

SESSION 7

EXPLOIT YOUR FRIENDS

▶ **The Point**

Be wise with resources and opportunities.

▶ **The Passage**

Luke 16:1-12

▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

Businesses often have to take risks to get noticed. And the Minnetonka Corporation did just that in 1980. Although liquid soap had been around since 1865, people weren't yet using it in their homes. But Minnetonka decided to change that when they introduced Softsoap®. Since both liquid soap and the pump already existed, they couldn't patent those products, so how could they corner the market before bigger companies took it over?

Minnetonka determined that if they could get a six-month lead on their competitors, the market would be theirs. They went to the only two manufacturers of plastic pumps and bought their entire supply—*one hundred million*. Their competitors would have to wait 6-8 months for the supply of pumps to be replenished, but they hoped by that time, consumers would be locked in on buying Softsoap. It was shrewd and risky, and it paid off. Big.⁶

Shrewdness doesn't sound like a positive quality in the Christian life, but Jesus challenged His followers with a story of shrewdness. What would happen if we exploited our resources in order to grow the kingdom of God?

▶ **The Setting**

At first glance, Luke 16 seems to deal primarily with economic issues, such as wealth and poverty. However, even economic issues are spiritual issues at their core. How a person handles his or her wealth ultimately reveals if their master is God or money. (See Luke 16:13.)

What does the Bible say?

A hundred measures of oil (v. 6)—This would be between 875-900 gallons and the produce from about 150 olive trees, worth about one thousand denarii (over three years salary for a common laborer).

A hundred measures of wheat (v. 7)—Representing the yield from about 100 acres, it amounted to between 2,500 and 3,000 denarii (eight to ten years salary for a common laborer).

Luke 16:1-12

¹ He also said to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions.

² And he called him and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.’

³ And the manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg.

⁴ I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.’

⁵ So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’

⁶ He said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’

⁷ Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ He said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’

⁸ The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.

⁹ And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.

¹⁰ “One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.

¹¹ If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?

¹² And if you have not been faithful in that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own?

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

Notes



ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, set up a whiteboard or poster board near the door. As group members enter, ask them to draw or illustrate a resource or two that they have at their disposal. Afterward, ask group members to brainstorm various resources we have as a church and as a group. For now, just compile a list. Tell the group you'll return to this list at the end of the session.

DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 121 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): **“What’s the most innovative product you’ve seen lately?”** Allow time for each person to respond.

GUIDE: Direct group members to **“The Bible Meets Life”** on page 122 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of being shrewd by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

GUIDE: Call attention to **“The Point”** on page 122 of the PSG: **“Be wise with resources and opportunities.”**

PRAY: Transition into the study by asking God for an understanding of what it means to be shrewd. Thank Him for the resources and opportunities He has given us to use for His kingdom.

Dotted lines for taking notes.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Luke 16:1-2

¹ He also said to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions.

² And he called him and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.’”

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Luke 16:1-2 on page 123 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 123 of the PSG: “How have you seen people squander God-given resources and opportunities?”

GUIDE: Use the Commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to further explain the parable Jesus tells of the rich man and the manager.

RECAP: Let’s change out the characters: we are the manager, and God is the rich business owner. “The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein” (Ps. 24:1). God created everything in and of this earth, and He charged us with the responsibility of overseeing His creation (Gen. 1:28-30). We are simply managers of God’s resources. Nothing is ours; it all belongs to God. Just like the manager in the parable, we all have, at some point in our lives, been guilty of wasting God’s resources.

SAY: “In the parable, the manager was called to account. At some point, we likewise will be held responsible for how we have used our resources and opportunities. We would be wise to change our habits, become kingdom-minded, and use everything God has entrusted to us to glorify Him and help others.”

TRANSITION: We are held accountable for how we use our resources and opportunities. In the next verses, we see that we are to be wise—shrewd—in the way we use our resources and opportunities.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What are the consequences of mismanaging the resources and opportunities God has given us?

Luke 16:1-2 Commentary

[Verse 1] Jesus took an opportunity to instruct His disciples that they are accountable for how they use their resources and opportunities. Luke reported that as Jesus travelled, “great crowds accompanied him” (Luke 14:25). Also, “the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him” (15:1). These crowds even included the Pharisees and scribes, who were complaining about Jesus’ actions: “This man receives sinners and eats with them” (v. 2). In response to the complaints of the Pharisees and scribes, Jesus had told the parables of the lost sheep (see vv. 3-7), the lost coin (see vv. 8-10), and the lost son. (See vv. 11-32.)

At this point, Jesus turned His attention to instructing His **disciples**. Luke did not specify which disciples to whom Jesus was speaking. The term *disciples* might refer to the twelve apostles in particular, or it might refer generally to a larger group of Jesus’ followers.

Although Jesus’ disciples were familiar with parables as part of Jesus’ teaching style, the parable of the dishonest manager (see 16:1-12) must have startled them. Bible students today still consider it to be one of Jesus’ most difficult teachings to interpret and understand.

This parable focuses on two primary characters, a **rich man** and his **manager**. The *manager* or “steward” handled the business affairs of the rich man. A manager might be a trusted slave, but in this story he is a free man. This is indicated in the parable by his actions of reducing the quantities owed by his master’s debtors. A slave would not have been able to make such transactions. Apparently, the manager was a scoundrel. Rather than handling his master’s wealth honestly and wisely, the manager was accused of **wasting** the rich man’s **possessions**.

[Verse 2] Somehow the rich man discovered the misbehavior of his manager, and the rich man confronted the manager. The rich man demanded, “**Turn in the account of your management.**” Since the manager was responsible for the day to day operations of the rich man’s business, he might have made periodic reports to his master. However, now the master demanded an immediate report on the manager’s activities. The original Greek wording suggests that the rich man believed the accusation against his manager to be true. In any event, the rich man apparently did not expect the manager’s report to prove his innocence, as the rich man told him, “**you can no longer be manager.**” All the manager had left to do was to give his final report to the rich man. After that, the manager was unemployed.

One lesson we can take from this story is our accountability for whatever duties we have. In the workplace any employee, supervisor, or boss has responsibilities. We are expected to do our jobs well. Unfortunately, we regularly hear reports in the news of people today who embezzle from their companies. Even if you are not currently employed, you are responsible for using your resources and opportunities wisely. We can honor Jesus and testify to our Christian faith by all of our actions.

Luke 16:3-9 Commentary

[Verse 3] Like the final actions of the dishonest manager, we need to be wise in the way we use our resources. Even though he knew he was fired, the manager took the opportunity of preparing his final report to act in an attempt to provide for his future well-being. The manager considered three options concerning his future. First, he might have to take a job involving manual labor. Second, he might **beg**. While digging would have been seen as a step down on the social ladder of the day, begging would have been an even bigger drop down that ladder.

[Verse 4] Next, the manager devised a plan that would insure he had good relations with some people with whom he had done business. He wanted to further cultivate these relationships so that these business associates would **receive me into their houses** when the manager was jobless.

[Verse 5] The manager's plan involved meeting with each of his master's business associates. These people were indebted to the rich man, owing him either money or possessions. The manager summoned each one of his master's debtors and inquired as to how much they owed.

[Verses 6-7] The manager reduced the amounts owed by his master's debtors. The intent of the manager was to cultivate his personal relations with these debtors in the present, hoping they would help him in the future when he had no salary.

[Verse 8] When the **master** learned what the manager had done, he **commended the dishonest manager** for **his shrewdness**. On the human level the master appreciated the ingenuity of the disgraced manager. The master was impressed with the manager's resourcefulness.

After telling the parable of the unrighteous manager, Jesus contrasted two types of people: **the sons of this world** (unbelievers) and **the sons of light** (disciples of Jesus). Jesus' disciples are to imitate the unbelievers in being **shrewd**. In this instance, the term *shrewd* was not being used in an immoral sense. (See Matt. 10:16.) Disciples today need to use the same kind of creativity in meeting the challenges of ministry in a world where many people do not know Jesus.

[Verse 9] Jesus referred to **unrighteous wealth**. Money is essentially neutral; it can be used for good or bad causes. Jesus said His disciples should **make friends** with their money, using money and other resources in legal, moral, and yet creative ways.

The identity of the **friends** Jesus referred to is uncertain. However, since the believers will ultimately be welcomed into **eternal dwellings**, perhaps God is the best choice for the category of "friends." Making friends does not mean we earn our salvation through giving money to those in need and how we use our possessions. Salvation is through grace by faith in Jesus alone.

Jesus was not commending an immoral use of money today, but He knew His disciples needed the kind of forward-looking resourcefulness and creativity demonstrated in the parable of the dishonest manager. Jesus expects us to be both godly AND wise in our use of the resources and opportunities God entrusts to us.

Luke 16:10-12 Commentary

[Verse 10] Jesus instructed His disciples that they could demonstrate their faith in God by how they used their resources and opportunities. He compared people who are **faithful** and those who are **dishonest**. These two categories probably parallel “the sons of light” and “the sons of this world” in verse 8. The groups differ because of their rival value systems. One group, Jesus’ disciples, are faithful to God in all of their attitudes and actions. The other group, illustrated by the dishonest manager, live by values opposed to God.

Although the *faithful* and the *dishonest* differ in their values, they are similar in one way. Both groups are consistent in their use of **very little** and **much**. Those who are faithful with very little will be faithful with very much, while those who are unrighteous in how they handle very little will also be unrighteous with much. (See Matt. 25:14-30.)

[Verse 11] Jesus also contrasted two types of wealth. The first type of wealth, the one which people handle in this age, is **unrighteous wealth**. It is not the possession of material wealth in and of itself which is the issue, but how each person uses the wealth God has entrusted to him or her in this life. The other type of wealth is that which is **true riches**. This type of wealth is connected to the “eternal dwellings” Jesus referenced in verse 9.

Jesus’ emphasis was on the proper stewardship of earthly wealth now in anticipation of receiving heavenly wealth in the next life. We are to be responsible with our money and possessions in this life, and in the next life God will entrust us with true riches. We do this by investing such worldly wealth wisely, using it for the kingdom of God and the benefit of others. Furthermore, our priority should be treasures in heaven, not treasures on earth. (See Matt. 6:19-21.)

While we are to use wisely what God has entrusted to us in this world, all that we do in this life should be done with the realization that this world and all that is in it is passing away; our true hope and expectation lies in the world to come, where we will spend eternity with God. (See 1 Cor, 7:29-31; 2 Peter 3:10-13.)

Jesus was not separating this life and the life to come after physical death. What we do in this life is important. Jesus expects us to be responsible stewards of our resources and opportunities in this life. How we live in this life matters, even though we have a sure future hope of life with God in heaven.

[Verse 12] God expects us to use what He has given us wisely and righteously. Ideally, Christians will be good stewards of everything God has given to us. If we are irresponsible with our resources and opportunities in this life, what should we expect in the life to come? Jesus asked, if you have been unfaithful with God’s resources, “**who will give you that which is your own?**” This reference probably relates to the “true riches” in verse 11. Jesus pointed again to the importance of doing the right thing with our resources here and now, since we will later have a heavenly reward.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 128 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications to carry out this week:



Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

- ▶ **Confess.** If up to this point you have used your time, resources, and possessions only for yourself, confess that to God. Ask Him to change your heart and use what He’s entrusted to you for the sake of others and for His kingdom.
- ▶ **List.** Make a list of the resources and possessions at your disposal. Beside each item, list one or two ways you could use those in service to Christ. Develop a strategy for using those things for Him.
- ▶ **Work together.** Join with others who share a like-minded interest or passion and consider how you can work together to use that interest to benefit others and advance Christ’s kingdom.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 128 of the PSG:

Words such as “exploit” and “shrewd” may not be common in our Christian vocabulary, but when we apply them in the biblical context, we become more effective Kingdom managers.

PRAY: Conclude by thanking the Lord for the resources and opportunities He has given us. Ask Him for the courage to use them for His kingdom.

**GROUPS
MATTER.**

Grow with other group leaders at the [Groups Ministry blog](#).

LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry