

Assessing Productivity

When we think of productivity, we think of accomplishing much work. If you are able to mow the lawn, trim the hedge, wash the car, pay the bills, and take your son to buy a new pair of shoes in one Saturday, you probably would consider it a productive day. Would you feel the same if some of those tasks were put off so you could spend a few hours taking care of some church needs, such as helping to clean the church building or canvassing for Sunday school children?

As we look at our personal productivity, let us try to see it as God does, with emphasis on the eternal value rather than the temporal.

1 ● The parable of the talents, in Matthew 25:14-30, deals with productivity. It centers on servants who are stewards of their master's goods while he is away on a long journey. After a time, the master returns with the expectation that his servants have gained an increase in the goods with which they were entrusted. Two servants had satisfied this expectation, while one had not. All were rewarded accordingly. In applying this parable to the present day, what do the master, his servants, and the talents represent? What expectations does God have for us in terms of spiritual productivity?

2. In many lines of work, productivity is easily assessed. In a lumber mill, productivity is measured by the stacks of lumber. A carpet layer determines his output by the amount of carpet he has installed. A retailer looks at the cash register totals for the day. Spiritual productivity, however, is not ascertained by visible methods. If it were, Noah's preaching would have failed because only eight were saved on the ark. Of the multitudes that followed Jesus, only 500 were present to see Him ascend to Heaven. Of these, only 120 followed His instructions to tarry in Jerusalem. Only eternity will reveal the magnitude of Jesus' productivity. What attribute brought about productivity in the parable of the talents? What attribute will determine your productivity at Jesus' return?

3. There appears to have been some discussion in the church at Corinth, relating to who was most successful in his ministry: Paul or Apollos. Paul addressed this issue in his epistle to the Corinthian church when he inquired, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase" (1 Corinthians 3:5,6). What does this Scripture suggest about the source of our productivity? Considering the Gospel work today, what part do we have in the increase?

4. Three servants were given talents. A talent was a monetary unit. Assuming that these were talents of silver, each was worth over \$2000. By comparison, an average worker of that generation would have earned just sixteen cents a day. Thus, one talent was of great value, for it would have taken a laborer over forty years to earn its equivalent. Christians are entrusted with something of significantly higher value than silver; we all have been blessed with an ability to be used for the furtherance of the Gospel message. The faithful servants were rewarded for the gain they had made by using the talents they had been given. In what ways can you use your talents and abilities to gain spiritually for the Lord?

5. One of the servants dug a hole and hid his talent in the ground. When the lord came, he accused that servant of neglecting his responsibility to invest the money. He could have put it to the exchangers, which would have yielded at least a minimum increase. The servant was called “wicked” because he refused to properly care for his master’s goods, despite the fact that he knew a day of reckoning would come. He was “slothful” because he neglected to put forth an effort to increase the goods, even though he had the ability (verse 15). Our productivity can be hindered also. Look up the following verses and write the hindrances they describe: Matthew 13:22; Hebrews 2:3; 2 Timothy 2:4.

6. The productivity of the faithful servants was not assessed by the master until he returned. Likewise, our spiritual productivity will not be fully known until Jesus returns. Nevertheless, evaluations need to be made from time to time while the Lord tarries. How do you think the faithful servants in the parable would have evaluated their productivity in the handling of their master's goods? How often would you suggest that your spiritual productivity be evaluated? How can it be done?

7. In evaluating productivity, you will not always feel as though you are “turning the world upside down” by your efforts. After all, how does one assess the productivity of a thirty-minute morning devotional period? Very often, you see no tangible results. What encouragement can you offer to someone who feels that his or her efforts do not count for much? Verses that apply include Psalm 126:6; Galatians 6:8,9; and 2 Timothy 3:14. Can you think of others?

8. Many people have a “things to do” list. There is a sense of accomplishment in reaching the end of a day and seeing a check mark beside each task on the list. How might a

person's list change if he began to look at his productivity with more weight on eternal values and with less weight on temporal values?

Key Texts

Psalm 126:6; Matthew 13:22; 25:14-30; 1 Corinthians 3:5,6; Hebrews 2:3; 2 Timothy 2:4; 3:14; Galatians 6:8,9

Other Scriptures Used in This Study

Psalm 126:5; John 15:4,5

Suggested Verse for Memorization

His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. — Matthew 25:21