

If you were asked to buy the tackiest gift imaginable, what would you buy? Martin Marty was once invited to a postnuptial party. He was asked to bring "a gift in the worst possible taste." The purpose was to embarrass the newly married couple. They would open their gifts standing in front of their family and friends and "ooh and aah" as they opened each tacky item.

Marty found a five and dime store and began his search for the tackiest gift. **To his delight he discovered a yellow plastic dove with a silver beak hollowed to hold a small plant and chained so it could be suspended.** This was the perfect gift for the occasion, he thought. No one would have a more disguising gift than his. Then, an amazing thing happened. Expecting to be embarrassed at the checkout counter, he was instead surrounded by shoppers. **They wanted to know where he had found such a beautiful object.** Two or three more of these doves got sold that day. Marty walked away wondering where such things come from and where they go if the neighborhood store does not manage to sell them.

Earlier this year he found the answer in an article in the Wall Street Journal. They were reporting on the "tackiest trade show" in the nation. It was being held in Las Vegas. Over four thousand manufacturers unloaded cheap or surplus merchandise at "unbelievably low prices." The reporter interviewed some of the merchants at the trade show. One merchant told him, "Everything's got a price." Another jokingly said, "I'm the last guy you see before you take it to the dump." Another said, "The less you know the better." Still another told the reporter, **"Grunge is in."** And finally, another summed up the experience with these words, **"Everything can be sold."**

WHAT WE DO WITH WHAT WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN SAYS A LOT ABOUT OUR FAITH!

Think of it this way, God has given each of us a gold coin and it is our choice on how we are going to spend it. We could spend it on junk, "Grunge is in." Or we could spend it on ourselves. We could bury it in the ground, or we could invest it in the kingdom of God.

Once there was a wealthy landowner, or "master" as he is called here, who was about to go away on a long trip. Since he was going away for such a long time he decided to put his loyal staff in charge of everything he owned. Before he left he presented one of the servants with the unbelievable sum of five talents. To another servant he gave two talents and to the third servant he gave one talent. The servants weren't given any instructions on what to do with the talents or when exactly the landowner would return.

A "TALENT" was a tremendous sum of money. It represented the earnings of TWENTY OR MORE YEARS.

- *The servant who was given five talents held in his possession the earnings of five persons' lifetimes.*
- *The servant who was given two talents had the earnings of two people.*
- *Even the servant who was given only one talent had an enormous sum of money.*

Immediately after the master left on his trip the first two servants went to work. The one with the five talents and the one with two talents soon had doubled the money of their master. The third servant who was given one talent, however, **"went off at once and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money."** At an unexpected time, the master returned and called in his three servants to give an account of how each used the talents entrusted to him.

NOTE, FIRST OF ALL, THAT EACH OF US HAS DIFFERENT GIFTS. Jesus does not pretend in this parable that all of us are alike.

Max DePree is chairman and chief executive officer of **Herman Miller, Inc.**, the **furniture maker** which was named one of Fortune's ten best managed and most innovative companies. In his book, **LEADERSHIP IS AN ART**, DePree writes about his 96-year-old father who was the founder of the company. Many years ago, when his father was still a young manager at the factory, a millwright died. The millwright was a key person who oversaw the operation of the factory. The entire activity of the operation depended on him. DePree's father was unsure of what to do when the

millwright died, but decided he should spend some time with the family. There were a few moments of awkward conversation as his father tried to find the right words to say.

The widow asked if it would be all right if she read aloud some poetry. Naturally his father agreed. When the widow returned she began reading selective pieces of beautiful poetry. When she finished Max's, father commented on how beautiful the poetry was and asked who wrote it. **The widow replied that her husband, the millwright was the poet.**

"It is...sixty years since the millwright died," DePree writes, "and my father and many of us at Herman Miller continue to wonder: Was he a poet who did a millwright's work, or was he a millwright who wrote poetry?"

WE ALL HAVE DIFFERING GIFTS. Some of us are poets. Others have mechanical ability. Some of us are still searching for our gift.

Harry Von Zell tells about comedian George Burns' love for singing. As Von Zell puts it, *"I know George is a great music lover, because a poet once said that every man kills the thing he loves, and I've heard what George does to a song."* Burns himself is very modest about his singing ability. For example, he jokes about once going to a party. *"At twelve-thirty I said I was going to sing a few songs,"* he recounts, *"and all the guests formed a circle around the piano. By the time I broke through I was too tired to sing."* Some of us are still searching for our gift, but all of us have different gifts.

HERE IS THE SECOND THING TO BE SAID: WE ALL HAVE WHAT WE NEED TO SUCCEED.

The servant with one talent didn't have as much as the servant with five talents, **but he had all he needed.** If he had not buried his talent in the ground, he could have done great things with it.

Here is a profound spiritual principle: GOD HAS GIVEN US ALL WE NEED!! The sad thing is that we do not appreciate the gifts we have.

There is a psychologist at Harvard named Howard Gardner who is trying to revolutionize the study of intelligence. He says we have been studying I.Q. all wrong. On our intelligence tests we only measure one or two forms of intelligence. **Gardner says that there are actually seven forms of intelligence.** Some people are gifted with *linguistic intelligence*, he says. These are our writers and poets. Others have what he calls *logical/mathematical intelligence*. They make good accountants and scientists.

Some people are *gifted spatially*. These are our artists and architects. Some are *gifted kinesthetically*. Their bodies are unusually graceful and coordinated. These are our athletes and dancers. Others are *gifted interpersonally*. They know instinctively how to get along well with the people around them. These are our sales persons, counselors, teachers. Some are *gifted in their ability to look within*. These are our philosophers, our wise people. Some are *gifted musically*.

HERE IS THE IMPORTANT POINT. Gardner claims that everyone he has ever tested has scored high in at least one of these seven forms of intelligence. All of us are gifted in our own way. Many of us are smarter than we think we are. Don't you wish that someone had told you that a long time ago? **Do tell your CHILDREN OR GRANDCHILDREN please. Many of them will go through life thinking they are dumb because their form of intelligence is not valued in school.**

All of us are gifted. All of us have what we need to succeed. God has created us differently so that different tasks will get done in this world. But all of us have a place where we fit in. **All of us have what we need to succeed.**

IT IS NOT AS IMPORTANT WHAT OUR GIFT IS BUT WHAT WE DO WITH WHAT WE HAVE. That is the obvious point of this parable. The servant with one talent had the same opportunity as the one with five talents, but he chose to bury his talent in the ground. **That is the worst thing we can do with any gift God has given us.**

Tony Campolo told of meeting a woman who is confined to a wheelchair. Although Nancy had a handicapping condition, she developed a unique ministry to people who are lonely and hurting. **Nancy ran ads in the personals section of the newspaper that read:**

"If you are lonely or have a problem call me. I am in a wheelchair and seldom get out. We can share our problems with each other. Just call. I'd love to talk."

From that simple ad the results were truly amazing. Nancy claims that she receives at least thirty calls each week from persons who need someone to talk to and listen to their pain. Nancy spends most of her day comforting and counseling people. **She has become someone for hundreds of people with problems to lean on.**

Campolo asked her how she became handicapped. Nancy's answer surprised, even shocked him. *"By trying to commit suicide,"* she said. Nancy went on to explain, *"I was living alone. I had no friends. I hated my job, and I was constantly depressed."* Nancy decided to jump from the window of her apartment to end it all. But instead of being killed, she ended up in the hospital paralyzed from the waist down. While she was in the hospital, Nancy said, *"Jesus appeared to me and told me that I'd had a healthy body and a crippled soul but from then on I would have a crippled body and a healthy soul. I gave my life to Christ right there and then,"* she said. *"When I got out of the hospital, I tried to think of how a woman like me in a wheel chair could do some good, and I came up with the idea of putting the ad in the newspaper."*

Nancy does not have some of the opportunities you and I have. ***But she is making maximum use of the opportunities she has. She is among the blessed of this world.***

Giano Carlo Menotti, an Italian/American Composer, who is known for many operas, said, *"Hell begins, on the day when God grants us a clear vision of all that we might have achieved, of all the gifts which we have wasted, of all that we might have done which we DID NOT DO.... but for me, he said, the conception of hell lies in two words: 'TOO LATE!'"*

What is your GIFT, YOUR TALENT?

What has God entrusted to you to share with the world?

Are you sharing it?

OR Are you burying it in the ground?

Are you investing it in JUNK?

Or are you using it to HIS GLORY?

You have all you need to have a terrific life and to make a real contribution to God's Kingdom.

THE QUESTION JESUS IS ASKING EACH OF US IS... WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH WHAT YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN? Amen.