

SESSION 7

EXPLOIT YOUR FRIENDS



When did opportunity knock and you didn't answer?

QUESTION #1

*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 it was risky, but Minnetonka Corporation took advantage of the resources available, and it paid off. *Big.*¹

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?

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.’

Jesus took an unusual approach with this parable to call us to be wise with our resources. His parable involves two men: a rich man and his manager. This managerial position was typical in Middle Eastern countries during Jesus’ time. A manager ran the rich man’s business affairs and estate. He made decisions regarding the household servants and the distribution of goods and conducted business transactions on his master’s behalf. We see a similar arrangement much earlier in Scripture with Joseph and Potiphar. (Gen. 39:1-20).

This manager was running his employer’s business into the ground. He was squandering his boss’s money. Jesus did not clarify how the

“Circumstances don’t determine faithfulness, character does.”

JOHN MACARTHUR

manager was doing this nor did He reveal for what he was using the money, but you can hear the dismay in the rich man’s voice, as he demanded, “What is this that I hear about you?” A man he thought he could trust with his business—the business that fed his family—was stealing from him. The employer was upset and had every right to be. “Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.”

In reality, 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 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 been guilty of wasting God’s resources.

I was a high school freshman the first time I got an overdraft on my bank account. I thought I had enough time between the deposit of my paycheck and the check I had written. Nope. Not even close. I felt guilty and ashamed, and was taken aback to learn that banks charge an overdraft fee! Many of us have known that feeling! I misused God’s treasures. I “gave away” money God had entrusted to me; I lost it to overdraft fees simply because of my bad spending habits. I’ve come to realize my money is not my own, but that it comes from the Lord. I am merely a steward of what God has provided me.

Money is not the only resource God has placed in our hands. God also has entrusted into our care our property, possessions, opportunities, and relationships—all we have. They are all resources that can advance the kingdom of God. The influence God has given us in our work can be used productively to honor Christ and advance His kingdom. He has given us time we can waste—or we can use it productively to honor Christ and point to Him.

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.

How have you seen people mismanage what was entrusted to them?

QUESTION #2

Luke 16:3-9

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.

KEY WORDS: **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).

The manager was on the verge of losing everything he had. He couldn’t complain about his situation, since he was responsible for what he had done. He didn’t deny that! But what was his next step? He knew he wasn’t “strong enough to” do hard labor, most likely because he was lazy and struggled even to do a decent day’s

work. Some biblical scholars say it was beneath him to move from a managerial position to do manual labor. His pride kept him from the option of begging: “I am ashamed to beg.” He would not ask for help.

The manager had an “aha moment.” He was quick on his feet and made a plan. He called in all of his employer’s debtors and changed their bills right in front of them. The manager “doctored the books” in their favor. This was an “I’ll scratch your back if you scratch mine” kind of deed. He was hoping if he helped them out, when he got fired and had nowhere to live, he could call upon the debtors to return the courtesy. “When I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.”

At this point, we might think this is not going to end well for the manager. But verse 8 contains a surprise: “The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness.” *He admired him?*

Do you consider shrewdness a positive or negative quality? Why?

QUESTION #3

The owner was surely still upset with the manager. In fact, the manager was stealing again by changing the bills and the accounting. In spite of that, the owner was impressed because his wise manager was “thinking outside the box.” The manager actually did his boss a favor. He made the owner look good—even generous. At this point, had the owner stepped in and returned the bills to their original amounts, the debtors would have viewed him as oppressive. By reducing the bills, the manager may have even brought in an influx of money the business owner would have struggled to get anyway. So the business owner praised his dishonest manager, not for his underhandedness, of course, but for his shrewd ability to “think outside the box.”

The manager was influencing influencers, those who could influence his future. He was leveraging the influence he had over people who someday might help him.

Jesus turned the point of the parable to us: “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.” All our worldly resources are temporary, and the believer’s goal should be to store up “treasures in heaven” (Matt. 6:20). Therefore, we should be shrewd with what we have, helping those who need our help. We don’t “buy friends,” but we make friends by helping them, and we make a difference in the lives of the friends we’ve made. Then one day in the future, they will be with us in our eternal home.

I know many examples of men and women who use their influence to further God’s kingdom. Perhaps you do too. The question we must continually ask ourselves is: “Am I leveraging everything I am and all I have to further the kingdom of God?”

How can believers wisely use resources to gain friends for eternity?

QUESTION #4

Luke 16:10-12

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?

Jesus started off simply: “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.” It’s an objective truth that seems clear enough, but in verses 11-12, Jesus made it personal: “If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own?”

Jesus turned the spotlight on us. Faithfulness is really a heart issue. If we are not responsible with what we have—if we are not taking care of it or using it wisely—why should we receive more? John MacArthur said, “Circumstances don’t determine faithfulness, character does.”² We can see this in financial giving. An individual might say, “If I had more, I would give more,” but he most likely wouldn’t. It’s first of all a heart issue—a matter of faithfulness. If your heart is not invested in it, you won’t give. On the other hand, if you are interested in seeing God’s kingdom grow, you invest in it. Jesus pointed to “a poor widow” who had little—very little—but she gave “all she had” (Luke 21:1-4). God does not measure the size of our gift; instead, He measures our hearts—how sincere and selfless we are.

Parents understand what Jesus was teaching. If a child is destroying or making ill use of his toys, chances are his parents will not buy him new toys. Similarly, if we are being irresponsible and mishandling what our heavenly Father has given us, why would He bless us with more? Character is of major importance here.

During a high school mission trip, our leaders instructed us to leave things better than we originally found them. Why? I understand cleaning up after myself, but why would I treat other people’s property better than my own? Because it’s biblical. If we can’t be faithful with other people’s property, why should we be trusted with our own?

For those who think they have nothing to offer or no influence to leverage, think again. Do you have a living room? Open your home up to encourage and support other believers. I have heard story

after story of people coming back from Bible studies where they met other people with similar interests; consequently, they formed ministry groups based on these interests. These groups have gone on to create a big impact for God’s glory. When you are faithful with what God has provided and you use it with kingdom-mindedness, you will be fruitful.

Earlier we read Psalm 24:1: God created everything and it’s all His. We are merely the stewards God has entrusted to take care of His possessions. We don’t own what we think we own. Let’s be shrewd and faithful with the resources God has placed in our hands to manage.

What’s the “small stuff” that’s been entrusted to us?

QUESTION #5

EXPLOIT THEM SHREWDLY

Identify two resources or opportunities God has entrusted to you at this stage in your life. Then mark on the scale how wisely (shrewdly) you are using (exploiting) that resource.

1. _____

not at all • • • • • • • • • fully

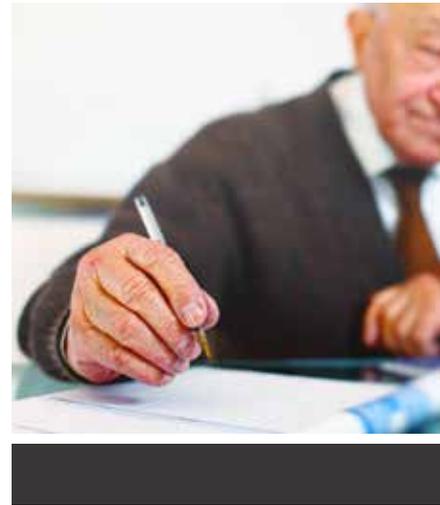
2. _____

not at all • • • • • • • • • fully

LIVE IT OUT

How will you be wise with what God has placed in your hands?

- ▶ **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.



END NOTES

1. William Putsis, *Compete Smarter, Not Harder: A Process for Developing the Right Priorities Through Strategic Thinking* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publishing, 2013).
2. John MacArthur, Sermon "Investing Earthly Finances with an Eternal Focus" (January 15, 2016), <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/42-206/investing-earthly-finances-with-an-eternal-focus>

COMING IN SUMMER

Living by Faith: Women Who Trusted God

SUGGESTED FOR
THE WEEK OF:

<i>June 2</i>	<i>Rahab: Courageous Faith</i>	Joshua 2:1-14
<i>June 9</i>	<i>Deborah: Encouraging Faith</i>	Judges 4:1-9; 5:1-5
<i>June 16</i>	<i>Hannah: Faith That Prays</i>	1 Samuel 1:1-2,9-11, 17-18,26-28; 2:1-3
<i>June 23</i>	<i>Abigail: Intervening Faith</i>	1 Samuel 25:2-3, 14-17,23-28,32-35
<i>June 30</i>	<i>The Poor Widow: Faith That Gives</i>	Luke 12:13-21; 21:1-4
<i>July 7</i>	<i>The Samaritan Woman: Faith Worth Sharing</i>	John 4:10-18,28-30

Special Focus: Mentoring: How to Equip and Encourage Others

<i>July 14</i>	<i>Mentoring</i>	2 Timothy 2:1-2; 3:10-17
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Living a Godly Life in an Ungodly World

<i>July 21</i>	<i>Pursue Godliness</i>	2 Chronicles 14:1-8
<i>July 28</i>	<i>Depend on God</i>	2 Chronicles 14:9-15
<i>August 4</i>	<i>Act with Courage</i>	2 Chronicles 15:1-9
<i>August 11</i>	<i>Worship Continually</i>	2 Chronicles 15:10-19
<i>August 18</i>	<i>Remember God's Faithfulness</i>	2 Chronicles 16:1-13
<i>August 25</i>	<i>Leave a Legacy</i>	2 Chronicles 17:1-10