

## What's Money For?

Simple Stories Week 3: Shrewd Manager

2/24/19

Welcome/Intro/Vision: PBO Version!

Week three of a series called Simple Stories, looking at a few of the parables of Jesus

If you're new today and new to faith or new to Christianity

one of Jesus's favorite teaching techniques was to tell short stories that packed spiritual wisdom in one very strong punch—called parables

**And in his parables**, Jesus is answering this very important question: **How do we live in line with who God is and the world God's designed?**

This is Jesus's recipe for joy in this life and in the next!

Jesus teaches us that God is personally involved in this world and longs for a real relationship with each one of us

But there's also a way that God designed the universe to work: there are physical laws but also spiritual and emotional and relational laws that he's built into the design of the cosmos

And if we don't live in line with the design, we don't thrive

it doesn't matter whether you believe in gravity or not, it exists, and if you try to pretend as if those laws do not exist, it will not go well for you and for your body.

There's nothing malicious or judgmental about the law of gravity, it's just how the universe was built and if we don't live in line with those larger realities, there are negative consequences!

Jesus tells us that those sort of principles aren't just true in the physical world

There are spiritual and relational and emotional principles that God has put into place that if we don't live in accordance with how those have been designed then we get hurt

**BUT** if we can get proficient and even excel in working within those principles and laws we thrive

All day every day, you and I are surrounded by people whose lives are a mess in some area because they didn't live in line with a relational, spiritual, or emotional law or principle that God wove into the fabric of the universe

Including, if we're honest, in our OWN lives!

And on the flip side, the places where you see people thriving are those places where we're living in step with who God is and/or the world God designed—whether they know God or not!

In the parable that we're going to look at today, Jesus is going to talk about one of his favorite subjects, which is money

Money is one of those subjects that almost no one wants anyone else to talk to them about and yet it's also one of the single most charged and important areas of our lives

When you were a kid, you were taught not to put your fingers in the electrical socket, you could get electrocuted—some of you had to learn that the hard way, bless your hearts!

But no one told you that every time you pull out your credit card or pull out a dollar bill, you're handling live spiritual and electric current that is MUCH MORE LIKELY to ruin your life than getting electric shock would

Money and the obsession around getting more and more of it  
has wrecked and ruined more lives and more families and more marriages and more kids lives and more businesses and more companies and more whole COUNTRIES and economies than just about anything else in history

And so the truth of the matter is that while most of us are resistant to anyone else talking to us about money, we need wisdom both to *manage* it well

But we also need something more than just how-to's, we need someone to help us to spiritually and emotionally in our relationship with money to live in line with who God is and the world God has designed

So today Jesus is going to give us the answer to a very important question: **What's money for?**

Now of course most of us think we already know the answer to this question!

If you've got children at home, the answer is that ALL your money is for your children!

If you've got kids in college, the answer is ALL your money is to pay for THEIR college

Whether you've got a lot or a little or something in between, every time you handle or deal with money, you are handling something with tremendous spiritual and emotional volatility

That could literally be the single greatest cause of misery in your life OR, as Jesus is about to show us, could be a contributing factor to your eternal joy in this life AND in the next

Bible/No Bible: Luke 16—one of the most difficult parables, when we mapped out this series several months ago decided we wanted to do less familiar parables, including some that were a little more difficult to understand

This is one of the hardest to understand, so let's walk through this one together and if you're feeling a little confused at points, just stick with it and hopefully it'll all come together

***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.'***

<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.’***

Okay, so a rich man has a manager who’s in charge of managing his funds and maybe his whole household as well

And he’s accused of mismanagement and wasting the money

The manager doesn’t defend himself in any way, so we can assume that he’s probably guilty

And so due to his own mistakes or sins or mis-management, this man is in trouble

And so he begins to weigh his options income stream options: he’s been sitting around a desk in his office job for too long so he’s not strong enough to dig holes for a living—some of us can relate to that

and he’s way too proud to beg for a living—many of us can relate to THAT!

So he comes up with a Eureka plan to do something incredibly smart that will put people in his debt so that when he loses his job people will owe him a favor, here’s what he does

<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?’***

***“A thousand bushels of wheat,’ he replied.***

***“He told him, ‘Take your bill and make it eight hundred.’***

Now let’s pause here and celebrate the brilliance of this solution! If you’re about to get fired and you’re going to need a place to stay

one of the best ways to insure that you’ve got friends to take care of you is by making one of your final acts as the manager to tell debtors that they don’t have to repay the manager the full amount! Brilliant!

But of course on the surface this looks like stealing, further waste and mis-management of the rich man’s money and so Jesus’s first century audience and us today might expect Jesus to drop the hammer on this guy

But here’s the surprising twist from Jesus

<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.***

Fifteen years ago or so I took a week-long seminar or preaching and speaking and we spent lots of time talking about study and preparation and one whole day on delivery

And this was a gathering for pastors and people who were doing public speaking to groups of mostly Christians

So I figured we'd be talking about and looking at pastors who had great delivery styles

But instead, my professor completely surprised me and you know who we talked about all day? Comedians. Not CHRISTIAN comedians, all kinds of comedians.

We talked about how they connected with an audience and their timing and their pacing and how they leveraged surprise to get people to laugh and make their bits very sticky

And what that day did for me in a new way was put me in this super-helpful learning posture ANYTIME I see ANYONE doing ANY public speaking

I'm ALWAYS looking at how great communicators connect with large groups of people, whether it's a musician or a comedian or a pastor or even a politician!

Even politicians can get this right and do this well, even the ones I don't like or thoroughly disagree with, I can learn from how they're doing what they're doing and doing incredibly well!

And that really reinforced to me this notion that I once heard a favorite pastor of mine once say, "Armed with enough humility, we can learn from anyone"

Armed with enough humility, we can learn from people who are like us and who are different from us.

Armed with enough humility, we can learn from people who we agree with and people that we disagree with.

Armed with enough humility, those of us who are religious can learn from the non-religious and those of you who aren't religious might could learn a few things from those of us who are

Armed with enough humility, we can learn something from just about anybody

How open are you to learning something from just about anybody?

Jesus here tells the story of a manager who works the system and he celebrates him, not for stealing or breaking a commandment, but for acting shrewdly and Jesus says, "Go and learn from this guy and what he just did."

Now let's take a step back and get a little cultural context that might help us to understand why this isn't perhaps what it first appears

In the Jewish law, Jews were not supposed to charge interest to other Jews on loans.

However, what often happened in wealthy households was that the rich man would hire the manager to do his business dealings for him

And what the rich man would do was pretend to not know that the manager was charging interest

So the rich man could continue to go to the temple and appear religious and pious all the while in his business dealings he was growing wealthier and wealthier as his manager did the dirty work

And so in this parable, what the manager is doing is canceling the INTEREST that was being charged on these loans that wasn't supposed to be charged in the first place

So all the wealthy man can do on the other side of that cancellation is praise the manager for his good work so that he can maintain the pretense of following the Jewish religious law

That background helps, right? And it's also a helpful reminder to us when we bump up against passages like this that Christianity for all of us is a cross-cultural experience

We follow the teachings and the work of a Jewish man and his followers, all of whom lived 2,000 years ago in a very different culture.

Any time we read the Scriptures, we are engaging in a cross-cultural experience

And any time you have a cross-cultural experience, you're going to bump up against things that don't make sense to you

and for almost all of us our tendency in those experiences is to cross our arms and look suspiciously at it, sometimes to shake our head at it or to just withdraw and retreat

But the most important thing you can do whenever you're crossing cultures and bump up against something that you don't understand is to ***ask questions rather than shut down or make assumptions***

When you don't understand what's going on, ask questions, investigate, remain engaged and curious rather than fight or flight, rather than dismissing it or judging it or just throwing up your hands and giving up on it.

Now at that point the parable ends and we don't know if the manager was still fired and spent the rest of his life couch-surfing from house to house of all these people who now loved him

Because from here, Jesus launches into the interpretation and application of the parable

And to start with, Jesus commends his disciples to learn from the shrewd manager, just like I learned from the comedians in my preaching class:

***For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.***

If that word shrewd is a bit confusing for you, here are some synonyms:

**astute, sharp-witted, sharp, acute, intelligent, clever, alert, canny, savvy, perceptive, perspicacious, observant, discriminating, sagacious, sage, wise, far-seeing**

As one commentary put it: **“Well-intentioned as [the people of the light] are, they often lack the wisdom to use what they have as wisely as the worldly do.”**

Armed with enough humility, we can learn just something from just about anyone, including this slightly sketchy manager: Be shrewd, don't sin. Be shrewd, don't steal. Be shrewd, don't lie.

Be shrewd, love God and love your neighbor with your shrewdness, creativity, wisdom, sagaciousness, and problem-solving!

Be shrewd and live a life of faith, hope and love!

Jesus is going to talk very specifically about financial shrewdness but I want to zoom out just a bit to talk more broadly

#### **How do we live faithfully shrewdly?**

1. **Pray for It:** God's Spirit to make you more shrewd, more astute, to have clear-judgment and make a wise and far-seeing decision? At multiple points the Scriptures tell us if we don't have wisdom, we should ask for it. So ask!
2. **Think about it:** Taking a little more time to think it all the way out. Not just reacting in the moment. Sometimes making shrewd decisions just requires a little more intentionality and a little more thought work, a little more research
3. **Go get it:** take a class, read a book, watch some training videos, get together with someone who's shrewd and ask them to mentor you and teach you—go get it!
4. **Outsource it:** get input from shrewd and wise people regularly!

On our staff team, Steve Tamayo is our Executive Pastor, some of you might not have met him yet because his job is more behind the scenes and organizational

But one of Steve's many many gifts is he's freakishly good at chess. He's just able to see and anticipate multiple possibilities at any given time

I on the other hand STINK at chess. I'm kind of intrigued by it in a way a kid might be intrigued by a trip to the planetarium, but when it comes to anticipating what might happen, it's all a big fog of endless possible combinations

How am I supposed to know if you're going to go up 2 and over 1 or push your bishop over into the corner or move your pawn up 2 spaces? But somehow Steve can run all those possible scenarios in his head, it's just one of his gifts

Steve is ALWAYS playing chess, not just the game but in life, too!

And so we lean onto those gifts around here on a regular basis to help us to make shrewd decisions as an organization.

I'm always looking to him to give me his take on how he sees things possibly unfolding as we take various steps as a church

There's a call from Jesus to grow in our shrewdness—these are a few steps to help us to do that

Now from here, Jesus gets laser-focused on the application of this parable into the world of your money and my money-- "How do we live in line with who God is and the world God has designed? More specifically: what is money for?"

***<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.<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? <sup>13</sup> "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."***

So about six weeks ago or so now my oldest got his learner's permit. A rite of passage that every parent dreads—pray for us!

But of course, this has been an ongoing process to get to this point and it'll continue to be a process to get to the full license

He and I drove in empty parking lots on the weekends at various points over the past year to get him ready. He took a long, painful, boring drivers ed class last summer.

He drove around for hours through the back roads of Chatham County with a driver's ed teacher who had a brake on his side of the car and yet he clearly does not get paid enough to do his job!

And now Davis has got his permit which has significant restrictions in terms of who else can be in the car and how late he can drive

And when he first gets his license to drive solo nowadays there are even restrictions in place for a year after you get your full license as to who else can be in the car and how late you can drive

All throughout this process, the person who's getting their license is entrusted with a little more and a little more and a little more until they get the full privilege of driving

And at any given point there are checks and stops along the way

This idea of a series of developmental opportunities and tests and checks, that's something of what Jesus is getting at as in this portion of his teaching he's answering the spiritually loaded question "**what's money for?**"

And here's what Jesus says:

***if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?... No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other You cannot serve both God and money."***

Jesus talks about money more than any other person in the Bible.

This is in large part because money is one of God's biggest competitors for your heart.

***We were made to worship God, love people, and use money. At our worst our tendency is to love money, use people and ignore God altogether.***

And so Jesus is constantly pushing his original hearers (and us!) to break the spell of money over us and to see through the false promises of it.

What's money for? And how does it all go so very wrong with money? What does it mean to live in line with who God is and the world God has designed—Jesus's joy recipe?

**When money is your God, you will do whatever it takes to get more money**

No one can serve two masters! You'll love God or money, you can't love both!

**When God is your God, you do whatever it takes to get true riches.**

If we put God first, we use money to get us true joy, in line with who God is and how God designed the universe

Here, Jesus tells us that our passions aren't too strong but they're far, far too weak.

We are fooling about with trifles and play things, Monopoly money, when real money is waiting for us just ahead. Eternal joys and riches are being offered to us but we'd rather settle for disposable trinkets and knick-knacks.

We are far too easily pleased.

The money you're working with now, is temporary, fleeting and passing so don't get too attached to it! Money makes for a nice pet but it's a terrible master!

And in our culture, nobody knows it so nobody else is going to tell you that other than Jesus, so we need to listen really hard because it's so easy for this voice to get drowned out

And if you'll live financially in line with who God is and the world God designed, you flourish, you're healthy, you're free from being shocked and electrocuted by the current of money

You're free in this life to enjoy God and know his favor and blessing and you're free in the next life to know God and enjoy his blessings

And Jesus is telling us that the decisions we make with the play money we have in this life are being watched closely.

If we can't figure out how to steward the play money well in this temporary and fleeting life, who's going to trust us with real riches in the life eternal?

Your current financial situation is your learner's permit. You can do real damage or do some real learning in this life to set you up for what's ahead

And the call for followers of Jesus is that we must learn to use our resources (especially money) for spiritual purposes just as shrewdly as the people of this world use their resources for their own worldly purposes.

Because when money is your God, you will do whatever it takes to get money  
When God is your God, you do whatever it takes to get true riches.

**Shrewd, Trustworthy, and Faithful with worldly wealth** looks like two things:

**1. by managing it in very earthly and practical ways very well AND ALSO**

First, Jesus invites us to be like the shrewd manager in that we just make good, shrewd decisions in very tangible and earthy ways: get organized! Don't get in over your head in debt! Manage your finances well!

For some of you, going to Financial Peace University is your next step to doing whatever it takes to get entrusted with true riches--Information about that is in your bulletin

But there's also this additional call to be not only organized but **2. counter-culturally generous in giving money away**

Starting in the very first book of the Bible and all throughout Christian history, there are a number of people who declare to God that they are going to give 10% of whatever they make back to God

And so that 10% number has become a sort of helpful guideline or ballpark for one of the ways that giving can look--To give 10% of what we make to the church or towards some other God-honoring, redemptive work

For some of us, that might feel overwhelming and intimidating, that's okay, maybe you need to start a little smaller and work your way up--start at 5% and in six months increase it

Others of us, we can afford to give more than 10%.

I read about a seminary professor who essentially made it his goal with his wife EARLY in their marriage to continually find ways to increase their giving percentage, especially as their pay went up to NOT increase their living costs as they made more money so they could give more and more away

And by the time he was in his 50's he and wrote the book that I read about 10 years ago, he and his wife were giving away 30% of their salary every single month! 30%!

That inspired me to try to find ways to push past what's been our habit of giving 10% and stopping there!

We set it up on auto-pay every month, most of what we give goes here to the church and then we've got a couple of missionaries that we support and a World Vision kid that we've adopted

We're trying to find ways to give more money away

Because when money is your God you'll do whatever it takes to get money but when God is your God you will do whatever it takes to get true riches!

Here, Jesus is telling us that God designed the world such that people made in his image might leverage resources in creative ways

to position themselves and the people around them for better in the present and better in an eternal future.

You have an upstream opportunity today to use your resources in a way that will store up treasures downstream in heaven.

What will you do with that opportunity today?

Today's **Wildly Important Take-Home**

**When money is your God, you will do whatever it takes to get money**

**When God is your God, you do whatever it takes to get true riches.**

**What's your next step in living faithfully and shrewdly to secure true riches with God?**

**Pray about it?**

**Think about it?**

**Go get it?**

**Outsource it?**

Do you need help to get your financial house in order? Financial Peace? More individualized and specific coaching and care? Don't delay, let's do this!

Do you need to start to give more money away? That can be a little scary at first, but giving money away is part of how God frees us from taking it all too seriously

That's how you break the spell of money in this life and how you secure true riches with God in the next

*Benediction:*

*Next week's parable see a really obnoxious religious guy*

*If you've got people in your life who can't stand religious people, next week might be a great week to invite them to join us! Turns out they have a whole lot in common with Jesus*