

No Capes Required

From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded. (Luke 12:48)

Scripture: Luke 12:42–48

Song: “Take My Life and Let It Be”

I first encountered the lesson of this parable in the world of superhero comics. When a character has the power of flight or invisibility, that gift must be used to serve others. With great power comes great responsibility! In the simplified world of 1960s comic books, villains use their powers selfishly, and heroes use their gifts to help.

In this parable on servanthood, Jesus invites us into a world where gifts are less colorful than in the comics, but they are more real. The servant Jesus describes surely had the gifts required to do the job. The wise master wouldn't have given such responsibility to the servant had he not been sure the servant had every necessary gift. The master was certain the servant *could* do the job; but *would* he?

You and I have gifts of many kinds. Nobody gets every gift, but nobody gets left out either. Maybe our gifts draw admiration; maybe they are less noticeable. In either case, our Master will one day call for an accounting. He will review how we have used our gifts, whether great or small. I can't climb walls or leap tall buildings, but I hope God will be pleased by what I do with what I have.

Father, make me content with my gifts and teach me to use them for Your glory. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

November 3–9. **Michael Brewer** lives in Kentucky, where he spoils his granddaughters and enjoys his garden. His retirement ministry includes teaching, preaching, and pastoral care.

Taking a Stand

Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. (Luke 12:51)

Scripture: Luke 12:49–53

Song: “Here I Am, Lord”

When I’m working with a new group of students, I sometimes use a sorting game as an icebreaker. I ask all the students to stand along one wall. Then I make a statement. Those who agree with what I’ve said are instructed to move to the right, and those who disagree, to the left. Most of them enjoy expressing their opinions, but there are always a few who spend more time in the uncommitted middle than on either side.

Jesus warns us about gravitating toward lukewarm indecision. In fiery terms, Jesus declares that He has not come into the world to encourage the noncommittal life. Jesus was a controversial figure in His own day, and people tended to firmly take sides with Him or against Him. The very presence of Jesus—His words and deeds—confronted listeners with a dividing line.

Jesus is certainly not encouraging family members to turn against one another. The point of His vivid language is that you and I must decide who we are and whom we will follow. When we hover in the middle, trying to please everyone, we end up pleasing no one. It is possible, of course, that my following Jesus may offend friends or loved ones. When that happens, I must be faithful to my commitment. Those who are afraid to decide have already made a poor choice.

Father, no matter which direction the crowd turns, help me follow your Son faithfully, today and every day. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Storing or Pouring?

Pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord.
(Lamentations 2:19)

Scripture: Lamentations 2:17–22

Song: “I Love the Lord, Who Heard My Cry”

My friend always knows when I’m upset. When he asks what’s bothering me, sometimes I dodge the question. Maybe I’d rather not admit my own pettiness or confess my grudges. Even so, I’ve learned that admitting my feelings is healthier than pretense or denial. Such honesty may be painful, but the pain is a step toward healing.

The Book of Lamentations applies this lesson to our relationship with God. This book is a heartbroken prayer offered after the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem. The city has been ravaged, the temple burned. Many citizens have been captured, and others left to starve. The grief is both honest and raw. Some verses seem to accuse God of going too far. Others question His divine mercy.

Lamentations doesn’t encourage us to get angry at God, but it teaches us to lay our most bitter grievances before Him. We can pretend that we’re never angry about our circumstances, that we never feel as though God has let us down. Or we can come clean and offer that grief to the only One who can heal us. There is nothing within me that God doesn’t already know, so I might as well be honest. Maybe pouring out the anguish of my heart makes room for God to pour in something better.

Father, You know my every thought and feeling, even the ones I’d rather hide. Trusting in Your love, I give it all to You. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

How Long, O Lord?

It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.
(Lamentations 3:26)

Scripture: Lamentations 3:21–36

Song: “Open My Eyes, That I May See”

When browsing through my old journals, I occasionally come across a heartfelt, “How long, O Lord?” Looking back, I see that God always brought me through those hard times, and often the troubles passed more quickly than I expected. Reading my journals reminds me of two things: 1) I often worried that bad times had come to stay; and 2) they never did.

Lamentations is a prayer written during a time of calamity. Conquered by foreigners and exiled far from home, many Jews must have believed that they would die in a foreign land and that their children would grow up worshiping pagan gods. Darkness had swallowed God’s people forever. This was the end of the story—or so it seemed.

In fact, the Israelites eventually reclaimed their homeland and restored their nation. In between their exile and their homecoming, the Jewish people relearned the value of patience, perseverance, and waiting on God. I try to apply those same spiritual lessons in my own times of trial. God never forsakes His children. To wait for God when the waiting seems long is an act of trust. To long for God’s future is a practice of hope. To know that God’s love will outlast our troubles is a confession of faith. Hard times come. Hard times go. God never leaves.

Father, bad times are not forever, but You are. Thank You for holding my hand in every season of life and for bringing me home. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Sealed and Secure

This inheritance is kept in heaven for you. (1 Peter 1:4)

Scripture: 1 Peter 1:1–12

Song: “O That Will Be Glory”

While in college, I inherited from my great-uncle a heavy gold ring with three diamonds. I appreciated the sentiment behind the gift, but I’ve never been one for flashy jewelry. After wearing the ring a couple of times, I put it away for many years. I eventually had the gems reset as pendants that I gave to three young women in the family. They were grateful and proud to wear the diamonds I’d been holding since before they were born.

In a similar way, God is holding an inheritance for you and me. This inheritance was established before we came into the world, a gift prepared for each and every Christian. It is not yet time for us to receive it, but God is keeping our inheritance safe and secure for us, preserved from fading, spoiling, or perishing.

Peter doesn’t provide a detailed description of our heavenly inheritance. His letter alludes to spiritual treasures like holiness, rejoicing, “new birth,” grace, and peace—but these are mere facets of a glory beyond human words. Whatever awaits us in heaven will satisfy our deepest need and fulfill our highest longing. No one gives better gifts than God!

Father, as I move through the struggles of life, help me to be thankful and glad for the great inheritance that awaits me in Your presence. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Shaped for Holiness

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do. (1 Peter 1:15)

Scripture: 1 Peter 1:13–25

Song: “Take Time to Be Holy”

I once asked to borrow my teacher’s fountain pen to jot down a note. She refused, instead writing the note for me. “This pen is just for me,” she explained. “I’ve used it for years. The pen point has adapted to my hand, shaping itself to fit my style of writing. If I let someone else write with this pen, it would spoil its point.”

That story helps me understand the meaning of holiness. In the Old Testament, anything set aside for God’s use alone was considered holy. It might be a utensil from the temple or a priestly robe. A person could be holy too, if that person served no one but God. A holy person was someone fitted to God’s hand alone.

Peter appeals to this ancient teaching when he admonishes Christians to be holy in everything we do. I certainly fall short of that goal. I will never be a perfect servant of God in this world, but I keep trying. My hope is that every act of obedience shapes me to be a tool better fitted for God’s hand. And my comfort is the conviction that, despite my failings, my own shabby holiness is wrapped in the perfect holiness of my Savior.

Father, let me be Your faithful pen. Write with me whatever You will. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Leaning into the Future

He set fire to the temple of the LORD. (2 Kings 25:9)

Scripture: 2 Kings 24:18—25:9

Song: “My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less”

When the Jerusalem temple was burned by invaders roughly six centuries before Jesus’ birth, many Jewish people lost their faith. Some reasoned that the gods of Babylon must be mightier than Israel’s God, so they adopted the pagan religion of their conquerors. Others believed that the destruction was a sign of God’s total rejection. These Jews, convinced that God had forsaken them, turned their backs on God.

However, a remnant remained faithful in those terrible times. Even in exile, these believers clung to hope. The invaders could topple the temple, but they could never overturn God’s purposes. Jerusalem may have gone up in smoke, but God’s saving plans had not. Hope sustained that discouraged remnant. In turn, God used those faithful Israelites to restore the nation and bring the Messiah into the world.

Christian hope is not crossed fingers or wishful thinking. It is not whistling in the dark or denying reality. It is not pretending that everything is fine or that every story ends happily. Hope is not blind to evil. On the contrary, it is only by hope that we see the world clearly. Hope is our conviction that God reigns, our certainty that God’s creation will be redeemed, our bedrock belief that through God’s grace all will finally be well. Hope isn’t always easy, but life without hope is even harder.

Father, whatever this day brings, keep me from trudging in despair. Instead, help me dance in hope. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.