On its surface, the “Parable of the Talents” seems to essentially lionize unfettered capitalism and those who exploit others for their own gain. Even the later interpretation of this parable that originated our modern understanding and usage of the word “talents” as “spiritual gifts” has felt a bit stale.

But remember that Jesus himself was raised in a society of great exploitation, one that is not hard for us to imagine. A billionaire CEO demands his underpaid staff go out and make a profit for him, at all costs. Two follow along and use predatory loans and other forms of exploitation to earn their boss a profit; one stands up and refuses to participate. The boss is furious and reacts predictably: he feels aggrieved that something is being denied him and violently expels the man from his place of work. Perhaps the real talent this third man had fostered was the gift of courageous voice in the face of exploitation and adversity—no matter the great personal risk.

Even taking this other common interpretation of the parable—that of our cultivating and sharing our own spiritual gifts—do we really believe that God gives some of us more spiritual and personal “gifts” than others? Is that what we are being told? This approach seems to fall into something of a “fixed” mindset: “some are smart, some are not, and what matters is what you do with what you got.” I’m not so sure. What if, instead, our one great gift all of us were given is simply *life* and the ability to connect with one other? And what we refer to as our talents are simply the things we lovingly show up for and invest in, time and again?

May we always lovingly show up for one another, invest in dismantling systems that exploit, and attend to and lift up those treated simply as resources to be extracted.

~David Gaillardetz, Nov. 15, 2026