

Jesus also said to his disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager who was accused of wasting his possessions. ²The rich man called him in and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you can no longer be manager.’

³“The manager said to himself, ‘What will I do, since my master is taking away the management position from me? I am not strong enough to dig. I am ashamed to beg. ⁴I know what I will do, so that when I am removed from my position as manager, people will receive me into their houses.’

⁵“He called each one of his master’s debtors to him. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ⁶He said, ‘Six hundred gallons of olive oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and write three hundred.’ ⁷Then he said to another, ‘How much do you owe?’ And he said, ‘Six hundred bushels of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill and write four hundred and eighty.’

⁸“The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the children of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the children of the light are. ⁹I tell you, make friends for yourselves with unrighteous mammon, so that when it runs out, they will welcome you into the eternal dwellings. ¹⁰The person who is faithful with very little is also faithful with much. And the person who is unrighteous with very little is also unrighteous with much. ¹¹So if you have not been faithful with unrighteous mammon, who will entrust you with what is really valuable? ¹²If you have not been faithful with what belongs to someone else, who will give you something to be your own? ¹³No servant can serve two masters. Indeed, 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 mammon.”

Your parents probably taught you at a young age to take care of your stuff and take extra care of things that are lent to you. It was one thing if you were going to ruin your own possessions. You’d have to face the wrath of mom and dad. But it was something far worse to have to stand in front of a friend and tell them you ruined what they so generously let you use. This is a point that Jesus is making today. We ought to be faithful with what we have because it’s not ours. It was given to us on loan.

The parable that we have in front of us today may seem confusing on its face. The main character is a wealth manager for a rich man. And that manager is about to lose his job. It seems he has not worked hard to care for and invest his master’s money. Of course, when the master calls the manager to account for his work or lack thereof, the manager freaks out. He’s not cut out to work a manual labor job. And he’s not willing to beg. So, in a moment of ingenuity, he jumps into action. The manager devises a plan to give himself better standing with his master’s debtors. Then, maybe one of them will give him a job when he’s fired from this one. He goes

and changes their debts, cutting one in half and the other by twenty percent. Now, obviously, this doesn't hurt the manager. None of the money is his. It belongs to the master. But since he's in charge of the money, he can use it for his purposes.

You'd think this dishonesty would only speed up his firing, but the master is impressed with his manager's prudent use of what was not his. You might say he was moved by his manager's hustle. Why? Because the manager used what was under his control for his end goal, to secure his future. Jesus highlights this to make a contrast: if the "children of this world" can act so decisively for temporary gain, shouldn't the "children of light" be even more committed for eternal gain?

Jesus is complimenting unbelievers here. They use their money to accomplish their goals. Businesses spend millions of dollars schmoozing clients, all so they can shake hands at the end of the meal and close the deal. People use money to incentivize others to do things. A parent says, "If you get good grades, then we can go to Disney World." Brands flood the world with free samples so that they can get people hooked on their products for decades to come. The world knows how to use money to accomplish their goals. But do Christians?

Too often, we're not shrewd at all. Like the manager, before he got caught, we coast through life, forgetting that our days are numbered and that what's given to us does not belong to us. We waste what God has given us. And understand that it is God who gives us everything we have, and that all those things still belong to God, even though we hold them on loan. You know this is true because no one takes what they've accumulated here with them when they die.

We don't just waste what God has given us. We lack focus too, living as if this life is all that matters. Spiritual connection with God takes a backseat, especially in the early adult years, because there is just too much going on. You are trying to build a career to set your family up for future success. You are trying to raise kids, kids who sponge up so much of your time. And if you do get a second to breathe, you want to spend it doing what helps you unwind best: your hobbies.

Finally, we let our possessions master us instead of the other way around. You let the house you live in or the car you drive tell you how important you are. You get later into your working days and start paying closer attention to your retirement accounts, letting every market downturn keep you up at night over the fear that you might have to keep working. You get addicted to the newest and best, so you must have the new iPhone every year. And when you do any of these things, do you even recognize that you are serving these things more than they are serving you?

We know that we are not to be selfish with the money God has given us, even when we're guilty of falling into that trap. But at times do we revert to the other extreme? Do we at times

treat money as if it's useless? On the one hand, we can idolize money. But on the other hand, we can dismiss it as meaningless. But both miss God's intent.

Your money is not useless. How do we know? Because God does not give gifts with no purpose. What is the reason for your money and stuff, then? God gives you what you have to make friends for Jesus and further his kingdom in the hearts of those you share this world with.

And this is not just giving money to church. This is using your time and your money and your energy to make sure that the members of your household know Jesus. It's generosity that brings you to show Christ's love to people who may never have seen it before.

I get phone calls every once in a while from people asking if our churches help pay utility bills, sometimes even from people downstate. Now, we have not made it a habit to help people in this way out of concern that they'll become reliant on the church to continue to pay their bills, but our churches do help when there are disasters in the community. We do that to show Christ's love to people who are hurting, not expecting anything in return. It is good that people in society think of churches as generous institutions. It's good that we help put food in hungry mouths and do what we can when our neighbors go through traumatic life events. Because when people's physical needs are taken care of, we give them more time to think about their spiritual needs, which we are even more equipped to tackle.

So, when we disregard money as something that doesn't matter and can be used however we want, we really are undervaluing it and undervaluing God, who gave it to us with a purpose. We are not the shrewd managers God has called us to be. Either we're too selfish and tight-fisted with our money or we're too wasteful with it. But we certainly are not kingdom-minded with it. Here Jesus is not saying that unbelievers have it all figured out, but his point is that they are often more committed to their goals than we are to ours. We are not constantly focused on the reason God gives us what we have.

Thank God there is another manager in this story – Jesus. Where we so often lose sight in our mission, he did not. He used every word, every moment, and every gift from the Father to perfectly fulfill his Father's plan and design. He gave his life as the greatest act of stewardship. You think of that prophecy that Caiaphas, the high priest, speaks: "You do not even consider that it is better for us that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." He meant it as an excuse to kill Jesus, but God meant it as his promise to the world in sin. And so, Jesus died for that nation and every nation. He died for you. He died for all the times you've lived selfishly. He died for all the times you made your money and your stuff your god. He died for all the times when you thought too little of your money and wasted it uncaringly. And because he died, your God does not see you as a miser or apathetic to his purposes. He sees you as perfect and valuable beyond any amount of money.

Our home eternal is secure. We do not need to cling to earthly wealth. Our money, time, and abilities become tools for God's kingdom, not masters we must serve as slaves under. We take the stewardship responsibilities he gives us here seriously, because we know that being "faithful with very little" now also means being "faithful with much" in the kingdom to come.

Let's redouble our efforts—shrewdly planning, wisely using, joyfully giving—not for ourselves, but for God's glory and the good of others. The dishonest manager planned carefully for a short future. We, with eternity before us, can plan even more wisely for God's glory.

God has given you many hats to wear to glorify him. So, wear them well, using the limited resources God has given you to serve him at church, in your home, and in your community, so that the people you know, who don't yet know Jesus, may come to know his heavenly generosity through your earthly generosity. Amen.