

Good morning! It's good to see you, ALL of you, for Growing in Faith Together. If you took the first letter of each of those words—Growing in Faith Together—what would you spell? GIFT! And what a GIFT it is to hear God's word and wonder about it in an interactive way. Today I want to start with a quote from Albert Einstein: you know, the brilliant scientist with amazing hair, who lived a long time ago? He once said, (SLIDE) "A ship is always safe at the shore, but that is NOT what it is built for." What is a ship built for? (to be out in water) The boat is safer when it is at shore, but the whole purpose of the boat is to use it in water, to sail, even when it's kind of scary, in the face of storms and rocks or icebergs. Ships are made for traveling in water, and that's risky business.

What are WE made for? We are made to love and serve and trust God—that's called faith—and that's risky business too. Let's look at our Spark Story Bible and the Gospel of Matthew because it has something to teach us about risk and faith. Risk is a word that means taking a chance, knowing there might be danger and going ahead anyway. Our story is called the Parable of the Talents. Remember a parable is a simple tale, a type of story Jesus would tell so we would learn from it. Let's read! (SPARK STORY BIBLE SLIDES)

Wow! Talk about risk! The man took a risk to trust his servants and believed that they would take care of his special talents. Now a talent can mean a few things. The way we talk about it today is a gift, or ability, or skill—something special you can do, that not everyone else can do. What's your talent? Maybe you are really good at singing, or knowing how to help others, or doing math or reading, or playing a sport, or quilting, or golfing, or maybe you can whistle. Can you do that? Or how about touching your tongue to your nose. Can you do that? Terrific! Those are great talents. Each and every one of us is special and extraordinary!

Another way to talk about talents, like in our Bible story, is to think of a talent as a large amount of money—one talent would be roughly equal to the amount of money one person would make in 20 years of working. That’s a lot of money! To the first servant, the master gave 5 talents—100 years’ worth of money, to the second servant he gives two, and to the final servant, one.

It would be like if someone gave Bruce five million dollars, maybe that’s why he’s retiring!, and two million dollars to _____. Did you see how her face lit up? And one million dollars to you. Think of what you could do with all that money! You could spend it on yourself, you could give it to others, you could invest it. Money, money, money! It reminds me of ABBA’s song (SLIDE)! Listen to these words: (play Abba) *Money, money, money, Must be funny, In the rich man's world. Money, money, money, Always sunny, In the rich man's world, Aha-ahaaa. All the things I could do, If I had a little money, It's a rich man's world.*

Ok, so I admit ABBA’s a little eccentric or silly, but these words make us think of all the things we could do if I had a little money, or just a little more! We imagine we would be happier with just a little more money. We think that money, and all of the other things we have, are for ME—they are mine! It’s hard to risk and to share what’s mine.

Faith is different. Without risk, faith is impossible! (SLIDE) Some people say Faith is sometimes spelled “R-I-S-K.” We can’t have faith without risk. Faith is not always knowing—not knowing what’s going on, or what’s going to happen, but still trusting God. Sometimes it’s easy to think we should keep our faith for ourselves. But is that what God wants? No! Of course not. We can’t be like the servant that hides his talents like a dog buries a bone. Sure, the talent was safe, but it’s not what it was given for. God wants us to use our faith, and all that we have, to honor God, share Jesus’ love, and help others. It doesn’t mean it’s easy, but does that mean we shouldn’t try? No!

We take risks, we take chances, every day. Some of the risks we take are so small that we don't have to think much about them: like sitting by a new friend at lunch, or even going to school or work, not knowing what the day will bring. Other times the risk is so big, we worry about them for days. Like telling someone "I love you," and waiting for them to say what...? "I love you too." Or, as many of our high schoolers just experienced, asking someone to go to the Sadie's dance with you. Or for some of our adults, leaving your career behind to explore new work. Those are BIG risks. Sometimes it's easier to keep things the same, to keep things safe. If things don't go as you hope, you could be hurt and sad, but there IS a chance that things work out for the better and something amazing happens.

Like the parable servants, we have to choose how much risk we are willing to take. Two of them choose to risk it all, and end up doubling their money, and the master rewards them. One chooses to risk nothing and keep it safe. The master was not happy. In all we do, we can take a leap of faith and ask for God's help. We aren't promised that everything will end the way WE hope, but we are promised, in the end, it will be ok. How? We know we are never alone and that God will never stop loving us, or forgiving us, when we sin and mess up. When we don't take the risk we miss out on something, like the servant who hid his money. As Helen Keller once said, "Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all." Without risk, there is no reward. We want EVERYONE to know that God is always with us and will always love us—we don't want to HIDE that amazing gift. We take a risk and share with others.

And you know what? Each one of us has something to give, to share. God created each of us with unique gifts to share with the world. Like boats, we were crafted and made to DO something in this world, not just sit at shore...or at home...where it's safe. Each of us is richly rewarded and God wants us to use those gifts.

You know what this is? A Frisbee, right. Pretend for a moment, that you've never seen one before. It could be a dinner plate, or a hat, or a way to dig in the dirt. It could be just about anything, but it isn't. It's a Frisbee, and the person who created the Frisbee created it for a purpose...to what? Fly! Now, it isn't very fancy, but boy, can it fly! (Throw Frisbee) Sometimes we might look at the talents that God has given to others and think God hasn't given us very much. We might even be tempted to hide our talent. But when we use our God-given talent, the ways God made us special, to be for all that God hopes, boy can we fly! (SLIDE) We fly by faith when we offer a helping hand, or give an offering, sometimes in the offering plate or in our offering necklaces, or when we do penny wars with our classes in Sunday School. We fly by faith when we make 2,500 sandwiches for people who are homeless and work to make friends with someone new. We fly by faith when we bring in food for the food drive and help someone in need. We fly when we come to worship and sing and pray together. We fly by faith every day, in so many ways, when we share the gifts God has given us.

Even if you don't think you have very much let me remind you, you do. We are so blessed. Just look at a few things that most, if not ALL, of us have. This comes from Glennon Doyle Melton on her blog, "Momastery." (SLIDE) What is this? A refrigerator. She says "I have a refrigerator! This thing magically makes food cold. I'm pretty sure in the olden days, frontierswomen had to drink warm Diet Coke. Sweet Jesus. Thank you, precious kitchen." Inside her refrigerator is (SLIDE) what? FOOD. Almost 16,000 people die every day from not having enough food. She says, "Not mine. When this food runs out, I'll just jump in my car to get more. It's ludicrous, really. It's like my family hits the lottery every morning." This next crazy thing is a...(SLIDE) water faucet. I pull this lever and clean water pours out every time, day or night. 780 million people worldwide (one in nine people) don't have clean water. Some people spend their entire day walking miles to and from wells just for a single

bucket of this, and I have it here at my fingertips. Holy bounty!” Finally, turning to her...(SLIDE) coffee maker she says, “I can’t even talk about this thing. Actually, let’s take a moment of reverent silence because this machine is the reason all my people are still alive. It turns magical beans into a life-saving nectar of Gods. Every morning. On a timer!”

And those are just a few things in her kitchen! Everywhere we look we have much to be thankful for. (SLIDE) Even when we feel like the one servant with one lone talent, we can thank God. We have a LOT, and have a LOT to give. You are with people every day who need to hear about Jesus, maybe they are people in your home or at school or work, who long to experience God’s hope and mercy. SO instead of being like the third servant—too afraid to risk with what we have been given—like the ship stuck on the dry dock, and never out on the water, I want to tell you today, risk it. Trust God, live your faith, and FLY! Amen!