

Assessing Productivity

The dictionary gives several meanings for the word “productive.” The one that best describes this lesson’s theme of productivity is, “able to create or manufacture; generative.” Applying this definition to productivity in our spiritual lives brings out the thought that our lives as Christians should be creating, manufacturing, or generating something of eternal value.

If you have anyone in your group who is working in a management position, it might be interesting to discuss how productivity is assessed in the business world, where performance evaluations and employee reviews are a common procedure. In addition to job-related skills, these reviews typically will rate an employee on accuracy, judgment, innovation, cooperation, initiative, reliability, perseverance, stability, attendance, etc. What part do these characteristics play in spiritual productivity? Stress that, just as in a job situation, the review process of our spiritual productivity should be directed toward moving us closer to our potential.

Response 1 — Like the servants, Christians await their Master’s return from a temporary absence. The goods or talents with which we are entrusted are the abilities or aptitudes God has given to us. His expectation is that these be used for His glory, as He provides the opportunity. God has also given us the capacity to improve these abilities. It is our responsibility and privilege to be good stewards of whatever God has bestowed upon us.

Response 2 — Faithfulness was the attribute that brought about productivity in the servants. Two of the servants were rewarded for being faithful, and one was punished for his lack of faithfulness. As Noah was faithful in following God’s plan in his day, we are called to be faithful in ours. While our level of ability might differ one from another, our opportunity to be faithful in serving the Lord is the same. At Jesus’ return, we will be considered productive if we have been

Objective

The students will be able to define spiritual productivity as that which yields benefits throughout eternity. Each student should be able to identify some of his own God-given abilities, and know that it is God’s intention that those talents be used faithfully in service for Him.

Key Texts

Psalms 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

Psalms 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

faithful to serve God in the capacity that we are called to serve.

Response 3 — The source of productivity is the Lord. Our ability to yield fruit in the Gospel is directly related to our attachment to its Source. Refer the students to John 15:4,5, a portion of which states, “without me ye can do nothing.” Though we might not always see the increase, we have an integral part. Neither Paul nor Apollos sat back and watched as God evangelized the world. Just as they had a part to fill, so do we.

Response 4 — First, ask your students to identify some specific talents or abilities that can be consecrated to the Lord’s service. Their answers will likely include musical talent, the skill to teach, an ability to communicate with others, and the gift of helping. Broaden these thoughts to include every Christian’s responsibility of

prayer, Bible study, and witnessing. Then help your students to see ways that these talents and responsibilities can be improved upon.

Response 5 — Matthew 13:22 indicates we can be overcome by the cares of this world or by the deceitfulness of riches. Hebrews 2:3 shows us that we can be hampered by neglect. In 2 Timothy 2:4, we see that entanglements can retard our spiritual productivity.

Response 6 — Though the system of evaluation is not clearly defined in the parable, the servants obviously had some method of accounting, because when their master returned, they knew how much they had gained. You may want to compare the servants' evaluation method to the students' looking at their monthly bank statement. However, while we might assess our financial standing on a monthly basis, our spiritual evaluation should take place on a daily basis. This should occur during personal devotions as well as each time we attend church. You may wish to make the point that if we keep our Master's interests first, we will become more productive than if we hold our own interests as our first priority.

Response 7 — In discussing the Scriptures, remind the class that God does not operate based upon how we "feel." The important thing is to get

on the road to Heaven and to stay there until the end. That will lend itself to a productive life. That is where we begin, but if we don't also take action, we will be burying our talents. Psalm 126:5,6 lets us know that the time of sowing might not always be joyful, but the day when we reap will come. Galatians 6:8 reminds us to sow to the Spirit. The gardener who sows one day does not see fruit the next, but he will in time if he is patient. In 2 Timothy 3:14 we find one simple duty we can do to add to our productivity: continuing in what we have learned. Review some things Christians have learned that lead to the spiritual success of themselves and of others. Timothy's teachers had led productive lives and made the goal. We also may know of faithful Gospel veterans who have made the goal, and we would do well to follow in their path.

Response 8 — The point should be made that true productivity is that which will last throughout eternity. That is not to suggest that daily temporal duties should be neglected. It does suggest that our spiritual productivity should not be sacrificed in order to gain that which will soon fade away. New Christians usually find the need to rearrange the priorities established before their conversion. Though we may not actually keep a spiritual "things-to-do" list, the point needs to be made that spiritual matters are a top priority.