

X MARKS THE SPOT

"LIVING IN THE FUTURE"

LUKE 16:1-13

This Week's Core Competency

Stewardship – I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God. 1 Timothy 6:17, 18
Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. 19 In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

You no doubt remember the famous words of the missionary martyr, Jim Elliot, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Commenting on those words, one author writes, "We focus on his willingness to sacrifice and serve, and so we should, but we overlook his passion for personal gain. Without question, Jim Elliot was looking for profit. What separated him from the common Christian was not that he didn't want treasure, but that he wanted real treasure. He was not satisfied with treasure that would be lost. He was content only with treasure that would last" (Randy Alcorn, *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*, 125).

Jesus told his disciples that the only treasure that will last, the only treasure that is safe and secure is treasure in heaven. In his Sermon on the Mount he

Make money your god and it will plague you like the devil.

- Henry Fielding

said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Mt 6:19, 20). Moths destroy expensive fabric, rust destroys precious things, and thieves steal almost anything. Not to mention the fact that fires consume, floods devastate, governments seize, enemies attack, and investments go sour. Anyone with an ounce of sense knows that no earthly treasure is secure. "Christ's primary argument against amassing material wealth was not that it was bad, but simply that it was a poor investment. Material things just won't stand the test of time. And even if they did, even if they escaped moths and rust and thieves, they cannot stand the test of eternity" (125). And yet, many of Christ's disciples still wear themselves out striving to accumulate worldly wealth.

They would do well to follow Paul's advice instead. He told Timothy, "Command those who are rich," i.e., every middle-class North American, "to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share" (1Ti 6:17, 18). In so doing they would lay up for themselves treasure in heaven. Perhaps an illustration might help.

"Imagine for a moment that you are alive at the very end of the Civil War. You are living in the South, but your home is really in the North. While in the South you have accumulated a good amount of Confederate currency. Suppose you also know for a fact that the North is going to win the war and that the end could come at any time. What will you do with all of your Confederate money?

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"If you were smart, there is only one answer to the question. You would cash in your Confederate currency for U.S. currency—the only money that will have value once the war is over. You would keep only enough Confederate currency to meet your basic needs for that short period until the war was over and the money would be worthless.

"The believer has inside knowledge of an eventual major change in the worldwide social and economic situation. The currency of this world—its money, possessions, fashion, and whims—will be worthless at our death or Christ's return, both of which are imminent. This knowledge should radically affect our investment strategy. For us to accumulate vast earthly treasures in the face of the inevitable future is equivalent to stockpiling Confederate money despite our awareness of its eventual worthlessness. To do so is to betray a basic ignorance of or unbelief in the Scriptures" (128, 29).

For Discussion

You might not say so publicly, but you disagree with Jesus—slightly. Chalk it up to cultural differences between his day and yours. He said, "You *cannot* serve both God and Money." However, you're convinced, "You *must* serve both God and Money." You might explain your position this way. One must serve God; there can be no doubt about that. But serving God doesn't preclude serving money. One must serve money, too. If not, one won't have much money and the more money the better. Who can deny that a person with more money can serve God better than a person with less money? After all, Paul commands us to share, and one can't share what one doesn't have.

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Luke 16:1-13

Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. 2So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.'

3'The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg-- 4I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'

5'So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'

6'Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,' he replied.

'The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.'

7'Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?'

" 'A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied.

"He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.'

8'The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. 9I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

10'Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. 11So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? 12And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?'

13'No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money." (NIV(c)1984)

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Underline "Jesus told his disciples" in v. 1.
- * Box the following words indicating relationships within or between sentences and paragraphs: "so" indicating *result* (vv. 2, 5, 11), "because" and "for" indicating *reason* (vv. 2, 8), "so that" and "to" indicating *purpose* (vv. 4, 9).
- * Circle "manager" in vv. 1-3, 6.
- * Circle "dishonest" in v. 8.

- * Circle "shrewdly" and "shrewd" in v. 8.
- * Highlight v. 9.
- * Put parentheses around v. 10.
- * Bracket the rhetorical questions in vv. 11, 12.
- * Underline "hate" and "despise" with one line, "love" and "devoted" with two lines in v. 13.
- * Circle "Money" (capitalized in the NIV) in v. 13.

day **2**

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. What makes this parable difficult for you to understand?
2. Identify the two major characters introduced in the opening of the story Jesus told his disciples.
3. Describe the crisis facing one character meant to be resolved as the plot unfolds.
4. Two factors complicate the resolution of this character's problem. What are they?
5. The story reaches its climax with the resolution of this problem. Describe how the problem is resolved.
6. The story takes an unexpected turn at its conclusion-as most parables do (e.g., the Good Samaritan). Describe this story's surprise ending.
7. In his telling of the parable Jesus commented on the naivete of "the people of the light." To whom was he referring? (See also Jn 12:36; cf. Eph 5:8; 1Th 5:5.)
8. Have the best friends money can buy. Is that the point of Jesus' words in verse 9? Explain.
9. Express the point of the rhetorical question in verse 11 and in verse 12 by turning each one into a simple declarative statement.
10. **Discussion:** Jesus said, "You cannot serve both God and Money." Talk about why you agree or disagree.

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

When it comes to the parable of The Shrewd Manager commentators all agree on one thing, its difficulty. One writes, "Few passages in the Gospel can have given rise to so many different interpretations as the parable of the prudent steward" (I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke*, NIGTC., 614). Another adds, "Few passages of Scripture have caused as much confusion as the opening parable" (Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, NAC, 411). A last one concludes, "Luke 16:1-8 contains probably the most difficult parable in Luke" (Darrell L. Bock, *The NIV Application Commentary: Luke*, 418). So what's the big problem? (There are a number of small ones.) You've probably recognized it already. How could Jesus use an example of wrong behavior to teach his disciples the right attitude toward money and its use?

Two answers have been proposed. According to the traditional answer, the manager in Jesus' parable was negligent in the beginning and dishonest in reducing the bills of his master's debtors in the end, but he is commended for neither his negligence nor his dishonesty but for his shrewdness. Jesus didn't condone his wrongdoing but commended his crafty, forward-looking use of money. The problem, of course, is why should the master praise his dishonest manager? Would he have anything good to say about someone who had not only wasted his money (v. 1), but then, after being fired (v. 2), further cheated him?

According to a more recent and perhaps more probable one, the manager may have been negligent in the beginning, but in the end, he reduced the bills of his master's debtors by either removing the interest his master had hidden in the debtors' accounts (less likely) or by eliminating his own hefty commission (more likely). Neither of which was dishonest. As one author writes, "By canceling the commissions, the

debts were reduced, an action that would no doubt result in future kindness being shown the dishonest manager. Thus, the rich man has not at all been cheated by this final action of the fired manager. The master is still owed what is due him, while his former employee, by forgoing a few commissions, now has a brighter future" (Craig A. Evans, *Luke*, NIBC, 238, 39).

Unfortunately it's difficult to decide between the interpretive options. In the words of one commentator, "Either option can be correct. Jesus may be using a negative example of an unethical action to make the point about the use of resources in a negative way. But I prefer the option that argues the manager acted with foresight in this situation by cutting himself out of the bill short term, so that people he knows will have compassion on him later. Thus Jesus' point is not built on an example of dishonesty. It illustrates precisely Jesus' point, namely, to use the resources God gives us wisely and generously" (Bock, 419).

Fortunately, it doesn't matter much. In either case, the point of the parable remains the same. Good stewards use the wealth entrusted to them with their eyes on eternity. They don't just spend money; they use it wisely like the shrewd manager who used money to ingratiate himself to his master's debtors so they would be inclined to help him when he found himself out of work. They recognize the advantage in giving up a little now so that some day in the future they may receive much more. One writer puts Jesus' point in contemporary terms. "Every believer will be welcomed into heaven; not all will have the same number of friends to welcome them. When our money is used to meet the needs of fellow believers and when money is used to spread the gospel, we can be sure that there are eternal consequences" (Gary Inrig, *The Parables*, 115).

The Message of the Passage

Don't serve your money—use it wisely instead, and you'll be entrusted with true riches.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Journal your thoughts on the passage:**

- Write about what God wants you to know . . .

- Write about how God wants you to feel . . .

- Write about what God wants you to do . . .

“Living in the Future”
(Use the space below for Sunday’s message notes)

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

- v. 1 **disciples** Jesus spoke to his disciples within earshot of the Pharisees, who bristled at his words (see 15:1-3).
- v. 1 **manager** Wealthy absentee landlords, common in Galilee at the time, typically put their affairs in the hands of a manager (*oikonomos*) with considerable legal powers who acted as their agent. In Jesus' story, a rich man released his manager because he suspected that the manager was either incompetent or dishonest based on the accusation that he had wasted the rich man's possessions. So pending an audit that he expected would confirm his suspicions, he gave notice to his manager.
- v. 1 **wasting** . . . He did with his master's wealth what the prodigal had done with his inheritance (cf., 15:13).
- v. 2 **account** "The master's action is clear. It is a summary dismissal of the steward, coupled with a demand for a statement of the accounts for the benefit of his successor" (Marshall, 617); cf. Stein's paraphrase, "Turn in the books and ledgers of your stewardship," (413).
- v. 4 **welcome** After contemplating two unacceptable options, digging and begging (v. 3), the manager purposed to ingratiate himself to his master's debtors by reducing their indebtedness so they would help him when he found himself unemployed. Was he dishonest? Interpreters disagree. Two views predominate: "(1) The manager was dishonest in reducing the bills of the master's creditors but was thinking ahead; so Jesus commends his crafty, forward-looking use of resources. (2) The manager may have been dishonest earlier, but in reducing the bills, he is simply cutting out some of his own hefty commission in hope of goodwill later. If so, Jesus commends him for his creative use of foresight that provides for his care later" (Bock, 418); see also Marshall's discussion of various interpretations (614-16).
- v. 6 **eight hundred gallons** Greek, one hundred *batous*, the size of which is uncertain. Different standards may have been used at different times making measures of 500, 860, or 1000 gallons all possible (Marshall, 618-19). The oil's estimated worth was 1000 denarii or more than three years' wages.
- v. 7 **one thousand bushels** Greek, one hundred *korous*, the size of which is again uncertain. From the *kor*, an OT dry measure said to be 48 gallons (10-12 bushels), the measure is estimated to be 1000 bushels. The wheat's worth was 25-30 denarii per *korous* or approximately 2500-3000 denarii or eight to nine years' wages.
- v. 8 **dishonest** The Greek word describes a person who is "dishonest" or "untrustworthy," someone who has done something wrong. The question is whether the manager is called "dishonest" in v. 8 because of his wrongdoing mentioned in v. 1 or because he wrongly reduced the amounts owed by his master's debtors in vv. 5-7. In either case, the point of the parable is essentially the same, though the paths taken to get there are a little different.
- v. 8 **shrewd** Cf. "astute" (NEB). The Greek word (*phronimos*) is generally translated "sensible," "thoughtful," "prudent," or "wise." In Mt 7:24 and 24:1-13 it connotes "acting with foresight." While the KJV translates it "wise," many modern translations (NIV, the NET Bible, TEV, NASB, NRSV) prefer "shrewd" because this word connotes "practical hardheaded cleverness and judgment" (Merriam-Webster Online, s.v., "shrewd"), which better suits the context.
- v. 9 **worldly wealth** Lit., mammon of unrighteousness (cf., vv. 11, 13). "This expression does not refer to wealth gained through dishonesty, for in 16:11 we are told to be trustworthy in our handling of the 'mammon of unrighteousness,' and one cannot be trustworthy with respect to wealth obtained dishonestly. The expression is idiomatic and refers to 'filthy lucre' or as the NIV translates it 'worldly wealth'" (Stein, 416).
- v. 11 **true riches** "If Christians cannot manage their money, property, and other possessions properly (such as supporting the poor and the ministry), they cannot expect to be entrusted with the rewards and wealth that last forever (cf. Matt. 6:25-34). Implicitly, one's stewardship in this life will form the basis for future reward and responsibility in heaven (see Matt. 25:14-30)" (Evans, 240).
- v. 12 **someone else's** I.e., God's. In this life Christians are stewards of God's property.
- v. 13 **Money** "The term money is used to translate *mammon*, the Aramaic term for wealth or possessions. The point is not that money is inherently evil, but that it is often misused so that it is a means of evil; see 1 Tim 6:6-10, 17-19. God must be first, not money or possessions" (the NET Bible, note 43). When money becomes the master we serve, it becomes our God, which explains why it is capitalized in the NIV.

Family Time

Family time will help you take a break from your busy schedule and spend time connecting with your family.
Tips for your Family Time: Keep it simple! Be flexible! Do it often! HAVE FUN!!

Do you remember The Game of Life board game? The roll of a dice determined the course of your life. Would you get married? Go to college? Have kids? It all depended on what square you landed on. The goal of the game was to travel around the board accumulating as much money and stuff as you could and then end up in one of two retirement homes. The Millionaire Estates were for the wealthy but involved a little more risk. The Countryside Acres were less affluent but your assets were safer. In our parable this week Jesus teaches that the way we leverage our time, money, relationships and resources is an indication of where our heart is. Take some time to evaluate the way your family spends its time and money. Are you investing in the lives of others? With Memorial Day approaching maybe it's a good time to plan a neighborhood cookout. Have your family make invitations and deliver them to your neighbors. Plan a meal and some games. Choose to invest some time and money into building relationships with people who live the closest to you. You will be teaching your kids how to use your temporal things—time, money, resources—to gain eternal riches—loving people and pointing them to Jesus.

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Luke 16:1-13

- *What was the rich man accused of?
- *Who does the Bible say can be trusted with much?
- *Is it possible to serve two masters?

What Do You Think

- *What kinds of resources are available in your family? (time, money, possessions)
- *How might your family leverage those resources to help God's kingdom grow?
- *What are some ways you can plan wisely for your heavenly future?

What R U Going To Do

Have each member of the family identify one of their gifts or talents. List some ways that gift/talent could be used to further God's kingdom and serve others.

MEMORY TIME

Post the kid-friendly Core Competency and the Memory Verse throughout the house.

Core Comp

Stewardship - I believe me and all my stuff belongs to God.

Memory Verse

John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC ____ and Verse _____. Family completed **Say** _____ **Think** _____ **Do** _____

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn tokens by completing the Bible study portion of this page.
 Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.