

July 7, 2006

## Encouragement for Today

Able and Available

Renee Swope, Executive Director of Communications, Proverbs 31 Speaker

[http://proverbs31.gospelcom.net/speaker\\_renee.htm](http://proverbs31.gospelcom.net/speaker_renee.htm)

### Key Verse:

Matthew 25:21, "His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share in your master's happiness."  
(NIV)

### Devotion:

The doorbell rang soon after I got home. I was surprised to see Janet standing in the doorway. I had just walked home from her house after dropping off a thank you note. "This is the most amazing thank you note I have ever read." Janet said. "Renee, you have a writing gift and you need to use it."

I was a bit puzzled. It was only a thank you note. Later that afternoon, I thought about Janet's words and wondered if God could use me to encourage more than just one friend. So, I penned Janet's words in my journal and asked God to show me if He wanted me to do something with them.

A few months later, I was returning from a women's outreach dinner at my church. I was thinking about the message I had heard on contentment and wished I could read the speaker's notes so I could apply the lessons in my daily life. "Maybe I could write a follow-up study guide to give to women who come so they could go deeper, too." I thought.

The next day I called Janet and told her about my crazy idea. She was on the women's ministry leadership team at my church. She said they'd been praying for something to give women after the dinner series ended. She loved the idea of a small study guide.

Later that week, Janet asked our women's ministry director to consider my idea and much to my shock, they approved it! I nearly died from the suffocation of fear and insecurity but with Janet's prayers and prodding, I wrote a study guide. Two months later it was given to over 1000 women. I taught a class the following year to lead women through the study guide. I wrote another and another. The next year, a new ministry was started and it's thriving today. All of that, after one thank you note! All of that, because I was available to give back to God what He had given me.

But I haven't always been able or available. For many years I was more like the third servant in Matthew 25:14-30. In case you're not familiar with the story, here is my contemporary synopsis: There was a business owner who had three servants with varying degrees of abilities. He was going on an out-of-town business trip, but before he left he assigned each employee an individual project, according to their abilities. The first two were given more to oversee. Perhaps they had more experience or were better at multi-tasking. In any case, both gave their time and talents to serve their boss and he was very pleased with them when he returned. The one who had been given less responsibility made excuses about neglecting his assignment. He even blamed his boss for his neglect.

I wonder if he thought, "Oh, this little project isn't much. Why worry about being faithful with it? The boss will never notice." I have thought that at times. I wonder if he was jealous that others were given

more visible responsibilities. I wonder if envy turned to presumption, which led to strife toward the boss and apathy toward his abilities. I know that has happened to me.

Our Boss is on an out-of-town assignment and He's asked each one of us to oversee something in His kingdom, according to abilities He's given us. With each ability comes an assignment. With each assignment comes a choice, a risk and a responsibility. With each assignment comes the possibility of reward and the potential of regret. With each assignment comes accountability to the Master — whether great or small.

It isn't a matter of how much or how little He's given to us. What matters is how well we use the abilities we have been given. Just like the servants, if we are faithful with a little God will entrust us with more and we will experience deeper joy as we live out His purpose in our lives. No matter how big or small our talents seem, they are all God-given, and they all matter to Him.

It's been seven years since I wrote the first study guide. God has been true to His promise of giving more when we are faithful with a little. He has used my writing to grow my speaking. He has entrusted me with more for now, and I have the blessing of sharing all that He is teaching me with women across the country. Just as He promised, I am getting to share in my Master's happiness.

It started with one thank you note. It started with a woman who was faithful in the little things of encouragement, prayer and the gift of prodding. It started with another woman who gave back to God what He had given to her.

**My prayer for today:** Lord, what abilities have You given me that I don't see? Please make me aware of the little things that can make a difference for You and others. I lay down my doubt, my jealousy and comparison. I confess the times I have been unwilling to give back what you have given to me. I want to know the joy and pleasure of being faithful with the little things! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

**Application Steps:** Read the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30).

### **Reflection points:**

- List your abilities. If it's difficult, list some things other people say you do well:
- Have you ever struggled with the abilities God's given you compared to others?
- Have you ever "buried" your abilities because you didn't think God would notice or because you didn't think they mattered?
- How did each servants' faithfulness with their abilities impact their relationship with the master?
- How has burying or using your abilities impacted your relationship with God?
- List steps are you going to take to be a faithful steward of the abilities God has given to you:

### **Power Verses:**

Ephesians 2:10, "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (NLT)

Ephesians 4:16, "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." (NIV)

Romans 12:4-5, “Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, <sup>5</sup>so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of his one body, and each of us has different work to do. And since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others.” (NLT)

Romans 12:6-8, “God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out when you have faith that God is speaking through you. If your gift is that of serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, do a good job of teaching. If your gift is to encourage others, do it! If you have money, share it generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.” (NLT)

### **Additional Resources:**

Shaped with Purpose Workbook, by Renee Swope

[http://proverbs31.gospelcom.net/newresources\\_shapedPurpose.htm](http://proverbs31.gospelcom.net/newresources_shapedPurpose.htm)

Journey of a Woman's Heart Conference Tape Set, by Renee Swope

[http://proverbs31.gospelcom.net/newresources\\_journeyWoman.htm](http://proverbs31.gospelcom.net/newresources_journeyWoman.htm)

Living Life on Purpose by Lysa TerKeurst

[http://proverbs31.gospelcom.net/newresources\\_livingLife.htm](http://proverbs31.gospelcom.net/newresources_livingLife.htm)