

Manage God's Gifts Wisely

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Then Jesus said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. ² So he summoned him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer.' ³ Then the manager said to himself, 'What will I do, now that my master is taking the position 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 dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.' ⁵ So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' ⁶ He answered, 'A hundred jugs of olive oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.' ⁷ Then he asked another, 'And how much do you owe?' He replied, 'A hundred containers of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill and make it eighty.' ⁸ And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. ⁹ And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes. ¹⁰ "Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. ¹¹ If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? ¹² And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? ¹³ No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." (Luke 16:1-13)

1. Culture Shock

Christine and I came to the States from Korea in 1982. When we arrived, there were several times we experienced a very different culture than what we had experienced before. One time was when it came time to change Christine's maiden name. Korean women never change their maiden names even after marriage. Some Korean women in the States legally change their names but still use their maiden names with others.

Names are very important in society. Our names in many ways give us a sense of identity. In the Catholic tradition, people are usually given new names when they are baptized. This is to remind the person of their new identity in Christ.

2. The Parable of the Shrewd Manager

Although we don't have new names when we are baptized, today's scripture asks us a similar question, whether our relationship with the Lord and us has changed.

In Luke 16:1 and the following, Jesus tells his disciples of the parable of the shrewd manager. In the parable, a rich man calls his manager or steward to give an account of his dealings. The rich man tells his manager that he hears that the manager is not handling the owner's finances properly. In Jesus' day, managers were often hired by wealthy people to care for the finances of their estates. The manager would be like a modern-day financial planner. The Bible does not say exactly what the manager did wrong in handling the estate. It seems that the steward was using his master's goods for his own interest. The owner feels like the manager wasted his property. The rich man does not live on the estate but in a different town. Thus, the rich man would not know what his steward was doing.

When the manager is fired, he worries about his future. A brilliant idea comes to mind. Using the few remaining hours in his office, the manager secretly summons "***his master's debtors one by one, he asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' He answered, 'A hundred jugs of olive oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.'***" ***Then he asked another, 'And how much do you owe?' He replied, 'A hundred containers of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill and make it eighty'*** (16:5-7). In this parable, only two debtors are mentioned. But the manager would have called in as many debtors as possible. He would decrease the amount of the debt each time.

If I were the rich man, I would have been upset and furious. But the rich man commends the dishonest steward. Although the rich man has been cheated, the rich man admires the acts of his steward who uses his money to make friends. Here Jesus isn't teaching his disciples that they should be dishonest. Jesus rather teaches them that they should be wise in investing in the future.

In verse 10-12, Jesus teaches his disciples that if one is faithful in his use of money, he can be entrusted with greater things. And they should not be confused with the priority between money and God. The disciples can't serve both God and money. If one loves God, one can't make money the primary concern in life.

Who is the rich man in the parable? The rich man is God. The manager represents Jesus' disciples and us. God has entrusted man with resources to accomplish God's purposes on earth. God entrusted Israel with the word of God, and given them a mission to the world. But they squandered their privileges in many ways. Jesus tells his disciples and us that we must use our resources for kingdom purposes.

3. The Meaning of Stewardship

The parable of the shrewd manager teaches us that we are God's stewards. Everything we have belongs to God. God entrusts us to use all of our resources to glorify the Lord. What we have are God's gifts for us. We often might talk about how we bought a house or car and be proud of our accomplishments. But we know that everyone is born into the world with empty hands and when we die, we have to leave everything behind. That's why Job 1:21 says, "**naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away.**" Job says this after he hears that his ten children are killed by a strong wind. He reminds us that even our lives are in God's control.

This parable reminds us that we are God's managers here on earth. In my personal experience, I try to remind myself that I will one day have to leave everything that I have in life. My cameras, computers, cellphone, car, and clothes are not mine. At the end of my day, I will have to leave everything behind. Everything we have belongs to God. We are allowed to use them while we live on earth.

This parable tells us that God's gifts are given to use not only for ourselves but for others. Verse 9 says, "**I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes.**" Jesus encourages his disciples and us to make friends for ourselves by using God's gifts. When we use the resources that we have, other people would find that we are so generous and kind. And our generosity will tell others the generosity of our Lord.

4. Abraham and the Three Visitors

In the Bible, we see quite often what generous people do in their daily life. One of the best examples might be Abraham. Genesis 18 tells us that Abraham is sitting at the entrance to his tents when he finds three visitors. Abraham asks the guests to stay. He brings them food to eat and water to wash their feet. Abraham asks Sarah and his servants to cook bread and a tender calf to serve the visitors.

Abraham is so generous and kind to the strangers. The visitors are touched and promise Abraham and Sarah that they will have a son by the next year. As was promised, Isaac is born to Abraham and Sarah when the couple is 100 and 90 years old.

Isaac is certainly a gift from God. When God asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham does so without hesitation. When we look at the situation with human eyes, we see a strange situation with an unstable father. But we know after the fact that Abraham did this because he knows that Isaac is God's gift. And he completely trusts in the Lord. He knows that God is generous and would take care of Isaac and himself.

5. Conclusion

How generous are we? How much do we trust in the Lord? According to church giving report (<https://pushpay.com/blog/church-giving-statistics>), tithers only make up 10-25 percent of any congregation. On average, Christians give 2.5% of their income to churches. During the Great Depression, they gave 3.3%. It is very strange to think that Depression-era giving was higher than it is now. We live in an era of great wealth and opportunity. Giving is certainly an essential expression of Christian faith.

In Matthew 6:21, Jesus says to his disciples, “**where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**” When we take a look at our bank statement, we can tell our relationship with the Lord and how generous we are. This morning we need to remind us of God’s generosity for us. God did not spare his son for us. God is ready to give us everything. Romans 8:21 says, “**He who did not withhold his own son, but gave him up for all of us, will be not with him also give us everything else?**” If God is so generous and would give us everything we need, we should be generous and are willing to give everything we have for God’s purposes because everything we have belongs to God.

6. Application

Let me introduce a couple who have been giving everything they have for God’s purposes. Pastor David and his wife Rose spent 30 years serving their church community in Hopkinton, MA. Three years ago, they retired and moved to China to serve as missionaries. Rose teaches English and pastor David serves as choir director for a college chapel.

Like many people living in a foreign country, pastor David and his wife experienced a lot of difficulties due to the quality of the air and water. Pastor David had kidney problem so he came to the U.S. to see his doctor. Last week, they went back after being in Massachusetts for two weeks.

Everyone does not have to become a missionary to use God’s gifts wisely. But if we use God’s gifts for those who are in need, our Lord, the owner of our resources would be pleased.

Last Christmas I saw lots of gifts under the angel tree. About 8 families sponsor the Watoto children. As Ann said a few weeks ago, our church will sponsor a child. Our knitting group is also going to sponsor one child. I am so touched by many donations to support Cape Winds Rest Home. Last Sunday we raised \$700 for Teen Challenge. I hope we keep supporting them. I am happy to see that our church is making lots of friends using God’s gifts.

The parable of the shrewd manager reminds us that God wants us to use God’s gifts for others. We can use the resources we have when we become generous. Jesus was so generous that he gave his life for us. When we live as reflections of Jesus in our community, many people would find how God and his son Jesus are generous and will accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Amen.