

Lesson One Use God's Gifts

Parable of the Talents

Memory Verse:

James 1:7

*"Every good and perfect gift is from above,
coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights,
who does not change like shifting shadows."*

Parable Story:

Parable of the Talents
(Matthew 25:14-30)

Song Suggestions:

100 Reasons
A Beautiful Life
Count Your Blessings
Be Thou My Vision
Great Is Thy Faithfulness
Make Me a Servant

Preparatory Considerations:

1. This class is divided into seven "blocks" of instruction. To ensure that all the material is covered, you will want to consider carefully each block of instruction in preparation for class.
2. Read all the Scripture referenced in the lesson.
3. Make sure that all materials are prepared for the students' use. The following materials will be required for this class:
 - Student Books
 - Visual Aids—Cactus, Rock
 - Visual Aids marked Lesson One— Good Steward; Lesson One Memory Verse Poster; Fruit Cards reproducible; One Body Puzzle reproducible
 - Scissors (Block Four)
 - Envelope (Block Four)
 - Bindfold (Block Four)
 - Pens or markers (Block Four)



Saddle Up

- Welcome students.
- Introduce the theme.
- Introduce the lesson topic, *Use God's Gifts*. To be good stewards, we must use the gifts God gives us.

A. Begin by welcoming the students to class. Be sure to introduce yourself and each of your co-teachers as ranch foremen. If time permits, allow each student to introduce himself to the class.

B. Explain the theme of the VBS. **In this VBS, our lives will be compared to the lives of hired hands working on a cattle ranch.** Ask if any of the students have ever been to a cattle ranch. Allow them to share their experiences. Ask the following questions:

- **What are some of the duties of a ranch hand?** feeding the livestock, protecting the livestock, mending fences so the livestock cannot wander away, etc.
- **What is a cattle roundup?** A roundup is an event in which several ranch hands mounted on horseback gather the cattle together in one place.
- **What does it mean to be branded?** Branding is the process of permanently marking a symbol on the hide of an animal to be able to identify the owner of the animal. Branding can be done by heating a branding iron or using an electric brander or sometimes even freeze branding which makes the hair in the branded area grow in white.
- **Why is it important to brand an animal?** So everyone can know who it belongs to; so that lost cattle can be returned to their owner.
- **Do the cattle belong to the ranch hand or the rancher?** The rancher.
- **Why is the job of a ranch hand important?** The rancher has a lot of time and money invested in his ranch. It is the duty of the hired ranch hand to take good care of all that belongs to the rancher.

C. In many ways, our lives are very similar to working on a cattle ranch. God has entrusted us with so many blessings. **Everything God entrusts us with these blessings, in reality, everything we have belongs to Him. In a sense, each blessing we have been branded by God. We are like the ranch hand, meaning that it is our responsibility to take care of all of these blessings. As God's children, when we become His we are branded, sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13). In this VBS, we will discover the importance of using every blessing, every opportunity to glorify God.** Introduce the VBS theme verse: **Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). Each time God entrusts us with a blessing, He also gives us a responsibility. The responsibility is to use that blessing to glorify Him.** **Throughout the course of this VBS, we are discovering a high calling in our lives, a calling to become good**

stewards of all the blessings that God has given us. This leaves us asking two questions:

1. **Exactly what are the many blessings God gives me each day?**
2. **What does it mean to become a good steward of these blessings?**

During each lesson of this VBS we will look at one particular blessing that God has given us and the responsibility that accompanies it.

D. Before class begins, prepare the Good Steward poster and the Good Steward poster which depicts cowboys in a corral from the Visual Aid packet where the students can see them. Direct the students' attention to the Good Steward poster marked Lesson One. This poster depicts cowboys chasing and roping wild horses. **One responsibility a ranch hand has is rounding up strays. Whether driving cattle or corralling wild horses, there are always a few that attempt to get away. As a good steward of what is entrusted to him, the ranch hand's responsibility is to chase down every stray so that none get away. God blesses us with a multitude of blessings, or gifts, every day. Each one of these blessings should be viewed as an opportunity. Every blessing that God gives us offers us an opportunity to serve Him better. Unfortunately, we allow opportunities to serve God pass us by every day. Because we do not acknowledge our responsibility to serve God with our blessings, these "stray" blessings, or opportunities, can go to waste.**



E. Before class begins, you should prep the *Cowboy Speak* visual from the Visual Aid packet. This visual shows 10 different cowboy phrases or terms, two for each lesson. Cut the 10 pieces apart, and bring the two marked Lesson One to class. **During each class period, we will learn a couple of new phrases or terms that originated from western cowboys.** Show the first phrase to the class at this time: *Coffee Boiler*. Ask if any of the students can guess the definition of the term. After a few attempts to guess, tell them the meaning of the term. **Not all cowboys had a**

good work ethic. Some would shirk their responsibilities. A coffee boiler was a cowboy who spent most of his time sitting around the coffee pot watching it boil instead of helping out with the chores. The term soon came to define anyone who was lazy or failed to take advantage of every opportunity to get his work done. Show the second phrase



to the class at this time: *Riding for the Brand*. Can any of you guess what this phrase means? *Riding for the brand* meant that a person was loyal. A brand was a logo that signified the ranch for which a cowboy worked. One described as

riding for the brand was a cowboy who worked hard because he acknowledged his responsibility to the one for whom he worked. Discuss with the student the difference between being a coffee boiler and one who rode for the brand. How might these terms define some of the people you know? How might these terms define certain Christians today?

F. Introduce the memory verse for Lesson One: **Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, comes from the Father in heaven. We cannot spend our lives being a coffee boiler. If we are going to become the stewards that God wants us to be, we must show that we know that every good and perfect gift comes from God. It is our responsibility to ride for the brand by using these gifts and opportunities to glorify God.**



The Parable of the Talents

- Explore the Parable of the Talents
- Discover the importance of using the gifts God gives us for His glory.

A. Parables illustrate a lesson by comparing common objects or people to the listener. Many of Jesus' parables focused on the blessings that God gives us and the responsibility to accompany those blessings. The parable for Lesson One has been titled, "The Parable of the Talents." Its lesson encourages all the gifts with which we have been entrusted. This parable could also be named, "The Parable of Opportunities." Each of God's gifts to us is an opportunity to do His will and glorify His name. Instruct the students to turn to page 1 of their Ranch Journals where the lesson text has been written, and allow them to read the text at this time. Text is taken from Matthew 25:14-30.

Inside the Parable

- Although they were used to buy and sell, the *talents* to which Jesus referred were not coins. Neither were they the same as talents we mean today, meaning a special ability that someone has. They were a weight or a unit of measure that would be used to determine the value of various items. A talent made of gold would be more valuable than a talent made of silver, for example.
- Scripture, especially within parables, often depicts a wealthy man who must leave his home for an extended journey and leave his possessions in the care of others. Because travel was difficult and transportation was slow and limited, extended journeys for the elite were common during the first century.
- The comparisons in this parable are fairly obvious: The wealthy man represents God. The servants represent those to whom God has entrusted with His blessings. The talents represent any of the number of blessings that God gives us. Our money, our time, our talents or abilities, and our possessions are all blessings that God bestows on each of us. Each blessing is, in fact, an opportunity to glorify His name.

B. Retell the parable in your own words, or discuss the parable with the students. Be sure to include the background and application information listed above. Ask the students the following questions:

1. Why do you believe the man in the parable entrusted each servant with a different number of talents? Most likely, the man based the number of talents given to each servant on his past performance. He distributed his talents based on the amount he felt each servant could properly manage.

2. What did the five talent- and two talent-servants do with their talents? Each of them began to trade with the talents. This probably indicates that they went into the marketplace and bought and sold goods with the talents that had been given. In an effort to please their master, they made wise choices and used the talents to gain more wealth for him.

3. Why do you believe the one talent-servant did not use his talent to please his master? We cannot be sure of the servant's motives, but he may have failed to act out of fear or embarrassment. The servant expressed that he feared his master, so buried his talent. If he truly knew his master, he would have acted differently. Also, he may have feared he was not capable of managing his talent with the same skill as the other two servants. Or he may have been embarrassed by the fact that his resources did not equal that of his peers.

4. What was the result of each servant's action? The two servants who used their talents wisely were rewarded with a greater level of trust and more resources. The one servant who failed to use his talent was punished, and his only resource was taken away.

5. It is interesting that the master who had once distributed all the talents did not punish them when he returned. Instead, he allowed the two faithful servants to keep their talents and continue working with them, even giving an additional talent to the first servant. What does this say about the blessings and opportunities that God gives to us? When God sees that we have acted faithfully with the blessings and opportunities He gives us, He will continue to give us more.



Saddling Up for His Service

- Introduce Memory Verse.
- Apply the parable to their lives.

A. Introduce the memory verse for Lesson 3: **Every gift and every perfect gift is from God.** **James 1:17.**

Ask the following questions to help the students better understand the verse:

- **What does it mean that our gifts come "from above?"** Our gifts come from God. He has blessed each of us with gifts that can be used to glorify Him.
- **What is meant by "every gift and every perfect gift?"** Every gift God gives is His means to do good. Each gift is perfectly chosen for each person.
- **How do we minister our gifts to one another?** We can use the gifts God gives us to both glorify Him and help our fellow man.

B. Instruct students to turn to page 2 in their Ranch Journals to the section titled *Saddling Up for His Service*. There they will find two verses, Romans 12:6 and Luke 12:48. Have students locate the first verse in their Bibles, and allow one student to read the verse aloud. Have students fill in the words of the verse that are missing. Discuss the verse with students and repeat with the second verse.

C. Remind students that each person is blessed with many and various gifts. What are their gifts? Also on page 2 of the Ranch Journal is a section titled, "An Inventory of My Gifts," with two columns. In the *Possessions* column, they should list physical possessions. In the *Abilities* column they should list unique talents and attributes (kindness, outgoing nature, patience). Allow the students a few moments to record the gifts that God has given them. Upon completion, divide your class into groups of two to three students each. Allow each group to discuss their gifts and think of some creative ways that they can use their gifts to glorify God and help their fellow man. After they have finished, allow the groups to share one or two of their best answers with the class.



Activity Stamped!

- Reinforce the lesson.
- Create a hands-on learning experience that will solidify the lesson in the students' minds.
- Have fun!

The following activities are all designed with the same purpose in mind—to reinforce the lesson. They are not listed in any certain order; there are a number of ways you can choose to coordinate them. Depending on the number of students, the number of teachers available, the size of your classroom, and the time allotment, you may decide to perform these activities one at a time with the entire class or separate your class into small groups and rotate through stations. Obviously, you may also opt to pick which activities work best for you and only perform those activities. However, it is important for this age group that each group of students has adult supervision.



One Body Different Parts

Materials needed: Visual Aid marked Lesson One—One Body Puzzle reproducible (several copies)
 scissors
 envelopes
 blindfolds

Before class, make several copies of the One Body Puzzle reproducible, one puzzle for each student. Cut each puzzle into pieces, and put each puzzle into a separate envelope.

Have one student read 1 Corinthians 12:19, which speaks of the body of Christ being made up of different parts. Discuss the verse. SAY: **God has blessed us with different talents and abilities so that as His body, we will be complete when we work together. In this body, different parts of the body will work together to complete a task. In each pair of students, one of you will be the eyes and the other will be the hands.**

Divide the students into pairs. Have each pair sit at a table directly across from each other. Ask for a volunteer from each pair to put on a blindfold. Place the puzzle pieces on the table between them.

The *eyes* cannot use their hands and the *hands* cannot use their eyes. The object is for the *eyes* to direct the movements of the *hands* so that the first pair successfully assemble the puzzle. Switch roles, and play again. Upon conclusion, SAY: **We should each use the talents God has given us. It is only when we work together that the body is complete. If one part of the body refuses to work, the whole body suffers.**



A blindfold can easily be made using a hand or shop towel fastened by hook and loop tape.

Known by Our Fruit



Materials needed: Fruit Cards reproducible (color version available on Multi-Media CD) pens or markers

Before class, make and cut apart copies of the Fruit Cards reproducible from the Visual Aid package. (A color version is available on the Multi-Media CD.) Make enough for each student to have at least two cards.

Hand out the Fruit Cards and have students write their names across the fruit. SAY: **Each of us is blessed with unique talents and abilities. God wants us to use these blessings to glorify Him. Think of talents or abilities with which you have been blessed. Write these abilities on the back of your Fruit, but don't let anyone else see what you are writing.**

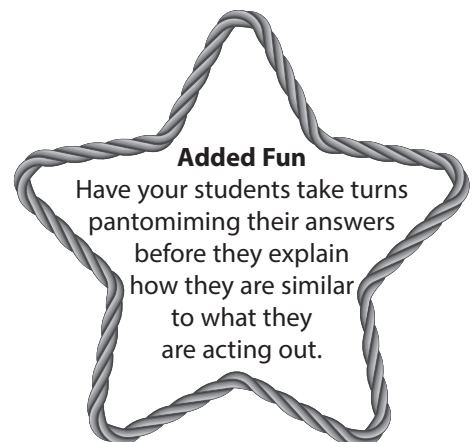
Collect the Fruit Cards, and shuffle them. One at a time, read the talent without revealing whose card you are holding. Allow the students to discuss and vote on whose card they believe you are holding. The name begins moving on to the next card. After all the cards have been read, read Matthew 7:18-20. SAY: **God expects us to produce results by using the abilities with which we have been blessed. If we use our talents to their fullest, others will see the fruit that is produced in our lives. Never bury your talents but use them to produce fruit.**



If I Were a...

Help students characterize their talents, abilities, and even their personalities. You will name a category, and each student will have an opportunity to tell how he fits into that category. For example, if the category is **Animal**, each student will say, **"If I were an animal, I would be a** (any answer they choose).

Once each student has answered the question, have them explain why they gave their answer. Other categories include: type of food, cartoon character, car, type of weather, piece of furniture, street sign, genre of book. Play as long as you wish. Upon conclusion, say: **we are all different and each of us has been made in a special way. Our challenge is to discover the talents with which God has blessed us and use them to glorify Him.**



Ranch Journal

Allow the students to complete the activities from Lesson One in their Student Books.