

“Wise as Serpents” - Luke 16:1-13
Temecula Hills Christian Fellowship
Nathanael King
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Central Truth: God’s resources should not be wasted, but instead should be invested strategically and faithfully.

Outline:

- I. Don’t waste God’s resources
- II. Invest your time and resources strategically.
 - a. Strategic Investment = intentional planning.
 - b. Strategic Investment = eternal relationships.
- III. Invest your time and resources faithfully.
 - a. Faithful investment = eternal dividends.
 - b. Faithful investment = undivided devotion.

Introduction

I am a big fan of my smart phone. I bought it thinking that it would allow me to be way more efficient. I could check my email, I can read my Bible, I can look things up on the internet, I can do my banking, I can navigate to places using the GPS, I can even send out text messages to all the high school students in our youth group. But I’ve got to admit, probably half of what I use my phone for is a complete waste of time. Let me give you some examples.

1. The Android Light Saber - I like to pull this out when I’m losing at a game so that I can pretend to Light Saber my opponent.
2. Talking Tom Cat - This is a cat who repeats everything I say in a high pitch, annoying voice.
3. Tricorder - This app turns my phone into a Tricorder from Star Trek.
4. The impossible level game - Which literally is impossible to beat.
5. Punch-o-meter - Measures how hard you can punch.
6. Chuck Norris app - Interesting facts about the toughest man alive.
7. Whoopie-Cushion - I’ll let you figure this one out.

It’s amazing, isn’t it how we’ve developed wasting time into an art. If you’re reading the Bible on your phone this morning, please resist downloading any of those apps till after the sermon. The way we use our time and our resources is something that the Bible talks a lot about. Today we’re going to look at a passage that shows us how we should use our lives, our time, and our resources for God’s kingdom.

We’re going to look at the passage that comes right after the story of the prodigal son. You’ll remember that in the story of the prodigal son, a son takes his inheritance early from his father, and then he squanders it on lavish living. Finally, when he has wasted his inheritance, he returns to the father who runs to him with open arms full of forgiveness, mercy, and grace. In the story we’re going to look at today, we’ll see the reverse of that. Instead of seeing a son who squanders his inheritance, we’ll see a servant who learns to use his masters money wisely and shrewdly. First, we’ll see the overriding principle that we ought not to waste our lives. Then we’ll see two ways that we can be good stewards with what God gives us. So please open your Bibles to Luke 16, and let’s begin reading in verse 1.

Body

I. (Don't waste God's resources.) (1-2)

Luke 16:1-13

¹He 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. ²And 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.’ ³And 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. ⁴I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.’ ⁵So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ⁶He 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?¹³ No servant can serve two masters, for 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 God and money."

So in this passage, Jesus tells a parable—the parable of the dishonest manager. Now a parable is a story—usually a story that's not true—that illustrates a truth. As we get into this passage, we find that there was a rich man who had a steward, or a manager. Rich landowners often didn't want to deal with the day-to-day business decisions, so they would have a manager who had authority to make all the day-to-day business decisions on their behalf. The manager could buy, sell, lend—they had the authority of the master when it came to decisions about the estate. And in the story, the manager has not been doing a good job.

Look with me again at verse 1. Verse 1 says, "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.'" This manager was wasting the master's possessions. He was throwing away things of value. He was squandering his master's wealth. I think there's an important lesson for us here in the first couple verses of the story. And that lesson is, **don't waste God's resources.** That's the first point on your outline. Don't waste God's resources. Now, you might think that sounds easy because you don't have many of God's resources. You might think to yourself, "It's not like I'm in charge of the church's finances" (unless you're Tom Haynes, in which case you are in charge of the church's finances).

Well, let's think a little bit about this parable. Notice who Jesus uses as the central character—a manager. A man who was in charge of a bunch of stuff he didn't actually own. I think Jesus had a very good reason for picking this person as the central character of this parable, and the reason for that is this: Everything we have is a stewardship from God. All that we have—our time, our resources, our money, our possessions, our family and friends—all of it is on loan from God. None of it belongs to you. We like to think it belongs to us, but in reality, it belongs to God. Psalm 24:1-2 says this: "The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers." So, all of your possessions are on loan from God—you are simply a manager. Therefore, do not waste the possessions of your master. Don't be like the prodigal son. As a believer, don't squander the inheritance God has given you. Instead, use it wisely. Invest it in God's kingdom.

Don't allow your life to be consumed with small, unimportant, trivial matters. You graduates, there's going to be a lot of things that compete for your time, attention, and resources over the next few years. Don't waste your time and attention on unimportant matters. Learn to say "no" to things that are of little value, and "yes" to things that are of great value. Busyness is not a virtue. A lot of us are so busy, that we don't have time to be effective for God's kingdom.

Busyness is often a tool of Satan, and we need to fight against it. You see, Satan is a cunning adversary. He doesn't always try to get us to go after things that are blatantly sinful. Often, he uses things that are not bad in themselves to stop us from being effective. If Satan can get us to fill our lives with small, menial, unimportant activities, that make no difference in eternity, then he'll have crippled our effectiveness for God's kingdom.

Richard Foster wrote a book called The Freedom of Simplicity that I'd recommend to you. In it he says this, We feel honestly the pull of many obligations and try to fulfill them all. And we are unhappy, uneasy, strained, oppressed, and fearful we shall be shallow. We have hints that there is a way of life vastly richer and deeper than all this hurried existence, a life of unhurried serenity and peace and power. If only we could slip over into that Center! We have seen and known some people who seem to have found this deep Center of living, where the fretful calls of life are integrated, where No as well as Yes can be said with confidence.

When I was in seminary, one of my Greek professors said something to me that I'll never forget. He said, "You have to be mediocre at a lot of things, so you can be excellent at what's really important." His point was that if we failed Greek, he didn't see us as failures. He understood that some people in the room had families and difficulties that took precedence over memorizing Greek paradigms and vocabulary. Every day, you make decisions, and these decisions determine what you will be excellent at, and what will you be mediocre at. Often, unimportant things fill up our time, and the important things get pushed aside. Will you be excellent at a sport or loving your family? Will you be excellent at surfing the internet or your job? Will you be excellent at pursuing leisure activities or loving God? Determine to be excellent at the important things.

You graduates, many of you are driven. Many are ambitious. Don't fill up your lives with so much busyness that you are rendered ineffective for God's kingdom. You need to learn to say no to the things that are unimportant. Carve out time to just sit and be still before God—to learn to listen to His still, small voice. Maybe it means quitting a sport, maybe it means saying "no" to a club or social event, or putting a video game console or TV in the closet. Or maybe it means not getting straight A's. Whatever it means for you, don't be so busy that you end up wasting what time God's given you on things that are unimportant.

There's another truth about wasting our lives that I think we can glean from this passage—namely that a time of accounting is coming. You see there in verse 2, "Turn in an account of your management, for you can no longer be manager." A time is coming when you will have to turn in an account. You will appear before God one day and deliver an account of how we used the limited time and resources he entrusted to us. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil." A time of accounting is coming. One day when you stand before the Lord, and he asks, what did you do with the resources I gave you, what will you have to show for it? Have you invested wisely, or have you wasted what God's entrusted to you on trivial matters? How did you use the time I gave you?

There's a verse I want to read that you should write down, memorize, and burn into your heart. It's Psalm 90:12, and it says this, "So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." Be wise. Don't waste God's resources. Don't waste his time.

Transition: So, we've seen the negative part of this command: Don't waste God's time or resources; don't be a poor manager of God's possessions that wastes them. So, how can we accomplish this? How can we not waste God's possessions? How should we live so that we invest what God's given us in His kingdom? Well, we're going to see two ways we do this, but the first is this.

II. Invest your time and resources strategically. (3-9)

To see this, we need to understand what Jesus is saying through this parable. This parable is one of the most disputed of all Jesus parables, because it appears that the master approves of the dishonest actions of the manager. You see there in the first part of verse 8 what it says, "The master commended the dishonest manager." Some interpreters have attempted to mitigate the dishonest actions of the manager by claiming that what he did was remove the interest charges from the debt (which, by the way, was forbidden by the Old Testament Law). Others have claimed that actually, all he did was merely remove the portion of their debt that would have been his commission.

But I think these interpretations fall short for 3 reasons. First, in order for these interpretations to succeed, you have to assume that the audience understood all of the rules surrounding a manager's commissions and interest charges including the rates they would have charged. This would apply to both Jesus' original audience when He was telling the parable, and to Luke's audience when he was recording the parable Jesus told. For this interpretation to succeed, you have to say that both Jesus and Luke assumed that their audiences had intricate knowledge of how the relationship between managers and masters worked so that they didn't feel it necessary to provide any explanation of this. Either both Jesus and Luke just assumed that their audiences had complete understanding of this and it needed no explanation, or this interpretation is incorrect. Second, in verse 6, the manager tells the person to *quickly* change their debt. The only reason I can think that the word "quick" would be included here is because the manager knew what he

was doing was underhanded and dishonest, and didn't want his actions to be discovered. Finally, in verse 8, the manager is referred to as dishonest. After doing something as righteous and virtuous as giving back his own commission or removing interest charges to conform to the Old Testament Law, I find it hard to believe that he would be referred to as dishonest.

So, what the manager did was dishonest, but how then can we explain the master's commendation of the manager? At the end of the story, the master gives props to the manager. He's impressed. Why? Well, I think the answer is that what the master commends *is not* the dishonesty of the manager, but rather the strategic planning of the manager.

You see there in verse 8. It says, "The master commended the dishonest manager *for his shrewdness.*" It's not the dishonesty that's being praised, it's the cunning plan. It's the strategic, shrewd plan that the master can appreciate. If you have kids, you can appreciate this. When my kids do something wrong, I never condone their actions, but sometimes, I can appreciate the ingenuity with which they get into trouble.

Last week, I came home from work at nap time, so I was trying to be extra quiet. I opened our pantry to throw something away, and when I opened the pantry I was startled to find my son, Nehemiah sitting in the pantry on a chair with a door shut, with chocolate all over his face. He had the foresight and planning to wait until Melissa was asleep, quietly get out of bed, close his bedroom door behind him so no one would notice he was awake, creep downstairs, quietly push a chair across the kitchen into the pantry, turn on the pantry light, shut the door behind him, climb up the chair to the top shelf of the pantry, get the chocolate, and sit and eat it quietly. Now I don't think it was right of him to get into something he knew he wasn't supposed to (which is why there's now a child-lock on the pantry door), but I can appreciate his ingenuity. I think that's what's going on here, while the master does not condone the dishonesty of the manager, he can appreciate the cunning strategy of the managers plan. And so what we can learn from this parable is that we ought to invest our time and resources strategically.

Invest your time and resources strategically. This manager had a limited amount of time left, he was about to be fired. And he had to make the most of his limited time. And he had limited resources. He used the resources at his disposal in the limited time he had. Now, what does it mean to invest our time and resources strategically? Well, I think it means at least two things. First, it means intentional planning.

a. Strategic investment = intentional planning (3-8a)

Look with me at verse 3.

Luke 16:3-8a:

³And 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. ⁴I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.' ⁵So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' ⁶He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' ⁷Then 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.' ⁸The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness.

Notice in verse 4, the manager devises a plan. He says, "I have decided what to do." He has planned out his course of action, and then he executes that plan. This is a carefully thought-out, intentional plan that demonstrates great foresight. In the same way, we need to exercise carefully planned foresight.

We need to be *intentionally* strategic. Being strategic with your life does not happen by accident. If you just flow along, years will go by and you'll have wasted your life before you know it. Let me give you an example of how you can be intentional this summer.

This week everyone on our church mailing list received a flyer that looks like this. (Show summer impact flyer). If you didn't receive one, they're available on the outreach table. Last week, Rob issued a Summer Impact challenge. He challenged us to make a commitment to make an impact for God's kingdom this summer. The purpose of his challenge was not so that anyone could show off. Instead, it was to help you be intentionally strategic with your time and resources this summer. Let me list you some of the options on this flyer.

1. Join the prayer team focused on the Ecuador trip.
2. Send a note of encouragement or special gift to one of our missionary families
3. Host a Chinese student with GLO.
4. Host a BBQ and invite your neighbors.
5. Invite a non-Christian to a summer church activity like the Women's ministries pool parties or the all-church picnic.

So grab one of these flyers, and pick something on it or write something else down on it, and *be intentional about making an impact for Christ this summer.*

Strategic investment means intentional planning, but it also means something else.

b. Strategic investment = eternal relationships. (8b-9)

Read with me in verses 8-9.

Luke 16:8-9:

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.

You see, what this man did is made friends with others using the time and resources he had, so that when his management was over, he would have people who would welcome him into their homes. Jesus applies this to us, and says that we ought to use our time and resources to establish eternal relationships. That's the next point on your outline.

Strategic investment = eternal relationships. In the short amount of time you have, use the limited resources you have to build eternal relationships. This is the essence of what Jesus is teaching through this parable. Use your time and resources to build relationships with others that will last beyond this life.

When I was in high school, I went down to Mexico with a pastor named pastor Von. He took us to a graveyard that overlooked a Tijuana dump. The people buried in this graveyard were some of the poorest people you can imagine. They were people who spent their days scavenging the dump for things they could use or sell. Pastor Von said to us, "Here is the end of everything this world has to offer." Pointing at the dump, he said "Here's the end of all your stuff." Pointing at the graves he said "Here's the end of your body." Then he asked, "What are you going to do that will last?" As I stood there in the solemnity of the graveyard, overlooking the endless piles of garbage, with the roar of tractors shoveling the trash into the landfill in the background, his question was especially poignant. What are you going to do that will last?

There is only one thing you can take with you from this life into the next—relationships. Your relationship with God, and your relationships with those who know and love God. That's it. Everything else will rot. Relationships are the only eternal thing that will last, and that's why Jesus says that we should use our temporal wealth and resources and time to build eternal relationships.

Read the second half of verse 8 again. Luke 16:8 says, "For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light." He says sometimes non-Christians are more strategic with their futures than we are. At least they have a retirement plan, a 401(k). They have a plan for their futures. They invest in their futures strategically. Shouldn't we do the same?

Then he says this in verse 9. Luke 16:9 says, “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.” It’s probably better to translate the “unrighteous wealth” as “unfaithful wealth” because in this context, it means that the wealth is temporary and fleeting. So Jesus tells us to use our unfaithful wealth that we can’t rely on to make friends who will receive us into eternity. Jesus is telling us to push our money and our resources forward into eternity.

What does it mean to make eternal friends? Let me tell you a story about a friend of mine. I have a friend named Robin. He was a wealthy, successful, business man who had lots of nice things, but did not know Christ. His wife Karen became a member of the cult group Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Robin was outraged when he found out that his wife was going to start going door to door for this group. He had a big fight with Karen about this, and he was considering divorcing her. He was just distraught and took his Porsche for a drive up into the mountains, and parked at a campground to spend some time thinking. As he sat there, a stranger walked up to him, pulled out a gospel tract, and shared Christ with him. Robin was just about as rude as he could possibly be to this man, but after the man left, Robin read the tract, and surrendered his heart to Christ. After some prayer and study, his wife renounced the Jehovah’s Witnesses and became a Christian as well, and then together they left their affluent lifestyle, and founded a Christian camp for abused children called “Camp Alandale.” Thousands of kids have come to Christ through camp Alandale, and whole families have been transformed. I want you to think about that man who shared Christ with Robin so many years ago. One day, he’ll enter eternity, and there will be thousands of friends waiting for him. Thousands of people whose lives have been transformed because of one act of faithfulness.

I believe that someday I’ll have friends that I’ve never met that will come up to me in heaven and say, “Thank you for supporting that missionary,” “Thank you for sharing Christ,” “Thank you for rebuking me,” “Thank you for befriending so and so,” “Thank you for your strategic investment in God’s kingdom.” So the most strategic thing you can do with your life is spend your life building relationships—building your relationship with God, and relationships with others that will push them towards the saving knowledge of God in Christ. That is a truly strategic investment.

Transition: So, don’t waste your life. Don’t invest your life in frivolous and superfluous activities; instead be strategic by intentionally planning your life so that you invest in eternal relationships. In Matthew 10:16 Jesus was sending out his disciples, and he said “Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” In the section we just read, Jesus told us what it meant to be as “Wise as serpents;” in this next section, we’ll discover what it means to be as “innocent as doves.” The serpent is strategic, the dove is faithful. And what we’re going to find is that we ought to...

III. Invest your time and resources faithfully. (10-13)

Now in the previous section, we saw a manager who acted dishonestly and unfaithfully, but he was cunning, shrewd, and strategic. In this section, we’re going to see that not only ought we to be strategic, we also ought to be faithful to our master. We need to live lives of honesty, integrity, and faithfulness. And there’s two points that Jesus makes about investing our lives faithfully.

a. (Faithful investment = eternal dividends). (10-12)

The first is in verses 10-12.

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?”

The point Jesus is making is that **Faithful investment = eternal dividends (10-12)**. Jesus first states a broad principle in verse 10 saying, “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.”

You young people and students should remember this when it comes to your giving. Don't think that because you make such a little amount of money that your giving to the church or a missionary doesn't matter. Right now is your training ground, and right now is the time to develop patterns in your life of pushing money and resources forward into God's kingdom. The key is to be faithful with what God's given you—whatever and however much that may be.

And for all of us, we need to remember to be faithful with what God's given us. Let me ask you some questions. Why did God design the person you're married to as He did? Why did God orchestrate it so that you are in the job you are in? Why has God placed you in the house you are in? Why has He given you the kids you have? The answer to each of these questions is so that you could demonstrate your faithfulness to Him. God has given you your spouse, job, house, and kids so that you could display your faithfulness to Him through your current circumstance and situation.

So Jesus states this broad principle in verse 10, and then he applies that principle in verses 11-12. Luke 16:11-12 says, "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?" You see, right now, we have fleeting, temporary, unfaithful riches. That's what is meant by "unrighteous wealth." But in eternity, we will have true riches. Right now, everything we have really is not truly ours—it is temporary, and it will eventually belong to someone else or end up in a dump. In eternity, we will have riches that will be truly ours—riches that will last. In 1 Peter 1:4, Peter describes these riches as "an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you."

So, if you are faithful to our master, then you will yield eternal dividends. This is the result. Faithfulness in this life results in eternal dividends in the life to come. You have an inheritance to look forward to in eternity. Faithful investment results in eternal dividends, but there's another point that Jesus makes about faithful investment. This second point Jesus is making really is just a definition of what it means to live faithfully.

b. Faithful investment = undivided devotion (13)

The second point is that **Faithful investment = undivided devotion**. Read with me in verse 13.

Luke 16:13

¹³ No servant can serve two masters, for 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 God and money."

Jesus is saying that you cannot serve 2 masters. Now in the parable Jesus just told, we saw a manager who was unfaithful to his master in order that he might gain favor with someone else. Jesus is simply stating a truth here. You cannot be faithful to 2 masters, because the interests of these two masters will conflict, and eventually you will have to choose between them. You have to choose which master you will be faithful to. Who will you choose? Are you going to be faithful to God or to money, or to yourself?

Keep in mind that Jesus says, "either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other." Are you going to be faithful to money and your possessions in the here and now? If so, it means you'll be despising and hating God. You'll be treating him as though He is irrelevant and unimportant to you. On the other hand, if you choose to be faithful to God, then you'll despise and hate money and your possessions. You'll treat them as though they are irrelevant and unimportant to you. And that is how we ought to live, in undivided, single-minded, undistracted devotion to God. He is worthy of such devotion. Let's choose Him as our master—not the temporary and fleeting treasures of this world. Let's resolve to be faithful to him.

Conclusion

So, we've seen that we ought not to waste this life, but instead, we need to invest our time and resources strategically and faithfully. We ought to be both as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves. Let's resolve to be intentionally strategic—to develop a plan so that our lives make an eternal difference. And let's resolve to be faithful to our Master—to be so devoted to Him that everything else falls by the wayside. Let's pray.

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