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When I was a child attending a Sunday school, ‘The Talent Party’ was one of my favourite church programs. ‘The Talent Party’ was a kind of market in which we could buy books, stationaries, toys or foods with using the fake notes called talents that we got when to attend the worship, listen carefully to what the teachers said, or help others. The party was held twice a year, and I was always waiting for it collecting the talents as much as possible.

The program was based on the parable of the talents in today’s Gospel reading. In the parable, a master called his three servants before he went on a journey, and to one he gave five talents, to another two talents, and to another one talent according to their abilities. ‘Talent’ was one of the currencies of the day valuing 6,000 denarii, and one denarius was a daily wage at that time; thus, one talent was a daily wage about for 20 years; yes, they were massive amount of money.

In the narrative, the servants who got five and two talents each used their money to earn a profit, while the man with one talent hid his money under the ground. The two servants who multiplied what their master gave to them were praised by their lord when he came back home, but the man who did nothing with his fund was cursed and deprived of what he had.

‘The Talent Party’ focused on the two servants who had worked hard and regarded good students as the two servants; it taught that good kid could get more talents and using the rewards was a great blessing. I found no problem with it then, however, as I grew up, I realised that the program wasn't accorded with what Jesus wanted to teach us through the parable.

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Above all, the master didn’t entrust his wealth to his servants to let them shop for whatever they wanted. We don’t know exactly why the master invested, but the bottom line is that the parable is about the kingdom of heaven. In Matthew 25:14 Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them.”

Some people have interpreted the master in the story as God the father, but others haven’t agreed with the stance; so there have been long-standing debates of who the master is. But from my point of view, it doesn’t matter whether he is God or not because it wasn’t the focus of the parable to analyse him. Jesus’ interest was to show that our talents should be used for the kingdom of heaven. Thus, shopping with the talents wasn’t accord with the teaching of the story.

Furthermore, the Talent Parable highlighted the obedience of the two servants, but we can find that the narrative stresses the acts of the last servant who did nothing with his asset. He is introduced as an example of those who don't use their talents for nurturing the kingdom of heaven in their lives.

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After a long time when the master returned and settled accounts with them, he blamed the one, saying “You wicked, lazy servant! So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten talents, and throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Then, why did he do nothing hiding the fund?

First of all, he seemed not to understand what his master really wanted. In the case of the first servant who got five talents, when he received the money he went at once and began to do business to make a profit. The second servant with two talents did the same thing. But, the one with one talent went off and hid the money without hesitation, which means that he didn't listen to his master carefully so didn't grasp his intention.

Also, the last servant didn't trust and respect his lord. He said to his lord: “Master, I knew you were a harsh man, harvesting crops you didn't plant and gathering crops you didn't cultivate. I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth.” His decision and acts were based on his distrust and fear of his lord.

Last but not least, he seemed not to have confidence and hope with what he had. He did nothing with his fund. As I mentioned earlier, what he had was never a small amount of money, although his money was smaller than what other two servants received. It was way enough to do something like other colleagues.

But, he did nothing. Why? He didn't seem to hope what he could do with the money; he didn't have vision or purpose and didn't trust his abilities. Yes, he looked hopeless; this is the main point of this story. He didn't use what he was given because he was hopeless, aimless and purposeless.

The bottom line is that his hopelessness was based on his misunderstanding of his master, and his distrust and fear of him. Through this story, Jesus wanted to say that without hope we cannot construct the kingdom of heaven no matter how great abilities we have, and hope is strengthened with the deep trust of God.

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There was an African-American salesman. He sold medical equipment and worked diligently to sustain his family. But, the sale wasn't good and his financial status got worse. Finally, he couldn't pay the rent, and his wife left him. One day, he encountered a share broker by chance and had a dream to be a share broker being impressed with his happiness. However, considering his education and experiences, his goal wasn't realistic.

After many complications, he became an intern of an investment company, but he had to work without pay during the intern period, and furthermore, it wasn't guaranteed that he became a full-time employee after that. To be selected, he had to bring the best result among 20 intern workers.

His situation wasn't good; since he couldn't get any payment, he had to keep selling medical equipment after working at the company. On top of that, he was evacuated from his house by force due to non-payment and became homeless with his son; he spent many nights at homeless facilities or even at public toilets. But he didn't give up; he worked hard during the day not to lose that golden opportunity.

One day, the CEO of another company invited him to have lunch together. Then, the CEO offered him a full-time position because he was impressed by the man's passion and sincerity. Someone was looking at him. After six years, he set up his own company, and it has grown into a big international corporation.

His name is Chris Gardner, an American successful businessman and billionaire. Chris says, “I was homeless, but I wasn't hopeless. I knew a better day was coming.” He shares that his faith in Jesus has been one of the strongest guiding forces not to lose hope in the critical time; so, whenever people ask him ‘What's the secret?,’ he tells them “Jesus loves me. This fact has sustained me.”

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Sisters and brothers,

Hopelessness is one of the biggest enemies hindering us not to achieve our dream. Hopelessness is the core stumbling block that makes us give up building the kingdom of heaven hiding what we have, and it is caused by our fear and distrust of God the father.

Let us hope what God would do through us, let us trust how much he loves us, and let us do what we can do little by little with what we have now. This is what we can learn from the last servant, and this is the way we can expand the kingdom of heaven here and now. Amen.