Faith Aflame: 360 Degrees

Stewardship Learning Community
Living in God's Economy
Handling Money

Opening Prayer

Scripture Read **Luke 16:1-14.**

Introduction

If someone were to look at your checkbook or credit card statement, would he call you a shrewd manager of God's wealth?

In *Meditations on the Gospels* (CPH 2009), the author writes, "This parable may be somewhat puzzling because Jesus says that the rich man commended the unjust steward, but we should note that he is commended not for his crookedness and double-dealing but for his wisdom. When this steward realized that his day of reckoning was coming, he did not deceive himself; he knew he would be deposed and he made provision for the future. And that is the same advice Jesus gives to His disciples: do not deceive yourselves as to what you are and what the future will bring; but make provision for your future security…We are the Lord's stewards. All that we have is His and we must use it wisely as long as we have it. We must return it when He demands it, and we must be accountable when He calls us. We are the Lord's stewards" (page 566).

- What, if anything, do you find puzzling about this parable?
- How would you describe a "wise" steward?
- How should we make provision for our future security?

A Stewardship Prayer

Heavenly Father, You have called us to be stewards of all we are and all we have. Help us to be wise and shrewd managers so that Your people are served and Your kingdom advanced.

Forgive me for thinking and acting like I own what really belongs to You.

Grant me strength to manage earthly wealth in such a way that it gives You glory.

We ask this in the Name of Jesus, a Name above every name.

Amen.

C. F. W. Walther writes about this parable in *God Grant It,* "…with this story, the Lord says that just as this godless man knew how to deal with the goods of his lord to guarantee his temporal future, so should a person use the goods of the Lord His God in such a way that he secures an eternal future. As godless prudence was praiseworthy before the world, so is true prudence praiseworthy before God…Doesn't Scripture teach that a person does not gain entrance into the eternal habitations by any work, but alone by grace through faith in Christ? Isn't this parable a contradiction of the Gospel? Not at all! There can be two reasons why one day Christ will receive us into heaven: because, as the Lord of heaven, He has earned our entrance for us and, as the Servant, He will testify to our claim at the entrance. Christ alone has earned our entrance into heaven for us, but no person will be admitted unless he has witnesses that he really believed in Him. These witnesses are among our brethren whom we have served with our goods and gifts on earth" (pages 620 - 621).

- How are you using the goods of the Lord to secure an eternal future?

In *Jesus, Money, and Me,* author Ron Jones suggests that this parable has three important lessons. The first is: ***we are stewards and not owners***. This is a recurring theme through all the stewardship stories Jesus tells. It is a foundational understanding for stewards who desire to live as God would have them live. Jones writes, "Thinking and acting like a steward and not an owner, though, does not come easy. Transferring the title deed to assets we thought were ours is slow and painful. Frankly, the old ownership mentality comes out as painfully as a tooth extracted from an infected jawbone" (page 63).

- Why is the ownership mentality so painful to extract from our lives?
- What difference does it make in your life to know that God owns it all?
- How much is enough?
- What does Acts 4:32-35 have to do with this discussion?
- Jones makes the statement, "If God owns it all (and he does), then every financial decision we make is also a spiritual decision" (page 64). Tell why you agree or disagree with the author.

Jones continues, "A second lesson we learn is ***God holds us accountable for the stewardship of his wealth***" (page 65).

- How does accountability show up in other parables Jesus told? (see Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 19:12-27)
- How does the fact that we are accountable to God (and others) for what He entrusts to us make you feel?

Joes identifies a third lesson to be learned from this unique parable. ***Faithful stewards use the Master's money to make eternal friends.***

Jones writes, "The shrewd manager in the story used his master's money to make for himself friends on earth, with the hope that at least one of them would give him a place to live. How do we apply his example to our lives? We generously use the Master's wealth to make for ourselves friends in heaven who will welcome us into eternal dwellings when we arrive. How exactly does this work?...In short, while money can never be used to buy a ticket to heaven, it can enable us to make friends who will welcome us when we get to heaven. The shrewd believer in Jesus Christ—the one who understands he is a steward and not an owner—looks ahead to that day and gives generously to the Lord and his work today. His deep desire is to use the money God entrusts to him to reach as many people for Christ as possible" (page 68).

- What is your deep desire for the money God has entrusted to you? What would others say is your deep desire for money?
- Jones suggests that on earth the more money you have the more friends you also have. Perhaps not the kind of friends you want, but money attracts people who are willing to be your friends. "The kingdom of God" writes Jones, "works in an opposite manner. Want friends in heaven? Give money away on earth" (page 68). What do you suppose he means?
- How are you managing earthly wealth?

Closing Prayer

Provide time at the end of each session for questions, comments and group prayer. The prayer can take one of the following forms or be done in a way the group decides.

Adoration...
Confession...
Thanksgiving...
Supplication...
Praise...
Remember...
Ask...
Yield...

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