

Prestonwood | January 14 | The Beauty of Eternal Investment

Main Point: Christian stewardship means using earthly possessions with eternity in mind.

Text Summary: Luke 16:1-13 How Christians use their money and their earthly possessions matter. In this parable, Jesus directs His disciples' attention to keeping the future in mind in how we live in the present. Jesus wants the disciples to learn the discipline of stewardship, using our temporary possessions wisely with eternal rewards in mind.

Hook

Break your class into small groups. Provide each of the groups with a sheet of paper with one of the following activities written on it. Task the groups with providing a list of four items that they would plan to bring with them if they were participating in the activity. Once the lists are complete, read a list and challenge the other groups to guess the activity. The group(s) whose list is not guessed wins the game.

Activities

Hiking
Scuba diving
Hang gliding
Golfing
Bowling
Playing hockey
Visiting a museum
Rock climbing
Gardening
Visiting the beach

Q: Why is planning helpful in all aspects of life?

Q: What happens when we fail to plan properly?

Q: What makes planning a spiritual discipline? What do we plan for in our walks with Christ?

Book

In this account in the gospel of Luke, Jesus challenges His disciples to be people who plan. As followers of Christ, we must have eternity in mind as we live within the temporary. In light of this, Jesus instructs His disciples and all those who follow Him to use what possessions we have now in a way that demonstrates our understanding of eternity. We must look forward to what is to come and let that inform how we live now. This is a call to biblical stewardship. Jesus will use a parable in Luke 16 to illustrate this idea.

Q: Do you make a budget each month? How do you plan your generosity?

Q: What motivates you to live generously?

The Story

Read: Luke 16:1-8a

Jesus uses the account of a man who was put in charge of another person's wealth. It comes to the owner's attention that this manager is wasting away the owner's possessions and dealing unwisely with all that he has. Verses 1–2 show that with no investigation needed, the owner fires the dishonest manager and asks for his records.

The manager, refusing to dig or beg, takes matters into his own hands and finds a way to secure his wellbeing once he leaves his current post. The manager seeks out those in debt to his former employer and reduces their debts in order to safely secure his future.

How did he reduce the debt? Scholars say there are three possibilities: (1) he either undercut the price they owed or he rectified the situation that got him in trouble in the first place; (2) he could have removed the interest payments on the amounts; or (3) he could have removed his own commission. Though we do not know which of these methods actually occurred, the point is clear: the manager alleviated the financial burden for those in debt in order to get in their good graces after he was out of his job.¹

Upon hearing what the manager had done, the rich man commended him for his shrewdness.

Q: Why do you think the manager took the steps he did?

Q: What does it mean to be shrewd (having or showing sharp powers of judgment)? Should Christians be shrewd? In what ways?

¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary: Luke 9:51-24:53*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 1330.

It seems odd that Jesus would use a guy like this as an example. But the Savior isn't encouraging us to cheat employers when we are disgruntled or sin in order to get ahead. Instead, the parable has three applications.

Application 1 – Use your financial resources to further the kingdom of God.

Read: Luke 16:8b-9

Jesus wants His disciples to strive to be wise with their resources, thinking ahead and utilizing money to make a significant and eternal impact. Verse 8 creates two categories of people: people of the world (such as the dishonest manager) and people of the light (disciples of Jesus). The people of the world are shrewd with their money, planning well; how much more should the people of the light be intentional and wise with their money?

What does a wise and thoughtful believer do with his funds? He leverages them to make/impact friendships, households, and communities. Use your money to serve others and introduce them to the hope that you have in Christ Jesus. Generosity in your use of wealth opens the door to make an eternal impact on those around you. Money is a tool. It is God-given and should be used for His kingdom, not hoarded or worshipped.

Jesus wants His followers to use the money they earn here on this side of His kingdom in such ways that welcome them into the kingdom that is to come. Money will fail us and eventually run out. But when it does, He says, make sure what you had was used in such a way that you are welcomed into God's kingdom, your eternal dwelling place, by those whom you served and sacrificed for.

Use your resources to invest in things that pay eternal dividends. There is no better investment than to use something temporary to gain something that's eternal. One is reminded of the famous quote by the martyred missionary Jim Elliot, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep in order to gain what he cannot lose."

Q: How can generosity help the Gospel go forward?

Q: If we are generous with our earthly possessions, what does that say about how we view what we've been given?

Application 2 – Show yourself faithful with money, demonstrating that you can be faithful with greater things.²

Read: Luke 16:10-12

² John A. Martin, "Luke," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 246.

The second aim of Jesus' parable is focused on faithfulness and character. Jesus wants the disciples to understand that how they handle small things is indicative of how they will handle larger things. Bock comments, "Character is character whether one is dealing with little things or larger issues."³ This is a call for faithfulness.

Jesus wants His followers to keep the future in mind. The Christian must remember that Christ is bringing about a future, coming kingdom and how His children live now has effects well beyond their life on earth. If money is the smaller issue, the spiritual realities are the larger issues that Jesus wants His disciples to see. There is more to life than what we currently see and experience in the here and now. Earthly wealth doesn't come close to what the children of God will experience in spiritual rewards.

Stewardship is addressed in verse 12 where God describes a believer's resources as "that which is another's." God has entrusted us with all that we have and we are called to be faithful with it. True riches are those mentioned in verse 11; these are spiritual responsibility in God's kingdom and a heavenly reward.⁴

Q: How have you seen the principle "one who is faithful in very little is also faithful in much" proven true in your life? In others' lives?

Q: Why would Jesus label money as "very little"?

Q: What does it mean to be a steward of something? How does this change your perspective of what you have?

Application 3 – Serve God, not money.

Read: Luke 16:13

Though we may have both God and money, we cannot serve them both.⁵ In verse 13, Jesus very plainly explains that we can have allegiance to only one King, and how we spend our money and use our possessions shows very clearly whom we ultimately serve.

This is where character plays an important role. How are we stewarding temporary possessions? Are we being faithful in the small things that God has given us? Are we seeking to serve both God and our wealth? Are we placing too much value on the lesser valued things, such as our material possessions? In this parable, Jesus uses earthly wealth as a litmus test about greater issues and larger responsibilities.⁶

³ Ibid., 1335.

⁴ Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 1990.

⁵ Liefeld & Pao, *Expositors*, 260.

⁶ Bock, *Baker Exegetical*, 1337.

Having money and earning a living are not sinful. Where our sin enters is what we do with what we've been given. The ways in which we use God's gifts reveal potential areas of selfishness and idolatry.

This is a call for Christ-followers to steward the Master's resources with great diligence and faithfulness so that we might hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Q: Knowing Christ calls for complete obedience, what does that mean for how we view and use our possessions?

Q: What does verse 13 reveal about the seriousness of this issue?

This brings us back to the important truth echoed throughout the Bible: What we have is not our own. It belongs to God. Jesus asks us to evaluate how we are using the things we have been given, because they are all His. Only by serving Christ and His kingdom above all else are we then able to use what we own and what we earn for His work and His ultimate glory.

Q: In what ways does Luke 16 challenge you?

Q: Why does Jesus care about the extent of our generosity?

Q: How do you keep yourself eternity-minded? What can you do to stay focused on eternity and not be distracted by the world or others around you?

Took

Lesson Conclusion: Jesus teaches us the value of stewardship by showing us the value of planning for the future. If the world sees the value in planning for the future with worldly wealth and worldly investments, how much more should Christians practice the value of planning how to use their possessions, knowing what is true for their future with God. Jesus' point is clear: how we use what we have now has implications for the rewards we will receive in Christ's coming kingdom. How we use our earthly possessions shows the level of faithfulness we will exhibit with eternal treasures. In light of this, we must live now in light of the future we know is coming. Because we will be given all things in Christ, what we have now can be given away for His sake and His name, instead of kept for our own desires and status.

Challenge

1. **Reflect on God's Generosity.** One of the biggest antidotes to a selfish spirit is to reflect on the reality of Calvary. When we sit and reflect on what God has done for us in Jesus, we come face to face with the most genuine display of sacrifice and outpouring of generosity. God held nothing back to save us and draw us to Himself. We must follow His lead and hold nothing back as we live for Him in this world.
2. **Pray for a generous spirit.** God is willing and able to grant us hearts that overflow with the generosity of Christ. Through God's Spirit, He can transform our selfish hearts into hearts that desire to bless others at every turn.
3. **Commit to tithe.** As believers, it is critical that we understand what the Bible says about tithing. The purpose of tithing—giving our first fruits for God's work on earth—is to teach us to put God first in our lives. God doesn't need our money. Instead, He wants what our money represents: our priorities, passions, purposes. Make a commitment to tithe and dedicate yourself to it. And more than anything, trust God and let Him prove His promises. (See more at <http://www.prestonwood.org/give/give-financially#sthash.iFOGqV0d.dpuf>.)

Giving Testimony: Teacher, provide your "giving testimony" to the class. Following your testimony, allow five to 10 minutes for your students to develop their own. For some assistance, we've provided a few questions to help get you thinking on how the Lord has changed your heart in regard to sacrificing and serving Him through Gospel generosity.

- When you first learned about generosity and giving back to the Lord, what were your original thoughts of tithing and sacrificing your money and possessions for the kingdom of God?

- From that time, how has your thinking changed in how you view giving?
- What seasons do you find giving to be the most difficult? How has your trust of God grown or how has it waned?
- Take a moment to explain why generosity is an outworking of being fully devoted to Christ. What does this look like now in your own life?
- Write down passages of Scripture that come to mind that have encouraged/challenged/convicted you in how you view biblical generosity.