

Procrastination or Production?

Matthew 25:14-30

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Everyone in this room has done this. At least I think you have. I certainly have. I've heard people brag about it. I've seen people identify themselves as it. I've watched people encourage one another in doing it. Yet, it can lead to poor grades; damaged relationships; frustration for the one doing it or those around them. It can lead to poor workmanship, increased stress and a sleepless night. Some who practice it get used to apologizing, asking for extensions, promises to change that often aren't followed through on. Ultimately, it can result in failing a course, losing a job, permanently damaging a relationship and may even cost us our souls.

What is it? Procrastination. To procrastinate means "to postpone what one should be doing; to stall or drag one's feet; to needlessly delay. The English word comes from the Latin "procrastino." Crastinus means "of or belonging to tomorrow." Pro is "in favor of." So procrastino meant "in favor of tomorrow." Thus procrastinate can mean to be "in favor of" putting it off until tomorrow or some future date.

I think most if not all of us have procrastinated in our lives. But why do we do it? One reason is **fear**. We may have trouble facing whatever it is we need to do. We may fear the workload.

So if we have big paper or project due at school, we don't want to think about how much work it will involve. That might upset or disturb our peace. So instead getting at it, we put it off until we are forced to deal with it by the due date. Some people say that's what works for them. They suddenly get this burst of motivation or energy and plow through the project.

Or we may fear dealing with a tough relational situation. Maybe we're emotional about something and we think that denying or burying our feelings means we won't have to deal with it. But then something happens and we explode or grow more and more distant from the person we have issue with.

We may also procrastinate because of **pride**. We proudly believe that we will always have time to get to whatever it is we need to get to. But how do we know we will have such time? Isn't God the one who ordains the amount of days for us to live? We don't know the number. Yet we procrastinate as if we're in control of the amount of days we'll live or opportunities we'll have to deal with the situation.

We can procrastinate because of **exhaustion**. It takes energy and courage to deal with tough situations. It requires effort and sacrifice to work on a paper or complete a project.

We can procrastinate because of **distraction**. We intend to get to the paper or do the next part of the project or clean up that area we promised to clean up. But then someone suggest a movie or we get lost on social media or we see something fun we'd like to do instead.

We can procrastinate because of **laziness**. In our recreation and leisure focused culture, we can put a greater priority on relaxing and enjoying leisure time and vacations. There's nothing wrong with any of those. We need refreshment and recreation. But there can be times where we put such a high priority on those things that we neglect what needs to be done. I remember my Dad always said to us "get the work done first. Then if there is time you can play." He came from a farming background where if you didn't work, you didn't eat. Yet if we live in abundance, we can get that backwards. "Play first and eat. If there's time, work. Somehow it will all work out."

So we can procrastinate because of fear, pride, exhaustion, distraction and laziness. I'm sure you can think of other reasons. But is it really that big of a deal to get a lower grade on an exam or be a little behind in cleaning up what needs cleaning? Is procrastination something we need to be concerned about? Jesus raises this issue as He continues to speak to His disciples about preparing for His return. If we procrastinate in preparing for His return there might be huge consequences. He talks about two types of people – those who are productive in the kingdom of heaven and those who procrastinate. As we look at this parable, I want you to watch for the surprise in the story and the consequences of procrastination.

Matthew 25:14-23 (ESV)

The Parable of the Talents

¹⁴ "For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. ¹⁵ To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶ He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. ¹⁷ So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. ¹⁸ But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹ Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.' ²¹ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' ²² And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.' ²³ His

master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

The parable begins with a wealthy owner going on a journey. He calls his servants or slaves together to entrust to them His property. We have to remember there were different classes of slaves and servants. Some slaves were the lowest of the low. They had no rights and were viewed as disposable and expendable. But higher up servants could manage property or flocks for an owner. Some earned wages, bonuses and could even buy property. It seems these are higher up servants who have some of the master's trust.

So this owner prepares to go on a journey. He calls three servants together to entrust something called talents. Now to us, talent means some natural skill or ability. But that's not what talent means here.

A talent was the largest measure of currency in that day. A talent equalled 6000 denarii. 1 denarii equaled 1 day's wage for a worker. So 6000 day's wages was equal to about 20 years of labor. One commentator states that in terms of today's value, the landowner disperse approximately 1,977,600\$ to his servants. It was like each talent was a bar of gold.

So let's use the bar of gold to picture a talent. To one he gave 5 bars of gold. To another 2 bars of gold. To the third one bar of gold. Jesus notes that the owner gave these differing amounts according to the ability of each servant in verse 15. So the owner reasoned the servant 1 had the ability to look after 5 bars of gold. Servant 2 could look after 2 and Servant 3, 1. There's no judgment about who is better or worse. It's simply an observation about ability with the talents. The one with 5 is not more important than one with 1.

Now here comes the first lesson from this parable. **Lesson 1 - Like the master, God entrusts all people with a portion of his resources expecting them to act as good stewards of it.** You might immediately say, "Well I didn't get a bar of gold from God but I could use one." But wait a minute. What has God given to us? A Life – the ability to breathe, exist and live on the earth. He has given us a certain amount of time to live our lives. He has placed people in our lives who have taught us or helped us. He has placed a certain mental capacity; certain talents or skills; a personality; a certain physical capacity; a body. He gives us opportunities. He may give us people who depend or are entrusted to us; a spouse; children; extended family; employees; coworkers; church family; volunteers; neighbors. He may entrust to us resources like money; land; inheritance; a house; car or some other type of property. Though He may not have given us a bar of gold, all of these ultimately belong to God. "The earth is the Lords and everything in it; the

world and all who dwell there.” Psalm 24:1. With whatever we have been given in life, God expects us to be good stewards or managers of it. That’s what He expects of each servant.

So what happens? Servant 1 takes the 5 talents and trades with them. He earns 5 more. Servant 2 takes his two talents and earns 2 more. Now wouldn’t you like to know what bank they were dealing with? I’d like to find a bank that gave me 100% return on my investment. But as unlikely as this seems to us, we need to remember a couple of factors. We don’t know how long the master was away. So this could have been the result of several years of work. Maybe the first servant didn’t simply invest the talents. Maybe he started a business and after several years had earned double the original investment. The same thing happens with servant 2. He takes his talents and earns two more. So both are ready to give to the master double what he originally gave them.

Servant 3 takes a different approach. In verse 18 we’re told, “But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money.” So maybe he took the very conservative investor’s approach. He didn’t want to risk losing anything. So he engaged in the common way people cared for their valuables in those days because there were no central banks. He buries the talent to ensure it’s there when the master returns. So there’s basically two approaches. Use the talent to earn more or bury the talent to ensure its safe.

Then the master returns. Verse 19 tells us that “after a long time, the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.” So this master expects an accounting of what each servant has done with the talent.

Servant 1 comes forward. He reports he received 5 talents. Here are 5 more.” The master affirms this servant’s work. “Well done, good and faithful servant.” This is what the master expected. He wanted the servants to use his resources to earn more. “You have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much.” Now that’s a little ironic. 5 talents is “a little” in this master’s eyes? 5 sets of 20 years of wages is a little. But in the eyes of this master it is. So he promises to entrust much to this servant. Then he invites the servant to “enter into the joy of your master.” That could mean “come join me in my joy over your faithfulness.” Or “come enjoy a banquet of celebration I have prepared because of your faithfulness.” Or “Come discover the joy I have prepared for you.” Whatever it means, it’s an invitation to something wonderful and long lasting.

Servant 2 comes forward. He reports he received 2 talents. He has 2 more. Does the master say, “Well that’s pretty good but not as good as my right hand man who earned 5 talents?” No. He responds to the second servant with

the exact same words he used with the first servant. Well done good and faithful servant. This brings us to our second lesson.

Lesson 2 – Like the two good servants, God’s people will be commended and rewarded when they faithfully discharge their commission. Or another way to put that, we will be commended and rewarded for faithfully using the resources God has entrusted to us for His glory and His purposes. Notice the master does not praise the amount produced. He praises faithfulness. This means we are called to be faithful with whatever God entrusts to us. We’re not to look at other people and cry because they have more or brag because we have more. Instead we must focus on using God’s resources in our lives for His glory.

So let’s test this. So in the regular ministry year, we’re a church about 300-350 people. So how do we feel about churches larger than us and smaller than us? We can look at larger churches with envy or disdain. “Oh look at all they have and all they can do with their largeness.” So we could give up because there’s no point because of all they can do. Or we could say “You just got lost in large churches and they’re very impersonal.” Envy or Judgment? But what about taking a perspective that affirms the calling and ministry of a church larger than us. We praise God for what He’s doing in and through them. But we also recognize that we are uniquely positioned with our size and in this community to reach the people God has called us to reach. God doesn’t call us to be someone we’re not. He calls us to be faithful with what He entrusts to us.

Let’s take the other example. What’s our attitude towards churches smaller than us? “Oh, there must be something wrong with them to remain that small.” Or “Sturgeon Valley is getting too big for me. I long for the smaller church where everyone knows each other.” But instead of looking down or longing for what the smaller church has, we affirm and pray for them and God’s calling on them. That’s why we pray for other churches every Sunday. We pray for them and focus on the resources God entrusts to us. Our calling is to be faithful with them. God will commend and reward His people who faithfully use their lives for His glory.

But there’s still the matter settling accounts with the third servant. Remember, he took the very conservative approach. He buried the master’s talent. So when the master returns, the servant presents that talent. Now if you entrusted your property to someone and they presented it back to you when you returned, wouldn’t you be okay with

that? They hadn't lost any of your property. They didn't squander it. Though they didn't make any more at least they still kept it for you. And they returned it to you. Let's see how the master responds.

Matthew 24:24-30 (ESV)

²⁴ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.'²⁶ But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? ²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸ So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. ²⁹ For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ³⁰ And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

This servant does not begin with a reference to the amount with which he had been entrusted. He instead begins with reasons to justify his decision. Through these reasons, he reveals his understanding of the master. "I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed." The servant portrays the master as an aggressive profiteer. The servant believes the master wants to obtain profit by any and all means even if he didn't earn it. We have to be careful here because if we press this too hard, we can project this servant's understanding of his master as truth about God. But I don't think that's what Jesus is doing here. I think he's about to expose the faulty reasoning and actions of this servant. So the servant thinks his master is an aggressive profiteer. If you knew that about your boss and he entrusted you with some money or resources while you were away, what would you do? Would the most reasonable and appropriate response be "I'm just going to keep that money in my house so I can give it back to my aggressive profit motivated boss upon his return. And that should satisfy him."

No. Wouldn't you instead work harder to try to make a profit for this kind of master? But this servant says, "I was afraid and hid your talent in the ground." Fear – fear of doing what needs to be done – putting it off until tomorrow. Sounds a little like procrastination. "Here, you have what is yours."

Verse 26 – But his master answered him, "You wicked and slothful servant." Unlike the wise and faithful servants who used the talents for the gain of the master, the servant who hid the talent receives the verdict of wickedness and sloth or laziness." It's not okay with God if we waste the resources He entrust to us. The master goes on to point out the irrational behavior of the servant. If you knew what I expected, why didn't you at least invest the

talent? The master does not see the servant's actions as frugal, careful, wise and cautious. He will not excuse the servant's wickedness, laziness and procrastination.

Verse 27 – So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the 10 talents. For to everyone who has will more be given and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

What is Jesus doing here? Well He reveals that not only is the 3rd servant lazy and procrastinating, he's not a believer. His actions reveal His beliefs. He is not right with God. He will be cast out from His master's joy and never experience it. **Lesson 3 - Like the wicked servant, those who fail to use the gifts God has given them for his service will be punished by separation from God and all things good.** This third servant portrays those who claim to be one of God's people yet show little or no evidence of the reality of God in their lives.

So this is no works salvation parable. It's not saying that you first have to produce and then God will accept you. Or you do the good works and then God will pronounce the verdict – you did enough good to make up for the bad things in your life. That's how salvation seems to work in every other faith. In Christianity it's totally different. Perform first – then God accepts it. The verdict is pronounced first. Not guilty because of faith in Christ through which flows God's forgiveness and right standing before him. From that verdict flows our works and productivity. Because we are saved, we by God's strength invest all of our lives in glorifying Him and gaining for His kingdom. So if someone claims to be a Christian but is not using all God has given them for His glory, there's reasonable doubt about their Christianity. So if someone says, “I'll get my life right with the Lord someday. Or I'll get serious about Christ when I retire or when the kids are grown up or when I'm ready to settle down” such procrastination can cost them their soul. We never know when Christ will return or when our time is up.

The Lord's gifts to us require productivity for His glory instead of procrastination. The Lord will call me to account for what He has entrusted to me. How do I feel about that? I have to admit I'm a bit scared. I must guard against thinking that this is a performance based system where God only accepts me based on what I do. Yet, I must also recognize that “performance” or action or effort is still part of the Christian life. But it's all out of grace and response to what God has already done. What will I do with the life God has given me?

Some of us might struggle with this because we wonder “Why can’t God be more affirming and encouraging?

Why does He have to call us to account?

Well how many of us do something hard or persevere in something difficult if we don’t have to; if there’s no accountability or reward or test or wage at the end, would we just go out and do hard things?

Would we do all the reading, write the papers and study for exams of a university course – 90 hours of work outside of class time required for each university course – if we didn’t receive credit for it in the end? Would we do it all for fun? Would we be open to changing in our character or growing in maturity if everybody including God just affirmed us in our immaturity?

Would we persevere in some taxing physical labor at work if there wasn’t some pay at the end of the day or week? Most of us need some sort of accounting, testing, review, motivation to do something and stop procrastinating.

Yes, God says to us “Come as you are when you first come to me.” But He loves us too much to let us stay where we are. He wants to grow us, mature us and see us use what He has given or allowed in our lives for His glory and the help of other people.

Work for the glory of God. Run your business for the glory of God. Endure unemployment for the glory of God. Invest your retirement for the glory of God. View your dwelling place as a gift from God. Live in your marriage to the glory of God. Raise your children to the glory of God. Do your schooling to the glory of God.

Maybe God has revealed to some of you today that you’ve buried the resources He’s entrusted to you. You’re wasting them and you’re not walking closely with Him. Will you dig up those resources today and this afternoon and renew your journey of living all the time for His glory.

Maybe God has revealed to you today that you are not ready for an accounting with Him. You have been living your life for yourself and given Him little attention. Remember we talked earlier about Christianity being verdict first and performance second? But right now, the verdict over you is still guilty if you have not put your trust on Christ to pay for and forgive your sins. You can’t perform to change the verdict. You have to accept what God has provided to change the verdict. Then you live in response to the verdict. Will you put your faith and trust in Him today? Through that faith, God will pour out His salvation, forgiveness, blessing and new life. And you will begin the journey of walking with Him and directing what He has entrusted to you to be used for His glory.

Many of you are living faithfully every day to the glory of God. God sees that everyday faithfulness. He rewards it.

When the day of accounting arrives, He will reveal what He has done through your faithfulness. Well done good and faithful servant. Procrastination with God's resources or productivity for His glory. Which will it be for you?