

Hey, have you ever heard the phrase “opportunity cost?” Well, that’s a really important idea in economics. And it may just well be the one thing that every adult on the planet has done countless times in their decision-making for years, but that the vast majority of them have never heard of—opportunity cost!

So, just what really is *opportunity cost*? Well, opportunity cost is the value of what you have to give up in order to choose or live out your first choice in each particular circumstance. Put another way, it’s the value of the option or options that you *don’t* choose. You see, each of us, rich or poor, rural or urban, makes choices every day that naturally exclude the benefit we might have gained from another option, another path that we declined to take. Like choosing to marry Elizabeth instead of Sally. Heh. Seriously.

Listen. Strong decision-making in the context of opportunity cost is one of the most important, useful tools for each of us to think properly and act wisely. We must work to carefully contrast the options before us. That’s true both for decisions that are clearly big decisions and for decisions that are seemingly small, where we might be missing some hidden upside or downside. So, let’s take a closer look with an example.

Say you inherited \$10,000 from your uncle on New Year’s Day in the year 2011. Worried about losing that money in a risky investment, you stuck the money into the back of your bottom drawer of your dresser, just to be safe. Sure enough, you check on the money ten years later, and there’s your stack of \$10,000, right there where you left it! But on the very same first day in 2011, your sister inherited \$10,000, too, but she invested that \$10,000 in Amazon stock, and on the very day you checked on your \$10,000 cash, your sister looked up her Amazon stock value while you looked in your dresser drawer, and it was worth \$189,000. So, your opportunity cost in not doing what your sister did was a whopping \$179,000! Wow!

Now opportunity cost is mostly just thought of as a money concept. And it *is* often about money. But it also can be much broader than that. How about the opportunity cost in terms of happiness, for example? So, let’s ponder some life-decisions that can have monetary impact...but also other dimensions of opportunity cost. Your decision to get married or not. Your choice of the specific person you choose to marry. Your choice on whether to have children. Your choice of career. Your choice of whether to hide money in a dresser drawer for a long time or invest that money early in the life of a company like Amazon.

That leads us right into taking a look in the Bible at the Parable of the Talents. Here, Jesus reported on people who were given “talents” (of course, talents were money, like dollars are today). Jesus said that two stewards—one entrusted with five talents and one entrusted with two talents—each doubled the resources entrusted to them. While Jesus doesn’t say the timetable that it took for that doubling, to Jesus at least, a doubling—that’s a 100% increase—was something to be considered quite commendable by the master yet still quite reachable by the efforts of a good steward. Again, Jesus was silent about the specific amount of time it took to do that, but, even if it took a notable period of time, say, several years, the parable’s context was that doubling the talents was clearly a good performance. Yes, the master was quite pleased with each of the two stewards who took a risk and doubled the master’s resources.

But that’s not the full story of the Parable...a very instructive part was about the person who failed as a steward for the master. You see, there was a third person who was entrusted with the master’s resources—this person was given one talent to handle. But, fearful of the master, that person buried that talent. So when the master returned to see the results of the steward’s efforts, the master got no increase! So the third person’s opportunity cost in the event that he made a similar investment as the first two was a doubling over the same period of time. But, for sure, burying the talent was unacceptable to the master.

But wait! I’ve still deliberately left out a very key part of the Parable of the Talents narrative. And that part is very interesting and highly instructive! When the master returned and the fearful steward of the one

talent reported that he had buried the talent, the master reprimanded him. But then the master actually took the original talent away from him and then gave it to the steward with the best results! Well, duh!

So the third person had fearfully missed capturing one talent of increase as the opportunity cost in his investment portfolio. But because the master then gave the uninvested one talent to the talent-increaser, *the third person also missed any additional opportunities after the master took away his role to invest!* Did you get that? This fearful guy had short-term opportunity cost but also long-term opportunity cost!

Make no mistake—likewise, you and I will have to live with the life decisions we make. For better or for worse, we all do. But just what about the opportunity cost of each and every one of the paths not taken? It isn't just about living with the consequences of our choices—it's about what we may be giving up in upside because we are simplistically considering the one and only choice that seems to be before us!

In the book of Joshua (24:14-15), Joshua gathered the tribes of Israel and gave them a succinct history lesson about God's faithfulness to Israel. Then he voiced a classic choice that was facing the Israelites. He concluded his message with a clear recommendation. "Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Wow. That's a big, stark choice.

But, hey, the primary choice available through the New Covenant is also very stark! Have you responded to God's grace afforded by Jesus's death and resurrection by deploying your faith? After all, that choice is the greatest opportunity cost decision of all—that of eternal fellowship with God in heaven...*or not.*

But after this response to God is made, there are important secondary choices for believers, choices that are chock-full of opportunity costs. Jesus said, "For the Gentiles seek after all these things [like clothing and food and drink], and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." (Matthew 6:32-33) A couple of things are really important to note here. Jesus presents exactly the right choice of the opportunity before each of us—that's seeking the Kingdom that is already here for you and me, with King Jesus leading, of course! But implicit in Jesus's narrative is that our heads are easily turned towards the kingdoms of this world as supposedly better opportunities before us. And we know that Jesus clearly teaches they are not.

So, here's the overarching truth: what Jesus commands in His teachings is what literally solves opportunity cost issues. You want a great path ahead with the fullest of opportunity, as unto the Lord? Then, "go forth and make disciples" of all nations! (Matthew 28:19) Of course, the alternative is to put that on mute! Unfortunately, many Christians have little to nothing to show for truly going forth and making disciples locally and around the world. Yes, they may have indeed responded to the Gospel and are assured of their personal salvation. But when their paths taken are not the best God offers us all, then they have missed opportunities for His rewards. (1 Cor 3:9-15) Sadly, such Christians have "buried" one of the most vital things God has given them...a voice for His eternal generosity as evidenced by Christ and Him crucified!

So here's a way to think about Jesus-guided choices in life. When it's Jesus clearly talking, the Word of God speaking, then the message is clearly the choice on the right path. So, how about these two guides? "Love God and love your neighbor as yourself." You see, that guidance is silent about hating or resenting your neighbor, you know, those bad choices with no upside! But when the world or the enemy comes with a seemingly enticing choice, it's often silent about *God's* ways and paths. And the opportunity cost of *not doing things God's way* is steep indeed. Opportunity cost. For the biggest questions in life, go right to the Bible. Happily, that's exactly a key reason why we have His Word. For the next-biggest life choices, like marriage and career, expect the Spirit to give guidance, with peace, too! *That's* the path to no regrets!

A&A: Application & Action

1. Reflect on your biggest opportunity-cost regret. In retrospect, what were some of the factors you should have considered differently in your thinking and process? What have you done to change any flawed processes?
2. In your spiritual walk, give an example of when you have acted like the first two stewards in the Parable of the Talents—when you have stewarded what God has given you and significantly increased your spiritual resources. Next, give an example of when you have acted more like the one-talent person, the one who buried his spiritual resources and did not invest wisely. Which of these two postures most consistently describe your spiritual walk?
3. Do you tend to get frustrated when God doesn't open the door you want, the door that seems best to you? Have you considered that God sometimes only opens a second, seemingly-inferior door in order for you to avoid later regrets because, in your current decision-making process, you can't see all the opportunity cost issues clearly? Reflect on your past experiences and discuss.