

QUALITY
OF
LIFE
BIBLE
STUDY



Potential[©]

COMPILED BY
S.MCRAE

POTENTIAL
“Quality of Life Series”

LEADER: **Bernard Shaw played the “What If” game shortly before he died.**

Source ~ <http://www.higherpraise.org/illustrations/potential.htm>

“Mr. Shaw,” asked a reporter, “if you could live your life over and be anybody you’ve known, or any person from history, who would you be?” “I would choose,” replied Shaw “to be the man George Bernard Shaw could have been, but never was.”

LEADER: Who would you be?

Would you like to be the person you’ve become...

The person you are becoming? The person you will be?

Are you living up to the potential God has designed for you?

READER: “Underachiever” Today in the Word, MBI

Source ~ <http://www.sermons.org/search.html>

An interesting cartoon shows a fourth-grade boy standing toe-to-toe and nose-to-nose with his teacher. Behind them stares a blackboard covered with math problems the boy hasn’t finished. With rare perception the boy says, “I’m not an underachiever, you’re an overexpecter!”

READER: “Anything?” Bits and Pieces

Source ~ <http://www.higherpraise.org/illustrations/possibilities.htm>

Meg. F. Quijano related the following incident that happened upon her return from a meeting of the National Organization for Women. Her five-year-old daughter, Lisa, greeted her with the news that when she grew up she wanted to be a nurse. There was a time when nursing was thought by many to be a “woman’s job.” Quijano told Lisa she could be anything she wanted to be. “You can be a lawyer, a surgeon, a banker, President of the United States -- you can be anything.” Lisa looked a little dubious.

“Anything? Anything at all?” She thought about it, and then her face lit up with ambition. “All right,” she said. “I’ll be a horse.”

READER: “The Americanization of Edward Bok” - Bits & Pieces

Source ~ <http://www.higherpraise.org/illustrations/potential.htm>

In his book, The Americanization of Edward Bok, Edward Bok, one-time editor of the Ladies’ Home Journal, tells a story about his grandfather, who lived in Denmark. It seems the grandfather had been commissioned by the King of Denmark to lead a band of soldiers against pirates who were playing havoc with shipping along a certain coastal area. The elder Bok set up his headquarters on a lonely, rocky, desolate island just off the coast, and after a few years was able to clear the pirates out of the area.

Upon returning to the mainland Bok reported to the King. The King was very pleased and offered Bok anything he wanted. All he wanted, he told the King, was a plot of land on the island where he had just lived and fought for so many months. They told him the island was barren. Why would he want to live there? “I want to plant trees,” was Bok’s reply. “I want to make the island beautiful.” The King’s aides thought he was crazy. The island was constantly swept by storms and high winds. He would never be able to get a tree to grow there.

Bok, however, insisted, and the King granted him his wish. He went to live on the island, built a home, and finally was able to bring his wife to it. For years, they worked industriously, persistently, planting trees, shrubs, grass. Gradually the vegetation took hold, the island began to flourish. One morning they arose to hear birds singing. There had never been any birds on the island before.

Eventually the island became a showplace and now is visited by thousands of tourists each year. When he died the grandfather requested that the following words be inscribed on his tombstone: “Make you the world a bit more beautiful and better because you have been on it.”

But the story doesn’t end there. Edward Bok, the grandson, who had become an American citizen, believed that anyone who was able to do so should retire at 50 and spend the rest of his life making the world a more beautiful and better place to live. And he was as good as his word. At 50 he retired as editor of the Ladies’ Home Journal.

One day, while traveling around central Florida, he came upon Iron Mountain, elevation 324 ft. above sea level, the highest point in Florida. Immediately the thought hit him -- why not repeat in America what his grandfather had done in the old country? He bought the site and set to work. Eventually he was more than successful. The place is called Mountain Lake Sanctuary, Lake Wales, Florida. Upon his death, Edward Bok willed it to the State of Florida, and it is now a major tourist attraction. Upon the younger Bok's catafalque were the words: "Make you the world a bit more beautiful and better place because you have been in it."

READER: QUOTE #1

Source ~ <http://www.quoteland.com/search.asp>

"There are countless ways of achieving greatness, but any road to achieving one's maximum potential must be built on a bedrock of respect for the individual, a commitment to excellence, and a rejection of mediocrity."
- Buck Rodgers, Angels Baseball Star 1930s

READER: "Even If" Bits and Pieces

Source ~ <http://www.higherpraise.org/illustrations/potential.htm>

General Mark Clark was one of the great heroes of WWII. He led the Salerno invasion that Winston Churchill said was "the most daring amphibious operation we have launched, or which, I think, has ever been launched on a similar scale in war." At the time Clark was promoted to Lt. General, he was the youngest man of that rank in the U.S. Army. He graduated from West Point in 1917. At the top of his class? Nope. He was 111th from the top in a class of 139!

Even if you never earned a college degree, don't worry, you're in good company. Irving Berlin, for instance, only had two years of formal schooling. He never learned how to read music. When he composed his songs, he would hum the melody and a musical secretary would write down the notes. He became one of the greatest songwriters the country has ever known.

READER: "16 and 20" Today in the Word

Source ~ <http://www.higherpraise.org/illustrations/potential.htm>

When 16-year old Eliza married the 20-year old tailor, he had never been to school. Others might have written his education off as a lost cause, but Eliza didn't. She taught him to read, write, and spell. Those days were difficult, but he proved to be a fast learner. In fact, he learned so well that years later he was elected president of the United States! When he ran for a second term he lost, but refused to give up. Instead, he won a seat in the U.S. Senate. Who? our 17th president, Andrew Johnson.

LEADER: We can encourage others to be all they can be.

READER: QUOTE #2

Source ~ <http://www.quoteland.com/search.asp>

"Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around." - Dr. Leo Buscaglia, 1924-1998 Author/Professor

READER: "Rosebud Potential"

Source ~ <http://www.rbc.org/odb/odb-08-14-06.shtml>

Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him. —Mark 3:14

My wife and I adore miniature roses. Recently, we planted several bushes, but one did not survive. We returned it to the nursery and asked for an exchange. It was midsummer and the mini roses section was limited.

I looked at one that had a picture showing its potential when in full bloom. But the rose plant itself looked rather plain. My wife offered some good advice. "Don't look at the full blossoms. Look at how many healthy new rosebuds are starting to form."

Following her advice, we selected, brought home, planted, and tended the plant with the most rosebuds. In only a week, it had blossomed beautifully!

When our Lord chose His apostles, He selected imperfect men (Mark 3:13-19). One had a history of shady business practices, others had violent tempers. Yet Jesus looked not at their imperfections but at their potential.

Jesus uses the same approach with us. He loves us so much that He chose us despite our imperfections (2 Thessalonians 2:13). Through the Holy Spirit's work in our lives, He nurtures and transforms us into His glorious image (2 Corinthians 3:18). Next time you are with family, friends, and co-workers, don't focus on imperfections. Instead, look for rosebud potential. —Dennis Fisher

*God, help us see in those we meet
The likeness of Christ's image there,
And may those traits that are like His
Grow stronger from our love and care.* —D. De Haan

The Spirit develops in us the clear image of Christ.

LEADER: Don't let others discourage you from achieving your potential.

READER: "Seabiscuit" (Excerpt)

Source ~ <http://www.cfdevotionals.org/devpg05/de051107.htm>

If you have ever seen the movie Seabiscuit, you may understand when I say it reminds me of a love story. It resembles Christ's love for us, and how His strength can change our lives.

I wonder how many of us are broken by society and circumstances? I think often times, society encourages the brokenness in us, instead of trying to boost confidence. Other times, I think we don't know how to boost our own confidence. And to be honest, when it all boils down to it, neither society, family, nor ourselves are able to do that, to make the changes necessary to prove to ourselves we are ok after all.

But Jesus can. Jesus is like the horse trainer in the movie. He sees the Spirit in us, without allowing our outside appearance to hinder that. He knows distinctly (in a much more profound way) what exactly it is that each of us needs to bring the truth of ourselves.... our Spirits...outward.

We all have an amazing family heritage, just like Seabiscuit did. Our Father is just as determined as his was. Just as Seabiscuit found his sire's determination within himself and learned to turn it from something negative to something wonderfully and beautifully positively powerful.... God wants us to know as well, that we truly are created in His image.

Seabiscuit's owner statement, "You don't throw a whole life away just because it's banged up a little bit" really affirmed well, what God Himself says about each of us. He's telling us not to give up or to give in to what society is telling us. And just as the jockey, Hadis said, "Brick by brick, citizens, brick by brick—" God is reminding us that He has a plan for us, that He has good works to perform toward us, that He intends to fill our lives with peace and hope.

READER: Jeremiah 29:11

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

READER: "Paderewski" Bits and Pieces

Source ~ <http://www.higherpraise.org/illustrations/potential.htm>

When Jan Paderewski was to leave his native Poland to play his first recital in London, he asked an influential compatriot to give him a letter of introduction to a leading figure in Britain's musical world, who might be of assistance should anything go amiss.

The letter was handed to him in a sealed envelope. He hoped that everything would proceed smoothly and he would not have to use it. He did not; his debut was a success and no snags developed. Some years later, while going through his papers, he came upon the letter and opened it. It read:

"This will introduce Jan Paderewski, who plays the piano, for which he demonstrates no conspicuous talent."

READER: "Expectations" - Kay Kuzma, Family Times

Source ~ <http://www.sermons.org/search.html>

You can have a brighter child, it all depends on your expectations. Before you're tempted to say, "Not true," let me tell you about Harvard social psychologist Robert Rosenthal's classic study. All the children in

one San Francisco grade school were given a standard I.Q. test at the beginning of the school year. The teachers were told the test could predict which students could be expected to have a spurt of academic and intellectual functioning. The researchers then drew names out of a hat and told the teachers that these were the children who had displayed a high potential for improvement. Naturally, the teachers thought they had been selected because of their test performance and began treating these children as special children.

And the most amazing thing happened -- the spurters, spurted! Overall, the "late blooming" kids averaged four more I.Q. points on the second test than the other group of students. However, the gains were most dramatic in the lowest grades. First graders whose teachers expected them to advance intellectually jumped 27.4 points, and the second grade spurters increased on the average 16.5 points more than their peers. One little Latin-American child who had been classified as mentally retarded with an I.Q. of 61, scored 106 after his selection as a late bloomer.

Isn't this impressive! It reminds me of what Eliza Doolittle says in *My Fair Lady*, "The difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she is treated." You see, how a child is treated has a lot to do with how that child sees herself and ultimately behaves. If a child is treated as a slow learner and you don't expect much, the child shrugs her shoulders and says, "Why should I try, nobody thinks I can do it anyway!" And she gives up. But if you look at that child as someone who has more potential than she will ever be able to develop, you will challenge that child, work with her through discouragement, and find ways to explain concepts so the child can understand. You won't mind investing time in the child because you know your investment is going to pay off! And the result? It does! So, what's the message for parents? Just this: Every child benefits from someone who believes in him, and the younger the child, the more important it is to have high expectations. You may not have an Einstein, but your child has possibilities! Expect the best and chances are, that's exactly what you'll get.

LEADER: God expects great things from us.

In Luke 12:48 it says: *From everyone who has been given much, much will be required;*

READER: "Prime Time" Mike Lupica in Esquire.

Source ~ <http://www.higherpraise.org/illustrations/potential.htm>

Deion "Prime Time" Sanders, outfielder for the Atlanta Braves and cornerback for the Atlanta Falcons, is the only athlete to have hit a Major League home run and scored an NFL touchdown in the same week. Sanders grew up on the mean streets of Fort Myers, Fla., where exposure to some would-be athletes spurred him to make a success of himself. He explains: "I call them Idas. 'If I'da done this, I'd be making three million today...If I'da practiced a little harder, I'd be a superstar.' They were as fast as me when they were kids, but instead of working for their dreams they chose drugs and a life of street corners. When I was young, I had practice; my friends who didn't went straight to the streets and never left. That moment after school is the moment we need to grab. We don't need any more Idas."

READER: "Swedish Nightingale" Bits and Pieces

Source ~ <http://www.higherpraise.org/illustrations/potential.htm>

In a small village in Sweden lived a young girl who was terribly poor and unskilled, so she could get along only by doing the most menial of jobs. She loved to sing, and despite her poverty, she dreamed of some day being a great singer. She began to sing on street corners, hoping passersby would toss her a copper or two.

Each day she sang--in wind and rain, heat or cold, yet barely had enough at the end of the day to buy food. Some in the village protested to the town council that it wasn't right for children to be on the street in rags, begging, yet no one did anything to help her. One day a great musician happened to pass by and hear her. He was entranced by her beautiful voice. He took the ragged urchin home with him and began to teach her how to use her glorious voice to its fullest. In time she became the toast of two continents and everyone knew and loved "The Swedish Nightingale," as they called Jenny Lind.

READER: "What Do You See?" By David Massey

Source ~ <http://www.cfdevotionals.org/devpg01/de010124.htm>

Then I will put over them one shepherd, my servant David. He will feed them and tend them and be their shepherd. Then I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David will be a ruler among them. I, the LORD, have spoken. Ezekiel 34:23-24

My six-year-old son was recently given an old wooden bedroom suit that belonged to his great-great-grandfather. I did not know what to expect this bed to look like, but I have to tell you, I was not expecting much from it. My low expectations were met when I went to pick it up. The suit was fairly massive and had some hand-carved detail, yet it was dark and cold-looking to me. The finish on the wood was nearly black, the hardware was tarnished and dull, the drawers nearly fell apart when the ones that would open were opened. The mirror on the dresser was cracked and the top was stained with years of watermarks and other blemishes of over a hundred years of neglect. I thought to myself, “not in my house, is this bedroom suit going.” This bed, at best, could be used as a dust collector in the attic along with the other junk up there.

My son was thrilled when he saw the bedroom set. I sighed and told him that the one he has is much better, but he was not convinced. I thought to myself, “well maybe if I have this junk refinished it would not look quite so bad.” So I lugged the set out to a retired gentleman who restores furniture. I hesitated to open the door on the truck when I arrived at his shop. My expectation was for him to either pronounce the bed “dead on arrival” or to politely decline the job of restoring it.

Mr. Whitaker took one look at the bed and his face beamed with a smile of pleasure; his eyes seemed to sparkle with joy. I stood there watching his reaction and was baffled at his look of anticipation at seeing the rest of this bedroom set. As we unloaded more furniture, his smile grew bigger. Finally he said, “son, what you have here is a wonderful walnut bedroom set with the original hardware, which is prized by many antique collectors.” He informed me the bed was made in the late 1800’s and was a prized piece of history, as well as a marvelous heirloom for my son to pass on to one of his kids. Needless to say, I was shocked.

Where I saw junk, someone who appreciates great craftsmanship saw beauty. What does God see in you?

Others saw David as a simple shepherd boy; God saw a King. All throughout the Bible God sees the uniqueness and potential in the characters of the Bible. God sees the potential in you, too. We often allow the world to shape our view of ourselves. We allow the negativism of certain circumstances in our lives to play over and over in our minds, telling us again and again we are nothing, that we have no or limited potential. Some hear a parent saying, “you will never do that,” or “you can’t do this.” Some hear a former or even a present boss being critical of their work. Some hear a spouse or former spouse telling them over and over, that they are failures or that they will never amount to anything. Some hear a teacher or professor embarrassing them in class and implying they don’t have what it takes to be successful people.

When did God first start dealing with your life?

READER: Ephesians 1:44

That is, in Christ, he chose us before the world was made so that we would be his holy people-people without blame before him.

READER: Jeremiah 1:5

Before I made you in your mother’s womb, I chose you. Before you were born, I set you apart for a special work.

READER: Psalm 139:13

You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother’s womb.

READER: “Hidden Potential” by Nancy Todd The Upper Room

Source ~ http://www.upperroom.org/devotional/default.asp?start_pos=1&item_id=16226

My husband collects old bicycles. “Vintage,” he calls them. When we go to an auction or a junk store, he inspects every bike there. I’m always drawn to the clean, shiny ones. But Terry heads for the rusted wrecks that don’t seem to have any use left in them. He looks at them differently, marveling at the pieces that are still functioning. And with his skilled, loving hands, a bike that was good for nothing becomes a thing of beauty and a delight to ride.

As I observed Terry examining his newest “wreck,” I was reminded that God is like that with us. While we may focus on the outward flaws of ourselves and others, God looks at what works, what is good. As God saw David’s hidden potential to be king of Israel, God sees our potential as well. And with God’s skilled and loving hands, that potential can be developed into something beautiful and useful.

READER: I Samuel 16:7

The Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.

READER: “Thinking Outside The Pew” #1

Source ~ http://www.youthspecialties.com/articles/topics/personal_stuff/creative.php

Unleashing Your Creative Potential By McNair Wilson

Ben Franklin once said, “Do not anticipate trouble, or worry about what may never happen. Keep in the sunlight.” The Marquis de Condorcet added, “Enjoy your own life without comparing it with that of another.”

That’s one of my best tricks (comparing me to everyone). Many of us think we don’t measure up, yet all of us should strive to be ourselves, not a copy of anyone—no clones, copycats, or even “like so-and-so, only a better version.” Truth is, there’s no one like you, never has been, nor shall there ever be. If we’re pursuing our inner passion, even at a slow and steady pace, we’re on our way to becoming the one-of-a-kind creation we were put here to be.

Who you are is a product of the many daily choices you make. Making a risky choice today will be invigorating, exciting, and filled with discovery. You’ll never discover the complete, original you through imitation. (What if the person you’re emulating is just copying someone else?)

Risk is rearranging the old furniture in our minds. There’s that oh-so-comfortable chair we sit in to dream all the “what ifs” prancing through our imaginations. But that big old chair is so accustomed to our shape that dreaming is all we ever do. There’s a better way.

While I was serving as artistic director for a gifted troupe of street theatre performers at Disney World, I often asked them following a wonderful performance, “That was a great show. How will the next one be better?” Whatever you’re up to can be more, better. I’m confident you know that. I hope you feel it strong enough to go after whatever the next step is for you.

READER: John 10:10

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

LEADER: “Thinking Outside The Pew” By McNair Wilson (Excerpt) Cont:

Source ~ http://www.youthspecialties.com/articles/topics/personal_stuff/creative.php

John recounts he heard Jesus say that he came so we might have life more abundantly. Not just abundantly (as if that wouldn’t be enough), but Jesus promises us more abundant living. This is in addition to all the abundance in our lives today.

READER: “Thinking Outside The Pew” Cont:

Source ~ http://www.youthspecialties.com/articles/topics/personal_stuff/creative.php

Unleashing Your Creative Potential By McNair Wilson

We continue to worry: “What if I mess up?” Count on it! No one has had a flawless week yet. Have you ever failed? “Certainly!” Have you ever completed anything? Yes, you have. Is all that you’ve accomplished perfect?

The Japanese word wabi describes a small flaw that artists intentionally put into each work they create. They believe it gives the art distinction. The hand made vase is more valuable than its manufactured twin because the artist has intentionally given it a wabi, a one-of-a-kind flaw, undetectable by the untrained eye. There are lots of wabi in my life and work, and I’m going to keep at it ‘til I get it wrong a thousand more times.

If we call on our creator spirit, we can take on those long-held assumptions that hold us back. We can waive worry, shun struggle, and foil fears and other imagined impediments. We can even ignore our critics— both real and imagined. We each have many passions. They point us to who we could be. The creative spirit you expressed so effortlessly as a child is still in you.

Dig out that dusty old poetry journal and scribble a few lines this afternoon; get thee to thine garage or garden and dig into that too-long-dormant project you love getting dirty with, or go out and put some air in the squishy tires of your bike.

Time to do a little thinking outside the pew. That big, old comfortable chair will still be there when you need a break. It's been years since you did what you really love. Hey, I think you can still buy watercolor paints at the drug store. How about giving your passion five minutes today, an hour or three next week and next month? Who knows?

"Creativity is more powerful than knowledge." That is what Albert Einstein said, whose lack of knowledge had only to do with hair care and apparently didn't care what others thought of how he looked. Knowledge without action is merely information. Faith without action is a seminary pop quiz. Follow your gut, your heart, and your Creator—who waits with great wonder for when you will be you. If you don't do you, you'll never get done. Maybe someone is watching you for inspiration. They may even be copying you. Are you worth watching? When you're being yourself, you're worth a look!

READER: "Getting Unstuck"

Source ~ <http://www.cfdevotionals.org/devpages/de961121.htm>

Getting Unstuck When we accept Christ as Savior, God gives us new hearts. We become new creations:

Sometimes we get "stuck" in life, because of the lingering effects of something that has happened to us in the past, because of something we have done wrong, a grudge we are holding, or something else. Going down a side-road for a second, we need to remember that grudges are NEVER Scriptural. Christ was pretty clear on that:

Mat 6:14-15 says: *For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*

God doesn't intend for us to let ANYthing stop us from growing spiritually. His resources are limitless. We can overcome anything from the past or the present, no exceptions. We can do ANYthing He wants us to:

No matter what, it can be overcome -- whether it is a tragic mistake we have made, abuse, or anything. Even though we may still suffer some temporal effects, God can help us overcome our problems, and He can even use them, to minister to others! A good example is Joni Eareckson Tada. She was paralyzed in a diving accident, and God has used her disability for His glory, and to minister to countless other disabled individuals, around the world! What is holding you back from fulfilling your potential? God can use you in spite of or because of your illness / divorce / crime / bad grades / bad judgment / dysfunctional childhood. If something is causing you to think "God can't use me," "I don't have anything to offer," "No one would want help from me," etc. think again! After all, remember, God used persecutors of the church (the Apostle Paul) and men who gave in to cowardice (Peter), and He wants to use us, too! He can help us overcome our weaknesses, and He will use us, if we pray for His help, read His Word daily, and find support and a place of service in our local churches and elsewhere! After all, He gave us all gifts that He intends us to use to build up His church! And when we become Christians we are new, with all the resources that we need, available to us through God.

READER: Philippians 4:13

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

READER: "We Come Bearing Gifts" #1 (Excerpt) Waking Up To Your Potential By Blaine Smith

Source ~ <http://nehemiah.gospelcom.net/gifts3.htm>

In considering our potential, we are always in danger of thinking too highly of ourselves. "Don't cherish exaggerated ideas of yourself or your importance," Paul admonishes us (Romans 12:3). We can foolishly entertain ideals for our life that are totally out of line with how God has made us. As a young high school student, I imagined myself becoming a great singer. Fortunately, a tape recorder and brutally honest friends helped me face my limitations.

But Scripture also emphasizes that we can think too little of ourselves. Paul continues: "but try to have a sane estimate of your capabilities by the light of the faith that God has given to you all." Underrating our potential can be as detrimental to our service for Christ as a bloated self-image.

Jesus clearly makes this point in the familiar parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30). A master gives a sum of money to three servants--five talents to one, two talents to another and one talent to the third. The first two invest the money and realize impressive returns. The third, out of fear, buries his talent to keep it safe.

The talents in this parable symbolize opportunities we have for using our abilities. The point of the story, then, is that God gives us abilities along with the chance to make significant contributions with them. Yet, like the servant who buried his talent, we can fail to recognize our potential and the doors God opens for us.

READER: “We Come Bearing Gifts” #2 (Excerpt) Waking Up To Your Potential By Blaine Smith

Source ~ <http://nehemiah.gospelcom.net/gifts3.htm>

The parable can only have the impact Jesus intended, though, if we understand the value of a talent at the time he spoke. We modern readers typically assume it wasn’t a substantial sum. In fact, the talent was equal to more than fifteen years’ wages of a common laborer in Palestine.

This point, of course, was not lost on Jesus’ listeners. The servant given the one talent hadn’t received a meager provision, but a gift of more than fifteen times his annual salary! Why, then, did he fail to appreciate the potential that was in his hands? Undoubtedly, because he compared his sum to what the other servants received and concluded that his was insignificant by comparison.

Most of us are “one-talent” persons. We are not going to be another Billy Graham, Mahatma Ghandi or Mother Teresa. When we see ourselves falling short of the accomplishments of certain renowned individuals, we can lose the motivation to take our own potential seriously. Each of us without exception, however, has significant gifts--and opportunities to invest them for Christ that vastly exceed our expectations.

What this provision amounts to specifically varies greatly from person to person. But God wants each of us to begin with the a priori assumption that he has endowed us with important ability to meet vital human needs, and that he will open all the doors necessary for us to be productive. This attitude of faith will help us take meaningful steps toward fully understanding our gifts and the opportunities Christ provides us to make a difference.

LEADER: “We Come Bearing Gifts - Waking Up To Your Potential” By Blaine Smith (Excerpt) Cont:

Source ~ <http://nehemiah.gospelcom.net/gifts3.htm>

Each of us should also keep in mind that life is an ongoing process--a remarkable adventure--of discovering our potential. At any point, new light may break through, and we may realize we have certain talent that we hadn’t previously recognized.

But most important, don’t belittle your potential through unhealthy comparisons with others. See yourself as God has made you--a one-of-a-kind creation, with a combination of gifts and opportunities that no one else has ever possessed. After all, according to the parable of the talents, you have at least fifteen years’ wages staring you in the face--just for starters.

READER: 2 Corinthians 5:17

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

READER: “Passages About New Beginnings” (Excerpt)

Source ~ <http://www.cfdevotionals.org/devpg03/de031231.htm>

God has often been called the “God of a second chance,” and with good reason. As soon as we confess and repent from our sins, God gives us another new beginning. He gives us a new heart when we are saved, and each day -- even each minute -- is a fresh slate from Him.

What did you see when you looked in the mirror this morning? The mistakes you have made in the past year? The hurts of the last year? That is not what God sees when He looks at us. He sees us as a “new creation,” clothed in Jesus’ righteousness, and He sees the potential we have to be our best for Him in the next year. He envisions all the gifts He has prepared for us, and the opportunities we have to serve Him and our fellowman.

READER: Philippians 3:12-14

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

READER: “What Kind of Present Are You?” (Excerpt)

Source ~ <http://www.cfdevotionals.org/devpg00/de000714.htm>

In John 17, Jesus says seven times that God has given us to Him as a gift. Think of that. We are a present for Jesus.

I have told these men about you. They were in the world, but then you gave them to me. Actually, they were always yours, and you gave them to me; and they have kept your word. John 17:6

What kind of present are you? Are you a tarnished gift? When God looks at you, does He see bitterness, grudges, whining, and a refusal to forgive someone? Does He see a voluminous box, with a minuscule gift inside -- are you not living up to your potential? What have you done with the abilities and resources, which He has given to you? Or is your Father delighted to see in your life a lovely gift, shining with the wrappings of Christ's love, a life emanating patience, humility, forgiveness, gentleness?

I urge you to think of all God has given you, and what you have to offer Him. Ask Him today, to help you be a gift that makes His heart smile.

READER: “Your Biography” (Excerpt)

Source ~ <http://www.rbc.org/odb/odb-05-11-06.shtml>

When D. L. Moody was moving into old age, he was asked to grant permission for his biography. Moody refused, saying, “A man’s life should never be written while he is living. What is important is how a man ends, not how he begins.”

READER: 2 Timothy 4:7

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

LEADER: “What Do You See?” By David Massey Cont:

Source ~ <http://www.cfdevotionals.org/devpg01/de010124.htm>

When did God first start dealing with your life?

God started dealing with you and me before the beginning of time. He is the Master Craftsman of our lives. God sees great potential in each of us, as well as the beauty beneath our battered, tarnished and neglected self-images. God sees past our failures and our unsuccessful attempts to be more pleasing to Him. He sees His work in each of us. God knows your potential, and God’s work is always perfect. What do you see in you? Do you see what God sees?

COMMENTS IF TIME:**ALLOW TEN MINUTES BEFORE CLOSING FOR****PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES:****COPY AND DISTRIBUTE THE FOLLOWING PAGES FOR YOUR READERS:**

READERS

“Underachiever”

An interesting cartoon shows a fourth-grade boy standing toe-to-toe and nose-to-nose with his teacher. Behind them stares a blackboard covered with math problems the boy hasn't finished. With rare perception the boy says, “I'm not an underachiever, you're an overexpecter!”

“Anything?”

Meg. F. Quijano related the following incident that happened upon her return from a meeting of the National Organization for Women. Her five-year-old daughter, Lisa, greeted her with the news that when she grew up she wanted to be a nurse. There was a time when nursing was thought by many to be a “woman's job.” Quijano told Lisa she could be anything she wanted to be. “You can be a lawyer, a surgeon, a banker, President of the United States -- you can be anything.” Lisa looked a little dubious.

“Anything? Anything at all?” She thought about it, and then her face lit up with ambition. “All right,” she said. “I'll be a horse.”

QUOTE #1

“There are countless ways of achieving greatness, but any road to achieving one's maximum potential must be built on a bedrock of respect for the individual, a commitment to excellence, and a rejection of mediocrity.”
- Buck Rodgers, Angels Baseball Star 1930s

“Even If”

General Mark Clark was one of the great heroes of WWII. He led the Salerno invasion that Winston Churchill said was “the most daring amphibious operation we have launched, or which, I think, has ever been launched on a similar scale in war.” At the time Clark was promoted to Lt. General, he was the youngest man of that rank in the U.S. Army. He graduated from West Point in 1917. At the top of his class? Nope. He was 111th from the top in a class of 139!

Even if you never earned a college degree, don't worry, you're in good company. Irving Berlin, for instance, only had two years of formal schooling. He never learned how to read music. When he composed his songs, he would hum the melody and a musical secretary would write down the notes. He became one of the greatest songwriters the country has ever known.

“16 and 20”

When 16-year old Eliza married the 20-year old tailor, he had never been to school. Others might have written his education off as a lost cause, but Eliza didn't. She taught him to read, write, and spell. Those days were difficult, but he proved to be a fast learner. In fact, he learned so well that years later he was elected president of the United States! When he ran for a second term he lost, but refused to give up. Instead, he won a seat in the U.S. Senate. Who? our 17th president, Andrew Johnson.

"The Americanization of Edward Bok"

In his book, *The Americanization of Edward Bok*, Edward Bok, one-time editor of the Ladies' Home Journal, tells a story about his grandfather, who lived in Denmark. It seems the grandfather had been commissioned by the King of Denmark to lead a band of soldiers against pirates who were playing havoc with shipping along a certain coastal area. The elder Bok set up his headquarters on a lonely, rocky, desolate island just off the coast, and after a few years was able to clear the pirates out of the area.

Upon returning to the mainland Bok reported to the King. The King was very pleased and offered Bok anything he wanted. All he wanted, he told the King, was a plot of land on the island where he had just lived and fought for so many months. They told him the island was barren. Why would he want to live there? "I want to plant trees," was Bok's reply. "I want to make the island beautiful." The King's aides thought he was crazy. The island was constantly swept by storms and high winds. He would never be able to get a tree to grow there.

Bok, however, insisted, and the King granted him his wish. He went to live on the island, built a home, and finally was able to bring his wife to it. For years, they worked industriously, persistently, planting trees, shrubs, grass. Gradually the vegetation took hold, the island began to flourish. One morning they arose to hear birds singing. There had never been any birds on the island before.

Eventually the island became a showplace and now is visited by thousands of tourists each year. When he died the grandfather requested that the following words be inscribed on his tombstone: "Make you the world a bit more beautiful and better because you have been on it."

But the story doesn't end there. Edward Bok, the grandson, who had become an American citizen, believed that anyone who was able to do so should retire at 50 and spend the rest of his life making the world a more beautiful and better place to live. And he was as good as his word. At 50 he retired as editor of the Ladies' Home Journal.

One day, while traveling around central Florida, he came upon Iron Mountain, elevation 324 ft. above sea level, the highest point in Florida. Immediately the thought hit him -- why not repeat in America what his grandfather had done in the old country? He bought the site and set to work. Eventually he was more than successful. The place is called Mountain Lake Sanctuary, Lake Wales, Florida. Upon his death, Edward Bok willed it to the State of Florida, and it is now a major tourist attraction. Upon the younger Bok's catafalque were the words: "Make you the world a bit more beautiful and better place because you have been in it."

QUOTE #2

"Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around." - Dr. Leo Buscaglia, 1924-1998 Author/Professor

“Rosebud Potential”

Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him. —Mark 3:14

My wife and I adore miniature roses. Recently, we planted several bushes, but one did not survive. We returned it to the nursery and asked for an exchange. It was midsummer and the mini roses section was limited.

I looked at one that had a picture showing its potential when in full bloom. But the rose plant itself looked rather plain. My wife offered some good advice. “Don’t look at the full blossoms. Look at how many healthy new rosebuds are starting to form.”

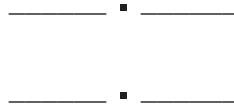
Following her advice, we selected, brought home, planted, and tended the plant with the most rosebuds. In only a week, it had blossomed beautifully!

When our Lord chose His apostles, He selected imperfect men (Mark 3:13-19). One had a history of shady business practices, others had violent tempers. Yet Jesus looked not at their imperfections but at their potential.

Jesus uses the same approach with us. He loves us so much that He chose us despite our imperfections (2 Thessalonians 2:13). Through the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives, He nurtures and transforms us into His glorious image (2 Corinthians 3:18). Next time you are with family, friends, and co-workers, don’t focus on imperfections. Instead, look for rosebud potential.

God, help us see in those we meet
The likeness of Christ’s image there,
And may those traits that are like His
Grow stronger from our love and care.
The Spirit develops in us the clear image of Christ.

Jeremiah 29:11



“Paderewski”

When Jan Paderewski was to leave his native Poland to play his first recital in London, he asked an influential compatriot to give him a letter of introduction to a leading figure in Britain’s musical world, who might be of assistance should anything go amiss.

The letter was handed to him in a sealed envelope. He hoped that everything would proceed smoothly and he would not have to use it. He did not; his debut was a success and no snags developed. Some years later, while going through his papers, he came upon the letter and opened it. It read:

“This will introduce Jan Paderewski, who plays the piano, for which he demonstrates no conspicuous talent.”

Ephesians 1:44



Jeremiah 1:5



Psalm 139:13



“Seabiscuit”

If you have ever seen the movie Seabiscuit, you may understand when I say it reminds me of a love story. It resembles Christ’s love for us, and how His strength can change our lives.

I wonder how many of us are broken by society and circumstances? I think often times, society encourages the brokenness in us, instead of trying to boost confidence. Other times, I think we don’t know how to boost our own confidence. And to be honest, when it all boils down to it, neither society, family, nor ourselves are able to do that, to make the changes necessary to prove to ourselves we are ok after all.

But Jesus can. Jesus is like the horse trainer in the movie. He sees the Spirit in us, without allowing our outside appearance to hinder that. He knows distinctly (in a much more profound way) what exactly it is that each of us needs to bring the truth of ourselves.... our Spirits...outward.

We all have an amazing family heritage, just like Seabiscuit did. Our Father is just as determined as his was. Just as Seabiscuit found his sire’s determination within himself and learned to turn it from something negative to something wonderfully and beautifully positively powerful.... God wants us to know as well, that we truly are created in His image.

Seabiscuit’s owner statement, “You don’t throw a whole life away just because it’s banged up a little bit” really affirmed well, what God Himself says about each of us. He’s telling us not to give up or to give in to what society is telling us. And just as the jockey, Hadis said, “Brick by brick, citizens, brick by brick-” God is reminding us that He has a plan for us, that He has good works to perform toward us, that He intends to fill our lives with peace and hope.

“Prime Time”

Deion “Prime Time” Sanders, outfielder for the Atlanta Braves and cornerback for the Atlanta Falcons, is the only athlete to have hit a Major League home run and scored an NFL touchdown in the same week. Sanders grew up on the mean streets of Fort Myers, Fla., where exposure to some would-be athletes spurred him to make a success of himself. He explains: “I call them Idas. ‘If I’d done this, I’d be making three million today...If I’d practiced a little harder, I’d be a superstar.’ They were as fast as me when they were kids, but instead of working for their dreams they chose drugs and a life of street corners. When I was young, I had practice; my friends who didn’t went straight to the streets and never left. That moment after school is the moment we need to grab. We don’t need any more Idas.”

“Expectations”

You can have a brighter child, it all depends on your expectations. Before you’re tempted to say, “Not true,” let me tell you about Harvard social psychologist Robert Rosenthal’s classic study. All the children in one San Francisco grade school were given a standard I.Q. test at the beginning of the school year. The teachers were told the test could predict which students could be expected to have a spurt of academic and intellectual functioning. The researchers then drew names out of a hat and told the teachers that these were the children who had displayed a high potential for improvement. Naturally, the teachers thought they had been selected because of their test performance and began treating these children as special children.

And the most amazing thing happened -- the spurters, spurted! Overall, the “late blooming” kids averaged four more I.Q. points on the second test than the other group of students. However, the gains were most dramatic in the lowest grades. First graders whose teachers expected them to advance intellectually jumped 27.4 points, and the second grade spurters increased on the average 16.5 points more than their peers. One little Latin-American child who had been classified as mentally retarded with an I.Q. of 61, scored 106 after his selection as a late bloomer.

Isn’t this impressive! It reminds me of what Eliza Doolittle says in My Fair Lady, “The difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she is treated.” You see, how a child is treated has a lot to do with how that child sees herself and ultimately behaves. If a child is treated as a slow learner and you don’t expect much, the child shrugs her shoulders and says, “Why should I try, nobody thinks I can do it anyway!” And she gives up. But if you look at that child as someone who has more potential than she will ever be able to develop, you will challenge that child, work with her through discouragement, and find ways to explain concepts so the child can understand. You won’t mind investing time in the child because you know your investment is going to pay off! And the result? It does! So, what’s the message for parents? Just this: Every child benefits from someone who believes in him, and the younger the child, the more important it is to have high expectations. You may not have an Einstein, but your child has possibilities! Expect the best and chances are, that’s exactly what you’ll get.

“Swedish Nightingale”

In a small village in Sweden lived a young girl who was terribly poor and unskilled, so she could get along only by doing the most menial of jobs. She loved to sing, and despite her poverty, she dreamed of some day being a great singer. She began to sing on street corners, hoping passersby would toss her a copper or two.

Each day she sang--in wind and rain, heat or cold, yet barely had enough at the end of the day to buy food. Some in the village protested to the town council that it wasn’t right for children to be on the street in rags, begging, yet no one did anything to help her. One day a great musician happened to pass by and hear her. He was entranced by her beautiful voice. He took the ragged urchin home with him and began to teach her how to use her glorious voice to its fullest. In time she became the toast of two continents and everyone knew and loved “The Swedish Nightingale,” as they called Jenny Lind.

I Samuel 16:7

“What Do You See?”

Then I will put over them one shepherd, my servant David. He will feed them and tend them and be their shepherd. Then I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David will be a ruler among them. I, the LORD, have spoken. Ezekiel 34:23-24

My six-year-old son was recently given an old wooden bedroom suit that belonged to his great-great-grandfather. I did not know what to expect this bed to look like, but I have to tell you, I was not expecting much from it. My low expectations were met when I went to pick it up. The suit was fairly massive and had some hand-carved detail, yet it was dark and cold-looking to me. The finish on the wood was nearly black, the hardware was tarnished and dull, the drawers nearly fell apart when the ones that would open were opened. The mirror on the dresser was cracked and the top was stained with years of watermarks and other blemishes of over a hundred years of neglect. I thought to myself, “not in my house, is this bedroom suit going.” This bed, at best, could be used as a dust collector in the attic along with the other junk up there.

My son was thrilled when he saw the bedroom set. I sighed and told him that the one he has is much better, but he was not convinced. I thought to myself, “well maybe if I have this junk refinished it would not look quite so bad.” So I lugged the set out to a retired gentleman who restores furniture. I hesitated to open the door on the truck when I arrived at his shop. My expectation was for him to either pronounce the bed “dead on arrival” or to politely decline the job of restoring it.

Mr. Whitaker took one look at the bed and his face beamed with a smile of pleasure; his eyes seemed to sparkle with joy. I stood there watching his reaction and was baffled at his look of anticipation at seeing the rest of this bedroom set. As we unloaded more furniture, his smile grew bigger. Finally he said, “son, what you have here is a wonderful walnut bedroom set with the original hardware, which is prized by many antique collectors.” He informed me the bed was made in the late 1800’s and was a prized piece of history, as well as a marvelous heirloom for my son to pass on to one of his kids. Needless to say, I was shocked.

Where I saw junk, someone who appreciates great craftsmanship saw beauty. What does God see in you?

Others saw David as a simple shepherd boy; God saw a King. All throughout the Bible God sees the uniqueness and potential in the characters of the Bible. God sees the potential in you, too. We often allow the world to shape our view of ourselves. We allow the negativism of certain circumstances in our lives to play over and over in our minds, telling us again and again we are nothing, that we have no or limited potential. Some hear a parent saying, “you will never do that,” or “you can’t do this.” Some hear a former or even a present boss being critical of their work. Some hear a spouse or former spouse telling them over and over, that they are failures or that they will never amount to anything. Some hear a teacher or professor embarrassing them in class and implying they don’t have what it takes to be successful people.

When did God first start dealing with your life?

“Hidden Potential”

My husband collects old bicycles. “Vintage,” he calls them. When we go to an auction or a junk store, he inspects every bike there. I’m always drawn to the clean, shiny ones. But Terry heads for the rusted wrecks that don’t seem to have any use left in them. He looks at them differently, marveling at the pieces that are still functioning. And with his skilled, loving hands, a bike that was good for nothing becomes a thing of beauty and a delight to ride.

As I observed Terry examining his newest “wreck,” I was reminded that God is like that with us. While we may focus on the outward flaws of ourselves and others, God looks at what works, what is good. As God saw David’s hidden potential to be king of Israel, God sees our potential as well. And with God’s skilled and loving hands, that potential can be developed into something beautiful and useful.

“Thinking Outside The Pew” #1 Unleashing Your Creative Potential

Ben Franklin once said, “Do not anticipate trouble, or worry about what may never happen. Keep in the sunlight.” The Marquis de Condorcet added, “Enjoy your own life without comparing it with that of another.”

That’s one of my best tricks (comparing me to everyone). Many of us think we don’t measure up, yet all of us should strive to be ourselves, not a copy of anyone—no clones, copycats, or even “like so-and-so, only a better version.” Truth is, there’s no one like you, never has been, nor shall there ever be. If we’re pursuing our inner passion, even at a slow and steady pace, we’re on our way to becoming the one-of-a-kind creation we were put here to be.

Who you are is a product of the many daily choices you make. Making a risky choice today will be invigorating, exciting, and filled with discovery. You’ll never discover the complete, original you through imitation. (What if the person you’re emulating is just copying someone else?)

Risk is rearranging the old furniture in our minds. There’s that oh-so-comfortable chair we sit in to dream all the “what ifs” prancing through our imaginations. But that big old chair is so accustomed to our shape that dreaming is all we ever do. There’s a better way.

While I was serving as artistic director for a gifted troupe of street theatre performers at Disney World, I often asked them following a wonderful performance, “That was a great show. How will the next one be better?” Whatever you’re up to can be more, better. I’m confident you know that. I hope you feel it strong enough to go after whatever the next step is for you.

John 10:10

“Thinking Outside The Pew” Unleashing Your Creative Potential

We continue to worry: “What if I mess up?” Count on it! No one has had a flawless week yet. Have you ever failed? “Certainly!” Have you ever completed anything? Yes, you have. Is all that you’ve accomplished perfect?

The Japanese word wabi describes a small flaw that artists intentionally put into each work they create. They believe it gives the art distinction. The hand made vase is more valuable than its manufactured twin because the artist has intentionally given it a wabi, a one-of-a-kind flaw, undetectable by the untrained eye. There are lots of wabi in my life and work, and I’m going to keep at it ‘til I get it wrong a thousand more times.

If we call on our creator spirit, we can take on those long-held assumptions that hold us back. We can waive worry, shun struggle, and foil fears and other imagined impediments. We can even ignore our critics— both real and imagined. We each have many passions. They point us to who we could be. The creative spirit you expressed so effortlessly as a child is still in you.

Dig out that dusty old poetry journal and scribble a few lines this afternoon; get thee to thine garage or garden and dig into that too-long-dormant project you love getting dirty with, or go out and put some air in the squishy tires of your bike.

Time to do a little thinking outside the pew. That big, old comfortable chair will still be there when you need a break. It’s been years since you did what you really love. Hey, I think you can still buy watercolor paints at the drug store. How about giving your passion five minutes today, an hour or three next week and next month? Who knows?

“Creativity is more powerful than knowledge.” That is what Albert Einstein said, whose lack of knowledge had only to do with hair care and apparently didn’t care what others thought of how he looked. Knowledge without action is merely information. Faith without action is a seminary pop quiz. Follow your gut, your heart, and your Creator—who waits with great wonder for when you will be you. If you don’t do you, you’ll never get done. Maybe someone is watching you for inspiration. They may even be copying you. Are you worth watching? When you’re being yourself, you’re worth a look!

2 Corinthians 5:17

“Passages About New Beginnings”

God has often been called the “God of a second chance,” and with good reason. As soon as we confess and repent from our sins, God gives us another new beginning. He gives us a new heart when we are saved, and each day -- even each minute -- is a fresh slate from Him.

What did you see when you looked in the mirror this morning? The mistakes you have made in the past year? The hurts of the last year? That is not what God sees when He looks at us. He sees us as a “new creation,” clothed in Jesus’ righteousness, and He sees the potential we have to be our best for Him in the next year. He envisions all the gifts He has prepared for us, and the opportunities we have to serve Him and our fellowman.

“Getting Unstuck”

Getting Unstuck When we accept Christ as Savior, God gives us new hearts. We become new creations:

Sometimes we get “stuck” in life, because of the lingering effects of something that has happened to us in the past, because of something we have done wrong, a grudge we are holding, or something else. Going down a side-road for a second, we need to remember that grudges are NEVER Scriptural. Christ was pretty clear on that:

Mat 6:14-15 says: For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

God doesn’t intend for us to let ANYthing stop us from growing spiritually. His resources are limitless. We can overcome anything from the past or the present, no exceptions. We can do ANYthing He wants us to:

No matter what, it can be overcome -- whether it is a tragic mistake we have made, abuse, or anything. Even though we may still suffer some temporal effects, God can help us overcome our problems, and He can even use them, to minister to others! A good example is Joni Eareckson Tada. She was paralyzed in a diving accident, and God has used her disability for His glory, and to minister to countless other disabled individuals, around the world! What is holding you back from fulfilling your potential? God can use you in spite of or because of your illness / divorce / crime / bad grades / bad judgment / dysfunctional childhood. If something is causing you to think “God can’t use me,” “I don’t have anything to offer,” “No one would want help from me,” etc. think again! After all, remember, God used persecutors of the church (the Apostle Paul) and men who gave in to cowardice (Peter), and He wants to use us, too! He can help us overcome our weaknesses, and He will use us, if we pray for His help, read His Word daily, and find support and a place of service in our local churches and elsewhere! After all, He gave us all the gifts that He intends us to use to build up His church! And when we become Christians we are new, with all the resources that we need, available to us through God.

Philippians 4:13

“We Come Bearing Gifts” #1 Waking Up To Your Potential By Blaine Smith

In considering our potential, we are always in danger of thinking too highly of ourselves. “Don’t cherish exaggerated ideas of yourself or your importance,” Paul admonishes us (Romans 12:3). We can foolishly entertain ideals for our life that are totally out of line with how God has made us. As a young high school student, I imagined myself becoming a great singer. Fortunately, a tape recorder and brutally honest friends helped me face my limitations.

But Scripture also emphasizes that we can think too little of ourselves. Paul continues: “but try to have a sane estimate of your capabilities by the light of the faith that God has given to you all.” Underrating our potential can be as detrimental to our service for Christ as a bloated self-image.

Jesus clearly makes this point in the familiar parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30). A master gives a sum of money to three servants--five talents to one, two talents to another and one talent to the third. The first two invest the money and realize impressive returns. The third, out of fear, buries his talent to keep it safe.

The talents in this parable symbolize opportunities we have for using our abilities. The point of the story, then, is that God gives us abilities along with the chance to make significant contributions with them. Yet, like the servant who buried his talent, we can fail to recognize our potential and the doors God opens for us.

“We Come Bearing Gifts” Waking Up To Your Potential

The parable can only have the impact Jesus intended, though, if we understand the value of a talent at the time he spoke. We modern readers typically assume it wasn’t a substantial sum. In fact, the talent was equal to more than fifteen years’ wages of a common laborer in Palestine.

This point, of course, was not lost on Jesus’ listeners. The servant given the one talent hadn’t received a meager provision, but a gift of more than fifteen times his annual salary! Why, then, did he fail to appreciate the potential that was in his hands? Undoubtedly, because he compared his sum to what the other servants received and concluded that his was insignificant by comparison.

Most of us are “one-talent” persons. We are not going to be another Billy Graham, Mahatma Ghandi or Mother Teresa. When we see ourselves falling short of the accomplishments of certain renowned individuals, we can lose the motivation to take our own potential seriously. Each of us without exception, however, has significant gifts--and opportunities to invest them for Christ that vastly exceed our expectations.

What this provision amounts to specifically varies greatly from person to person. But God wants each of us to begin with the a priori assumption that he has endowed us with important ability to meet vital human needs, and that he will open all the doors necessary for us to be productive. This attitude of faith will help us take meaningful steps toward fully understanding our gifts and the opportunities Christ provides us to make a difference.

Philippians 3:12-14

“What Kind of Present Are You?”

In John 17, Jesus says seven times that God has given us to Him as a gift. Think of that. We are a present for Jesus.

I have told these men about you. They were in the world, but then you gave them to me. Actually, they were always yours, and you gave them to me; and they have kept your word. John 17:6

What kind of present are you? Are you a tarnished gift? When God looks at you, does He see bitterness, grudges, whining, and a refusal to forgive someone? Does He see a voluminous box, with a minuscule gift inside -- are you not living up to your potential? What have you done with the abilities and resources, which He has given to you? Or is your Father delighted to see in your life a lovely gift, shining with the wrappings of Christ’s love, a life emanating patience, humility, forgiveness, gentleness?

I urge you to think of all God has given you, and what you have to offer Him. Ask Him today, to help you be a gift that makes His heart smile.

“Your Biography”

When D. L. Moody was moving into old age, he was asked to grant permission for his biography. Moody refused, saying, “A man’s life should never be written while he is living. What is important is how a man ends, not how he begins.”

2 Timothy 4:7
