

Recession-proof investments

By [Christian Coon](#)

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This American Life recently aired [two shows](#) on our current economic climate. In the popular episodes, the public radio program does its best to define things such as "credit default swaps" and "stock injection plans." It's easy for these economic tools to come to mind when reading the parable of the talents.

Two of the slaves, after all, are savvy investors. They are given a significant amount of wealth. And though we don't know what specific instructions they are given--possibly there are some winks and nods involved--it is probably understood that they are to make something of these resources.

Perhaps we are each drawn to one of the characters in this parable about the *parousia*, feeling particular kinship--or misgivings.

- **The slave with one talent.** It's not difficult to feel for this slave, especially in today's economy: who *doesn't* feel like [burying his or her wealth in the ground](#)? In Jesus' day, it wasn't considered foolish to bury one's wealth. Drawing from Joachim Jeremias, Daniel Harrington [notes](#) that "burying money was regarded as the best security against theft." Many of us also relate to the fear this slave expresses. We constantly struggle with failing to live up to expectations and with the temptation to bury our resources so that others cannot criticize. But as much as we may sympathize with and encourage those who are fearful, this way of living will not do when one's faith is in Christ.
- **The slaves with multiple talents.** My sweet seven-year-old daughter took me aback the other night with a proposal. As I asked her for the third time to get her pajamas on, out of nowhere she said, "I'll put my pajamas on for \$50." I have no earthly idea where this came from, but perhaps my wife and I are

raising an entrepreneur (though not always a successful one, as I declined her offer). Is this the kind of attitude that the five- and two-talent slaves had? Are they bold and risky, or are they simply being faithful to the wealth they were given? Or both? William Barclay [characterizes](#) this parable as one in which "Jesus tells us that there can be no religion without adventure."

- **The master/owner.** Some of my parishioners tend to rely on the saying, "God doesn't give me more than I can handle." Depending who says this to me, I might remind the person that this isn't actually in the Bible, that God isn't doling out certain tasks or experiences based on one's emotional or spiritual make-up. But as I reread this parable--to try to get a handle on just how benevolent this master is--I wonder if I'm dismissing those parishioners too quickly, without closer reflection on the connection between God's calling on our lives and the spiritual gifts and graces we have for responding to it. There's a difference between what this passage is saying and a simple aphorism. Still, the parable has provoked me to explore this issue more carefully.