

PathLights

*"Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path"
Psalm 119:104*

January 8, 2017

Immediately

by Frank Himmel

Jesus' Parable of the Talents is a familiar one. He said the kingdom of heaven "is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his ability; and he went on his journey" (Matthew 25:14-15).

You remember the rest of the story. The five-talent man gained five more and was approved. The two-talent man gained two more and was also approved. The one-talent man was fearful. He hid his talent, producing nothing. He was rejected.

I want to point out one detail we seldom emphasize in teaching this account. The text says the five-talent man "immediately...went and traded with them, and gained five more talents" (v. 16). The two-talent man



acted "in the same manner" (v. 17). Yes, the KJV and NKJV just say "then" they acted, but the adverb Jesus used suggests more immediate action: "at once" (ESV, NIV). Therein lies the point: we are most productive when we act immediately, when we give a task priority.

When we act immediately, things get done. What happens when we delay? Those other things we decide to do first sometimes end up taking longer than we anticipated, and we run out of time. Or, we get so absorbed in those other things that the task we put off just "slips our minds." We may wait so long that an opportunity no longer exists or what we had planned to do would have little meaning this late.

Application of this principle is simple (I am thinking especially of things done in the Lord's service). When you think of something you need to do, do it – now. Did you miss someone at worship? Call and check on them – now. Do you want to encourage the sick? Send them a card or go see them – now. Do you have a study assignment for a Bible class? Get started – now. Does a brother or sister need your prayers? Take a moment and pray for them – now. You get the idea.

I understand that it is not always possible to drop everything and do just what you would like. All of us have to organize our time. My point is simply that too often, important work goes undone due to procrastination. And I would remind you that Jesus identified the "important work," that by which we will be judged, as daily service, often small things. Read His next parable, The Sheep and Goats (Matthew 25:31-46). ■

Fruitless Discussion

by Frank Himmel

“For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion” (1 Timothy 1:6). Have you ever been involved in a Bible class discussion that could be described as fruitless? I have! What makes it so? Perhaps a number of things.

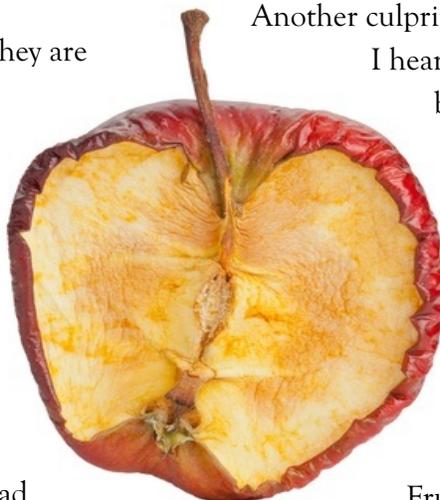
Some discussions are fruitless because they are about things the Bible simply does not reveal. That means we are speculating, not learning. I once visited a class that was studying Jesus feeding the five thousand. Luke says the disciples picked up twelve baskets full of leftovers (9:17). The teacher asked, “What is the significance of *twelve* baskets?” Besides the obvious – there was more food present after everyone had eaten than Jesus began with – the Bible attaches no significance to it at all. That did not deter the class. They wasted the entire hour bandying their opinions, and no one knew any more when he left than when he came in!

Bible class discussion might also be fruitless because it lacks direction. We are studying a book – let’s say James. We read a verse and someone comments. That makes someone else think of a verse in Mark, so we go

there. That prompts another to think about something Peter said, which in turn leads to further tangents. Along the way, another student asks a question that has no discernable connection to anything anyone has said. By the time we deal with all that and circle back to James, the bell rings. Perhaps everything said was true, and maybe a little of it was even useful. But as far as learning what the book of James is about, we didn’t accomplish much.

Another culprit in fruitless discussions is irrelevance.

I heard of a congregation just a short time back that split – yes, split! – over the question of whether people who lived under the Law of Moses were actually forgiven during their lifetime or not until Jesus died. In the end, what practical difference does it make? How does that affect us? Why belabor it? Why divide over it?!



Fruitless Bible class discussion might be due to other things. Beginning the class with a brief review is at times appropriate, but rehashing the same points week after week is of no profit. In some places, genuine Bible study has been replaced with “more relevant,” but less profitable current events chats. Uninformed or unprepared teachers are also a cause.

“But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Timothy 1:5). ■

Service Leaders for the Week

	Sunday Morning	Sunday Evening	Wednesday Evening
GREETER	Mark Clifton	Howard Moore	Chris Brooks
SONG LEADER	Carlos Garcia	Gary Hagler	Greg Winget
OPENING PRAYER	Mark Clifton	Albert Lee Harrison	
LORD’S SUPPER			
BREAD	Jason Chandler	Jason Chandler	
CUP	Steven Turner	Steven Turner	
CONTRIBUTION PRAYER	Rawland Daniel		
SERMON/INVITATION	Frank Himmel	Frank Himmel	Carlos Garcia
CLOSING PRAYER	Howard Moore	David Gray	Bruce Williams