entrusted to him.

3. Explanation for the group leader

Matthew 25:14-30 is *a parable*. A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It is a true-to-life story and can take place on earth in order to teach and illustrate a spiritual truth or principle.

[Step 1] Understand the story of the parable

The parable is told in figurative language and the spiritual meaning is based on that.

➤ *A man entrusted his property to his servants before he went on a long journey.*

A 'talent' is a measure of weight and a unit of money, which had different values at different periods of time. During the time of Jesus the Attic talent was worth no less than 6000 denarii. A denarius was the daily salary of a soldier or day-labourer. Thus, someone would have to work 20 years in order to earn 1 talent! This man was a rich businessman and he wanted to multiply his possessions during his absence.

➤ *The man gave to each according to his ability.*
The businessman was clever. He knew that his servants possessed different skills and abilities. That is why he gave to each what they could manage.

➤ *The servants put their money to work*
The first two servants doubled their possessions. How they did this, is not told. We must accept that it is done in an honourable way.

➤ *The third servant buried his talent*
He neglected his task! Because it was easy to break into his house (the walls were made of sticks plastered with mud) he buried his talent somewhere in the ground (cf. Matthew 6:19; 13:44). He did not do this because he felt inferior in comparison to the other servants, but because he had an unfounded mistrust in his master and because he was lazy!

➤ *There comes a time of reckoning!*
When the master after a very long time suddenly and unexpectedly returned he called his servants to give an account of their work.

[Step 2] Study the context of the parable and determine the elements of the parable

The context of a parable consists of three parts: the setting, the story and the explanation or application.

The setting consists of the occasion and the circumstances that led to the telling of the story. The setting is Matthew 24:1 to 25:13. Jesus Christ is going to return and every person will have to give an account what he did with what Jesus Christ entrusted to him. Therefore every Christians must be watchful and live and serve in a way that Jesus Christ expects of him.

The story is in Matthew 25:14-30.

The explanation or application here is given in the story. It is about the return of Jesus Christ and the events at his second coming. Jesus Christ will certainly ask an account of everyone!

[Step 3] Identify the relevant details in the story of the parable

Jesus Christ does not intend every detail in the story to have a specific significance. The relevant details in the story strengthen the message of the parable. The other details only serve the story itself and Christians should not give any meaning to them. A parable is not an allegory.

➤ *The kingdom of God* is a relevant detail (25:1,14).
The kingdom of God is the kingship of God through Christ over everyone and everything, but especially over people who acknowledge him as King in their hearts and lives (Luke 17:21; Matthew 6:10,33).

The kingdom of God reveals itself in the salvation of people (Mark 10:25-26) from beginning (the regeneration of their soul) (John 3:3) to end (the resurrection of their body from the dead) (1 Corinthians 15:26); in the establishment of the visible community of all believers (the Body of Christ or the Church) (Matthew 16:18-19); in the transforming influence of God's people in all areas of life on earth (Romans 14:17); and finally in the renewal of all things, the new heaven and the new earth (Matthew 25:34).

➤ *The man who went on a long journey* is a relevant detail (25:14).

He stays away for a long time. And he plans to multiply his possessions during his absence.

Because the explanation and application derived is about the final judgement at the second coming of Jesus Christ, this parable deals about what people do with what Jesus Christ entrusted to them between his first and second coming.

The master only returns after a long time (verse 19). Jesus implies that the period between his first and second coming will be long. Hereby Jesus Christ rejected the notion and expectation of his disciples that he would return very soon to establish the final phase of his kingdom (Acts 1:6-7). The kingdom of God has already come (Matthew 12:28-29), but it is very different to all the other kingdoms in the world (John 18:36). The kingdom of God grows and is extended visibly (Matthew 13:31-32), but reaches her final phase only at the second coming of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:24-26,50-52).

Jesus urges his disciples to eagerly put their talent to work until his return. Their labour in the Lord will never be in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58)!

➤ *The owner and the servants are relevant details (25:14).*
The talents belong to the master and not to the servants! The servants are mere stewards of the master who entrusted these talents to them. The servants are responsible to the master and will have to give an account of their service to the master.

➤ *The talents are a relevant detail (25:15).*
Because the master knew that his servants possess different business skills, he entrusted 5 talents to one and 2 to another and 1 to a third. He gave to each according to their ability (capacity).

One talent was a very large amount. It had a value of the total salary of 20 years of work! Jesus Christ entrusted very much even to the least of his servants (the people on earth)!

A talent in this parable represents all God's gifts to people: natural abilities (skills, money and possessions), supernatural spiritual abilities (gifts of the Spirit) and opportunities (open doors).

➤ *Putting the talents to work is a relevant detail (25:16-17).*

The first two servants doubled their number of talents! The number of talents entrusted to a servant will play a lesser role on the final judgement Day than what he has done with the talents entrusted to him.

➤ *The burying of a talent is a relevant detail (25:18).*
The third servant neglected his God-given task (commission) and buried his talent. He did this because he had the wrong view of his master and because he was lazy. His sin was that he neglected his master's command.

In the final judgement day, Jesus Christ will not only judge the bad things done, but also the good things one neglected to do (Matthew 25:41-43; James 4:17)!

Read the excuses people make in order to escape being a steward (Matthew 7:15-23; 22:5; 25:21,23,44-45; Luke 13:26-27; 14:18-20).

➤ *The time of reckoning is a relevant detail (25:19).*
There will definitely come a time when everyone will have to give an account of what he has done with the talents God entrusted to him. This detail is also important in other parables: the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:23), the parable of the wicked tenants (Matthew 21:34), the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:19) and the parable of the ten minas (Luke 19:15). That is why it is important that all servants of Jesus Christ (and all people in the world) keep the Day of reckoning in mind!

➤ *Is it true that God would reap where he had not sown (25:24-27)?*

What this evil and lazy servant said about his master, Jesus Christ, was not true!

There are two examples in the Bible where people reap where they have not sown. In Exodus 5:7-9 Pharaoh tried to reap where he had not sown. He demanded that the Israelites produce the same number of bricks as before but without giving them the straw they needed. And according to 1 Kings 12:11 king Rehoboam tried to reap where he had not sown. He said to the people of Judah, "My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions!" But God did not bless the evil work of these two kings!

God never reaps where he has not first sown! But he will certainly reap where he has sown! He will hold us responsible and accountable for what he has entrusted to us.

God certainly sows! And God will certainly reap! God gives faith (Ephesians 2:8) and demands faith (Luke 18:8; Hebrews 11:6). God gives love (Romans 5:5) and demands love (Mark 12:30-31). God gives self-control (Galatians 5:23) and demands self-control (Titus 2:2,5,6, 11-12). And according to Matthew 25:15 God gave to each servant at least one talent. This is very much! He gave to each according to their ability (capacity). God takes everyone's personality and ability into account. And because God has sown, he has the right to reap and he will reap!

- *The reward for faithfulness is a relevant detail* (25:20-23).

Although the first two servants were given a different number of talents, they were given the same reward: both had been faithful with a few things and both were put in charge of many things. Both had doubled their entrusted talents and therefore both received the same reward. Both were invited to come and share in the master's happiness! This is a symbol of eternal life in heaven.

- *The punishment for neglect is a relevant detail* (25:24-30).

The evil servant is punished for his unfaithfulness and neglect. The darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth is a figure for hell where people will suffer anxiety and torment.

- *The principle of reward and punishment is a relevant detail* (25:29; cf. Luke 8:18; 19:26).

Jesus Christ promises that faithfulness and zeal will be rewarded. Those who develop their God-given abilities and use their God-given opportunities in order to serve God, his kingdom and other people will be blessed.

This is also true in spiritual issues. Whoever reads, studies and applies God's Word (the Bible) a lot, will receive many of God's blessings (Mark 4:24-25). Whoever opens his heart to God and receives his Word will reap a hundred times more (Matthew 13:11-12; Mark 4:13).

Standing still in spiritual matters is impossible! You can only move forward and gain new ground or slide backwards and lose ground!

Every blessing guarantees new blessings of God – they come rolling towards you as the waves of the ocean (John 1:16). When you put what has been entrusted to you to work, new abilities and new opportunities will never fail! You will receive more abilities and more opportunities to have more influence in God's kingdom! You will grow in authority and influence.

But Jesus Christ also warns that unfaithfulness, neglect and laziness will certainly be punished. The opportunities God gives to you are not to enrich yourself or to enlarge your power, but are entrusted to you to promote God's kingdom (kingship)!

As a Christian you are not an isolated member of the Body of Christ (the Church or congregation). A Christian who contributes to the growth of the Body of Christ grows along with the Body. But a Christian who does nothing dies! Even what Christ had entrusted to him once will be taken away from him (Hosea 4:6; Matthew 8:12; Matthew 21:43)! An unfaithful and lazy Christian will lose his talents (his abilities and his opportunities)!

[Step 4] Identify the message of the parable

The message of the parable is found in the explanation and application of the story itself. From the manner Jesus Christ explains and applies parables we know how we should explain and apply parables. A parable normally has only one main thought or message. That is why we must not try to find a spiritual meaning in every detail of a parable (i.e. allegorise the parable), but rather discover the one important message of the parable.

The parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30 teaches about the reward and punishment in God's kingdom.

The main message of the parable is: "People must be faithful and zealous in putting their talents to work. Jesus Christ will reward faithfulness and zeal, but punish neglect and laziness!"

'Faithfulness' is an important characteristic in God's kingdom. The citizens of God's kingdom are faithful and zealous with respect to the talents (abilities and opportunities) entrusted to them. Every single Christian has at least received one talent, which is very much, but never more than his ability (capacity)! Whoever puts his talent to work will be rewarded with more talents (abilities and opportunities)! But whoever neglects his talent, will lose even what was entrusted to him before and in the end he will have nothing!

[Step 5] Check the message of the parable with other Bible passages

Some parables have comparable elements, but all parables have comparable and contrasting truths in the Bible. Check your explanation and application with truths in the whole Bible.

- *Stewardship of our possessions is in reality stewardship of God's possessions which he has entrusted to us.*

"What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you did not?" (1 Corinthians 4:7). Everything we possess is only loaned to us. Christians are merely stewards of God and will have to give an account of what they did with what had been entrusted to them at the second coming of Christ.

- *There is a long period of time between the first and second coming of Christ.*

Matthew 24:9-14; Matthew 25:5,19; 2 Thessalonians 2:2-3 and 2 Peter 3:4-9 teach that there are many events that must take place before the second coming.

➤ *Giving an account of our stewardship.*

Every human being will have to give an account on the last judgement Day of what he said and did in life on earth (Ecclesiastes 12:14; *Read* Matthew 25:19,35-45; Luke 12:47-48; Romans 2:16; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:13).

➤ *God will reap where he sowed.*

God has sown. He has entrusted at least one talent to each servant. He will demand an account.

➤ *Human excuses in order not to be a steward.*

In Luke 14:18-20 (Matthew 22:5) people make poor excuses not to do what the king demanded. Some say they are too busy with their own business and have no time for God's business. Others say that they have started a relationship (e.g. with a girl or boy) that demands a higher priority than the relationship with Jesus Christ!

In Matthew 25:44-45 people make the excuse that they did nothing for poor, needy and lonely people, because they never encountered Jesus Christ and therefore it would be unfair to punish them. But whatever a person does for one of the least of the brothers of Jesus Christ

(i.e. Christians) (Mark 3:35; Matthew 10:40-42) he does for Jesus Christ (Matthew 25:40; cf. Colossians 3:17,23)!

In Matthew 7:21-23 people claim that they did so-called Christian works and therefore have the right to be accepted by Christ. However, Jesus Christ replied that he did not know them – he had no personal relationship with them!

VII. PRAYER (8 min.)

Pray with one another in response to what God said to you during this gathering. Let every group member take a turn to pray one or two sentences about what God taught him during this meeting.

Pray with one another for one another (Romans 15:30) and for other people (Colossians 4:12).

VIII. THE NEXT MEETING (2 min.)

Hand out the preparation for the next gathering.