

Lesson One Use God's Gifts

Parable of the Talents

Memory Verse:

James 1:17

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

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 several blocks of instruction. To ensure that all the material is covered, you will want to consider carefully each block of instruction for preparation for class.
2. Read all the Scriptures 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 to Speak
- Visual Aids marked Lesson One— Good Steward; Lesson One Memory Verse Poster; One Body Puzzle reproducible
- scissors (Block Four)
- glue (Block Four)
- paper (Block Four)
- cardstock (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 has given us.

A. Welcome the students to class. Introduce yourself and each of your co-teachers. You may decide to allow students to introduce themselves. Make sure that visitors are recognized.

B. Ask students to think about the purpose in their lives. Prompt some discussion by asking the following questions:

- **Why are you here?**
- **What makes you "tick?"**
- **Why do you treat others the way you do?**
- **Why do you work hard in school, athletics, or other activities?**
- **What are the factors that motivate you to succeed in life?**

C. We all have selfish motives that drive our daily activities. Wealth, popularity, approval, importance, and self-actualization are all factors that motivate our actions and attitudes, and that is okay. Personal motives often change during the course of our lives. When we fail to reach our goals or when our goals seem to change from one day to the next, we can be left asking, "What is the use?" or "Why am I here?" Even King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, struggled with these questions. In fact, the entire book of Ecclesiastes is dedicated to Solomon's search for meaning in his life. Solomon seemingly had it all. He had wealth, wisdom, fame, and all of life's physical pleasures at his fingertips, but he was led to the conclusion that "all is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 1:2). What Solomon ultimately concluded was that life needs to be about more than selfish motivation.

D. Introduce the VBS theme verse, "Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). **Though we all have personal motivations for doing the way we act, our primary motivation should be to bring glory to our God. If we believe that, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above," (James 1:17) then we realize that everything we have belongs to God. All of our blessings should be used to bring glory to Him and to fulfill His purpose.** Through the course of this VBS, we are discovering a higher calling in our lives, a calling to become good stewards of all the blessings that God has given us. This lesson asks us two questions:

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

E. Ask the students to give their definition of a *steward*. After some discussion, SAY: **A steward is a person who takes proper care of the things that have been entrusted to him. In this VBS we are comparing the role of a steward to the role of a ranch hand on a cattle ranch. Though the cattle do not belong to the cowboy, it is his responsibility to take care of them. Our God has given us to do the same with our blessings. Everything we have belongs to God. Our blessings are only given to us for a short time while here on earth, and our responsibility is to properly care for and use them. To do this, we must "round up" these blessings daily by taking careful inventory of them so that we are aware of how much God has given us. During each lesson, we will look at one special blessing that God has given us and the responsibility that accompanies it.**



F. Before class, hang all the *Good Steward* posters, which depict cowboys in action, 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.**

Coffee Boiler

Lesson One

G. 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 students 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?**

H. Introduce the memory verse for Lesson One. **"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above," James 1:17. 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 and use these gifts as opportunities to glorify God.**

Riding for the Brand

Lesson One



2 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 parable illustrates a lesson by comparing common objects or people to the listener. Many of Jesus' parables focused on the blessings God gives us and the responsibilities that accompany those blessings. The parable for Lesson One has been called, "The Parable of the Talents." Its lesson encompasses 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 in 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 the *talents* we speak of today, meaning a special ability that someone has. They were a weight or a unit of measure and could 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 of us whom God has entrusted with His blessings. The talents represent any 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 it 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?

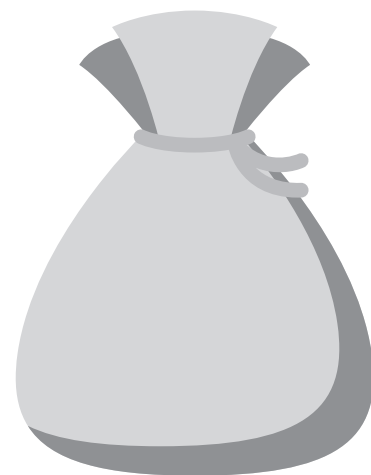
Most likely, the man based the number of talents he entrusted each servant on his past performance. The master entrusted talents based on the amount he felt each servant could properly manage.

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

3. Why do you believe the one talent-servant did not use his talent to serve 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 he 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 wisely 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 collect 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. Have students turn to page 2 in their Ranch Journals to the section titled, "Characteristics of a Productive Steward." **Each of us has a little of the one-talent servant in us. None of us is as productive with our opportunities as we could be. Most of us want to become more fruitful in our daily lives, but we have not yet mastered the art of doing so. We will be looking at three characteristics that will help us to become productive stewards.** One at a time, introduce the characteristics of a productive steward. As you do so, have students write the characteristic in the space provided in their Ranch Journal. After each characteristic is a Scripture. Have students look up the Scripture, and ask a volunteer to read it aloud. Discuss each Scripture.

- **Characteristic Number One: Take proper inventory of your resources.** Read James 1:17. **The five- and two-talent servants knew the value of what they had been given. They knew what they had to work with and what could be expected of them. In contrast, we don't always appreciate how much we have been blessed. We work hard in service to God's kingdom but don't truly believe that we possess much value. God has blessed each one of us abundantly, and His gifts are good, perfect, and useful. We must spend time each day considering the many ways in which we have been blessed.**
- **Characteristic Number Two: Focus on your own strengths and resources that you can use on the strengths and resources of others.** Read Romans 12:6. **All too often, we are more focused on what we lack than what we should be**

focusing on what we have. Like the unfruitful servant, our envy of the blessings of others causes us to belittle the blessings that have been given to us. What a mundane world we would live in if everyone possessed the exact same abilities and opportunities! God has created each person with unique gifts for a reason. Our charge is not to quarrel with someone or to envy what others have, but to make the most of what we have been given.

Characteristic Number Three: Realize our work is never finished. Read Luke 12:48. **After the five-talent servant received an additional six talents (five of his own and one from the one-talent servant), this servant now had seven talents. Was he still only responsible for the initial five? The more productive stewards we become, the more we will be blessed. The more we are blessed, the more God will expect from us.**

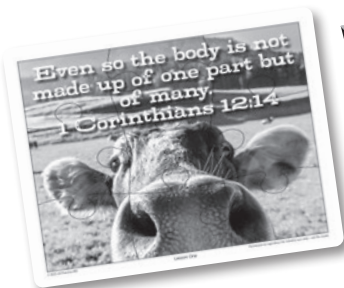
B. Remind students that each person is blessed with many and various gifts. What are their gifts? Also on page 2 of the Ranch Journal is a section titled, "An Inventory of My Gifts," with two columns. In the *Possessions* column, they should list physical possessions. In the *Abilities* column they should 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, ask the students to think about this inventory of gifts and how some of their blessings are unique in nature. Ask them, "How can these blessings be used to glorify God?"



Activity Stampede!

- 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 even 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.

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

Have one student read 1 Corinthians 12:12-19, which speaks of the body of Christ being made 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 and be the first to 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.**

If I Were a...

Added Fun

Have your students take turns pantomiming their answers before they explain how they are similar to what they are acting out.

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, a 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 might include type of food, cartoon character, type of weather, piece of furniture, street sign, or 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.