

Biblical Perspectives: Appreciation for Work Well Done

by Carrie Cavanaugh

Although the parable of the talents in Matthew 25 is clearly about God's judgment of our whole lives, I think it is also an insightful look at the biblical model of reward for work well done. Especially in this economy, where organizations don't have the ability to acknowledge hard work with bonuses and raises, other forms of acknowledgement are important tools for leaders to utilize. In fact, our survey shows that many things, including recognition, are more influential in your staff's engagement at work than their compensation. With this in mind, let us turn to the parable itself.

The first point I'd like to make is that the lord's response is word for word the same to the first two workers despite the fact that they had been entrusted with and earned different amounts. The Lord tells them, "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." This should be a reminder to us that all hard working employees deserve recognition for their labor, even if some don't have jobs that are as flashy as others. Although it is the church that is described as a body with many different parts that are all reliant upon each other, the idea holds true for an organization, especially Christian organizations that are doing kingdom work. Your staff may have different functions

with various levels of visibility, but everyone is part of the team, even the person who takes the trash out so faithfully that you never even notice.

From this parable we also learn that trust is built over time and one way that you can honor your staff for faithful work is by trusting them with more responsibility. It is a beautiful thing that God's ways aren't capricious dictates for the

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sake of flaunting His sovereignty. Rather God's ways are good and wise. This principle of rewarding good work with more responsibility is not only biblical, but wise. Draw on those who have proven themselves in the past and they likely won't let you down in the future. Furthermore, our research shows that when you consistently promote those employees who have proven themselves through their work, you gain the trust and engagement of all your staff. This element of justice will establish an environment where people work hard because they know their labors won't go unnoticed.

Be careful to give people added responsibility within the same sphere of skills that they have already proven themselves in. Many organizations promote their best workers to management, something they aren't actually gifted in. Going back to the beginning of the parable, the lord gives each servant talents "according to their ability".

Although this may seem counter to the topic at hand, I think the parable's description of the treatment of the third worker who didn't bring any return on his lord's investment is important as well. I know for many people, myself included, it's hard to address other's inadequacies. Yet, the lord in the parable boldly said, "You wicked, lazy servant!" and ordered, "And throw the worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." This is important not just because we need to eliminate fruitless workers for the sake of the bottom line, but also because the other staff see your response to their ineffectiveness and are impacted by it. That is, if you are just, not only in acknowledging good work, but also faithful in eliminating consistently substandard workers in the workplace, your staff will see that you are committed to your organization's mission. By eliminating those who aren't on board with the work, you will make it safe for the rest of your staff to

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really get excited about the work that they are doing. Also, since your staff must work as a team, they won't be held back by someone who isn't carrying their weight.

Not every situation will require that you fire a poor performing staff member. We encourage you to first see if there would be a better position for them within our organization that would fit with their abilities and passions. Or maybe they are better suited to serve at a different organization and you can bless them by helping them find a job where God can use them for all that they are.

This parable of the talents is really quite shocking in some ways. The Lord really seems harsh at some points—calling the servant wicked and sending him to a place of gnashing of teeth—but beyond the hard words, there is truth and justice and thus love. You can be this to your staff as well.

Yet, at some level, even leaders are like the servants in this parable because we serve our Lord. As such, we all know the longing within our hearts to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" Let us bless our staff by letting them know that they are doing good work.