

Investment Advice from the Dishonest Manager – Luke 16:1-13

What's the best investment you've ever made?

Think about it for a second. Picture it. Visualize it.

What's the best investment you've ever made?

Your decision to follow Jesus?

OK, fine. Sure, that's great. Technically true.

But – and I hesitate to say this, because some of you probably don't need to encouragement! – let's get *worldly* for a second.

Think of your very *human* life.

- Everything you've experienced.
- Everyone you know.
- Everything you own.
- Your entire, earthly life.

What's the best investment you've ever made?

Now, I imagine, that if I asked different individuals that question, I would get different answers.

And I would get different answers, at least in part, due to the different ages and life experiences of the responders.

That is, if I asked a *small child*, they might say that the best investment they've ever made was to spend their allowance on an ice-cream cone.

If I asked *someone my age*, perhaps they'd say that it's their college education, which allowed them to start a career.

Someone a bit older than me, maybe it would be saving up to buy a house.

Hopefully, at some point, I'd get relational answers like "my marriage" or "raising my children."

Right?

After all, it would be especially **sad** to ask *someone on their deathbed*, and to hear them say that their greatest investment was a car, or a boat, or a house.

Right?

We'd feel like they'd missed out on something bigger and better for their life, if all they had to show for it at the end is a Corvette or a mansion.

And we'd think they were *an absolute fool* if their answer, while **dying**, was still "spending my allowance on that ice cream cone."

We expect that, by the end of your life, surely you've made a bigger investment than that!

Right?

And yet, the tragedy is, that **when you expand this question from a normal human lifespan to all of eternity, many Christians are, in effect, giving the *ice cream cone* answer!**

That is, even though we should know better, even though we know that there is more to life than what this world has to offer, we get so wrapped up in the world's investment strategies that *we lose sight of the bigger picture*.

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Do you want some good investment advice, brothers and sisters?

Investing is a marathon, not a sprint.

If you've ever run a race before, you know that mistaking a marathon for a sprint would be disastrous!

The closest I've ever come is mistaking my very first 5-kilometer cross country race with a 4.9-kilometer race!

I came flying in to what I thought was the finish line, **throwing** myself forward to pass two other runners, only to realize – lifting up my eyes – that ***I still had about 100 yards to go.***

My legs felt like **concrete**. Those two other guys **passed me**. It was rough.

<When you're running, it pays to know *exactly how long your race is!*>

And ***investing your life is a marathon, not a sprint.***

But here's the problem:

What the world calls a marathon, God calls a sprint.

So, in light of eternity, Christians should invest their resources in a different way than the world, by being generous and faithful with what they've been given.

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This is the main point of our Gospel text today, the parable of the **Dishonest Manager** – or the Unjust Steward – in **Luke 16:1-13**.

Would you turn to that passage with me?

It's on **page 875** of your pew Bibles.

Show of hands:

How many people in here have ever been confused by this passage?

I'm definitely with you.

I mean, why does it seem like Jesus is giving investment advice by using a **bad investor** as an example?

*“**Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth**”* (Luke 16:9a)? Really?

I mean, sure, if Jesus is encouraging us to schmooze and glad-hand our way to the top, part of me is perversely happy.

Show me the money!

But, the other part of me is definitely uncomfortable.

Does Jesus realize what it sounds like he's saying here?

Let's remember the main point before we dive into the story:

In light of eternity, Christians should serve God with their money by being generous and faithful with what they have been given.

OK, now let's look at the passage in Luke 16.

In vv.1-2, **we get the introduction**.

There's the big boss, who finds out that his manager has been wasting his possessions.

So, the big boss calls the manager in, and lets him know that he's getting fired for just how bad things have gotten.

Notice, the manager doesn't even bother trying to defend himself! We get the impression that he's guilty as charged.

Instead of a defense, we're given an **internal monologue** in vv.3-4.

Because being a steward or manager of a wealthy household was quite the **prestigious** position in that day, the manager realizes that **his livelihood is about to take a serious cut.**

And this is distressing,

- because he is too **weak** for hard physical labor.
- And he's too **proud** to beg.

I mean, what's he *supposed* to do, go back to school and ***get an MBA?***

Luckily for the manager, he stumbles upon a brilliant idea.

And notice **his explicit motive** in v.4:

“I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.”

So, he's no longer trying to get back into his master's good graces.

Instead, based upon what's about to happen to him, he's **taking matters into his own hands to secure his own future**.

In vv. 5-7, he puts **the plan into action**.

Even though he's about to get fired, for the time being he is still ***legally in charge of his master's estate***.

So, the manager calls in his master's debtors one-by-one, and he **reduces their debts instantaneously**.

And, by the way, these were **very large debts!**

- About 875 gallons of oil – the produce of a **large olive grove**.
- Over 1,000 bushels of wheat – which would have taken about **20-25 average family farms** to produce.

So, apparently, the debtors themselves are quite ***wealthy***.

And, by reducing their debts, the manager hopes to gain favor with the debtors.

To ***reciprocate*** his generosity, they would have to offer him **hospitality** when he gets turned out on the street.

---Everyone with me so far?---

OK, so v.8 might just be **the most confusing verse** in the entire book of **Luke**.

Why on earth would the master **commend** the dishonest manager??

I mean, in addition to having **wasted** his possessions in the first place, this manager has now cost the master a considerable amount of money through these **debt reductions**.

Why would the manager be worthy of the master's **praise**??

I think the answer is that, as v.8 says, **both the master and the manager are “sons of this world.”**

And the master, though he's just lost some more money, **grudgingly admires the manager's brilliant move**.

See, if the manager had merely tried to collect his hefty commission and run, the master would have **gone after him** for every cent!

However, by legally **reducing** the debt, possibly even by subtracting his own substantial **commission**, the manager has **ingratiated** himself to these third parties in a way that his master can't touch.

Does that make sense?

If the manager had tried to run away with cash, it wouldn't have worked.

But, instead, the manager built up good will with **third parties**. And the master can't take that away.

So, in terms of his worldly standing, the manager has shown great foresight.

He used his available resources to prepare for the future.

How shrewd!

Are we, then, to **imitate** this manager, even though the text calls him “dishonest” or “unrighteous”?

Well, **yes** – and **no**.

Verse 8b reads:

“For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.”

You know, it's been said that, although Jesus told his people to be “**wise as serpents and innocent as doves**” (Matt 10:16), we're often **wise as doves**, and **innocent as serpents**!

That is, we're so often wrapped up in the ways of the world that, even though we should know that what the world calls a marathon, God calls a sprint, we often spend our time, money, and talents as if this life is all there is.

We often live as if the ways of the world are the ways of God.

We need to learn from the dishonest manager's **foresight**.

If even that knucklehead could use his resources to prepare for his future, **how much more** should we Christians use our resources to prepare for our own, **eternal** future!

What's that look like?

Well, verse 9 reads:

“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.”

Like I said earlier, at first glance, this sounds like Jesus is telling us to go out and use our money to get in good with people who can help us out.

But wait, that's precisely the way of the **world!** We humans **love** to try to make friends with those who can either help or hurt us.

Notice two things.

(1) First, speaking of “unrighteous wealth,” the verse says “**when** it fails.” Not “if it fails,” but “**WHEN** it fails”!

Though it promises us **comfort** and **security** here on earth, our wealth – which is so often tied up with unrighteousness – will **fail**.

(2) Secondly, we're talking about “**eternal**” dwellings here.

Not the earthly homes into which the dishonest manager hoped to be welcomed, but **God's** home. Eternal life.

So, what kind of **friends** are we talking about?

They seem pretty special!

I mean, how **powerful**, **influential**, and **prestigious** are these people, if they can welcome us into eternal homes with God?!

Who are we supposed to go schmooze, glad-hand, and get in good with?

...

We're supposed to make friends with the **poor**, the **powerless**, and the **outcasts**.

You know, with the kind of people the Pharisees were mad at Jesus for hanging out with in Luke 15:1-2.

With the kind of people like poor Lazarus, ignored by the rich man in Luke 16:19-31.

Jesus' instructions here sound like what he said in Luke 12:32-34:

“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Sell your possessions, and give to the needy.

Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Jesus' instructions here, in chapter 16, sound like what he said in Luke 14:12-14:

“He said also to the man who had invited him,

“When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid.

But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you.

For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

Jesus' instructions here sound a little bit like what he tells the rich young ruler to do in Luke 18:22

“One thing you still lack.

Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”

Make friends – not with the powerful people who can help you out in the short-term – but with the powerless people who can help you out in the long-term, as they join God in welcoming you into his kingdom.

In light of eternity, Christians are to be generous with their resources – especially to those who cannot pay them back on this side of heaven.

As Jesus said in Luke 6:34,

“And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount.”

We will get a reward for our generosity. It won't necessarily be the world's reward. But it will be a better, eternal reward.

But why?

Why should we follow such **risky** investment advice?

Because, **in light of eternity**, how we use our **earthly** resources **matters** to God.

In light of eternity, Christians are to be **faithful** with what they've been given.

Luke 16:10-12 reads:

“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.

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?”

It's as if all the wealth in the world we could possibly collect in a lifetime is just a **tiny allowance** in God's eyes.

No matter how much overtime you've put in to build your growing empire – **it's not ultimately yours!**

This is important:

- You've got it on **loan** from the Creator.
- He **gave** you everything you have.
- He gave up **his only Son** to save you from your sins.
- He offers you **new life** through his resurrected Son, and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

God offers you something **better** than your tiny earthly allowance – something **better** than all the riches in the world!

<<He offers you Himself.>>

But, how we spend the earthly allowance matters!

Because it reveals our **heart** – whether we are primarily focused upon this world or on eternal life.

So, **like** the dishonest manager, we're supposed to have **foresight**.

But, **unlike** the dishonest manager, we're not supposed to only look out for our **own** earthly interests!

We're supposed to look out for the eternal interests of **God** and **others**.

Friends, we have a **choice** to make in how we invest our resources here on earth.

Verse 13 reads:

“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.”

We can't have our cake and eat it too. We can't claim to be **Christians** and yet use our resources just like the **world** does.

You cannot serve God **AND** money.

You can either serve God with your money – by being generous and faithful with what you've been given.

<<<OR>>>

You can serve money as your god.

Brothers and sisters, **investing is a marathon, not a sprint.**

But what the **world** calls a **marathon**, **God** calls a **sprint.**

So, **in light of eternity**, **Christians should invest their resources in a different way than the world**, by being **generous** and **faithful** with **what we've been given.**

And we have been **given everything** we **have.**

The next verse, v.14, right after our passage, reads:

“The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him.”

And you know what?

On my own strength, I will respond exactly the same way to Jesus.

Because I want to use *my* money, *my* time, and all *my* resources – on **myself**.

Not on God. And certainly not on other people, unless they can help **me!**

Only through the Holy Spirit will my heart be softened, will my grip be loosened, to be generous and faithful with what I have been given.

Because it's not mine. It's GOD's.

Come, Holy Spirit. Open our eyes. Soften our hearts. Loosen our grips.
Amen.