

# 7

# EXPLOIT YOUR FRIENDS



*What's the most innovative product you've seen lately?*

**QUESTION #1**

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE **121**

*Be wise with resources and opportunities.*



## 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 risky, and it paid off. Big.<sup>1</sup>

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?

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## **Luke 16:1-2**

**<sup>1</sup> Jesus told his disciples: “There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. <sup>2</sup> So he called him in and asked him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.’”**

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. (See Gen. 39:1-20.)

This manager was running his employer’s business into the ground. He was squandering his boss’ money. Jesus did not clarify how the manager was doing this nor what he was using the money for, but you can hear the dismay in the rich man’s voice, as he demanded, “What is this 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. “Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.”

Let’s change out the characters: we are the manager, and God is the rich business owner. “The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it” (Ps. 24:1). God created everything in and of this earth, 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, at some point in our lives, been guilty of wasting God’s resources.

***How have you seen people squander God-given resources and opportunities?***

**QUESTION #2**

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.

## Luke 16:3-9

**<sup>3</sup>“The manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I’m not strong enough to dig, and I’m ashamed to beg— <sup>4</sup>I know what I’ll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.’ <sup>5</sup>“So he called in each one of his master’s debtors. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ <sup>6</sup>“‘Nine hundred gallons of olive oil,’ he replied. “The manager told him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred and fifty.’ <sup>7</sup>“Then he asked the second, ‘And how much do you owe?’ <sup>8</sup>“‘A thousand bushels of wheat,’ he replied. “He told him, ‘Take your bill and make it eight hundred.’ <sup>8</sup>“The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. <sup>9</sup> I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”**

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?

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.

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 because he had acted shrewdly.” *He admired him?*

# PERSONAL INVENTORY

*In the space provided, list some of your possessions and resources. Next to each item, list some ways that you could use (or currently are using) each thing for kingdom purposes.*

Possession/Resource

Kingdom Use

How could your community change as a result of your shrewdness?

"God's people should be as dedicated to living out Kingdom living with other people in this world as the people of this world are in living out their own values to their own advantage in this world."

—TRENT BUTLER

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, but for his shrewdness.

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: 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. We don’t “buy friends,” but we make friends by helping them, and we make a difference in their lives. 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?”

## **Luke 16:10-12**

<sup>10</sup> **“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. <sup>11</sup> So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? <sup>12</sup> And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?”**

***What are some ways we can use temporal resources and opportunities to gain friends for eternity?***

**QUESTION #3**

***When have you seen faithfulness in little lead to faithfulness in much?***

**QUESTION #4**

Jesus turned the spotlight on us in this passage. Faithfulness is really a heart issue. If we are not responsible with what we have—if we are not taking care of things or using them wisely—why should we receive more? John MacArthur said, “Circumstances don’t determine faithfulness, character does.”<sup>2</sup> 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 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.

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. Do you have kids? Create a playgroup and let them gather in your home on rainy days. 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 use what God has provided 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.



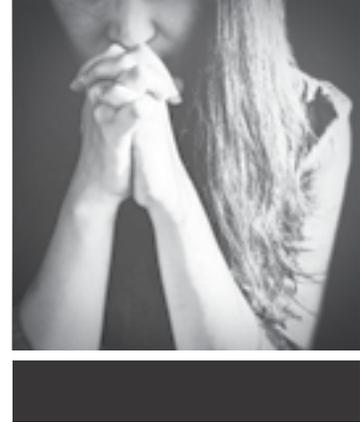
***How can our group be wise with the resources and opportunities God has given us?***

**QUESTION #5**

# LIVE IT OUT

How will you be wise with what God has placed in your hands? Choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **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.



Words such as “exploit” and “shrewd” may not be common in our Christian vocabulary, but when we apply them in the biblical context, we become more effective kingdom managers.

My thoughts

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>.