

God, Man, & MAMMON

Navigating the tension between
the material and the spiritual

Chapter 15



with
Mitch
Anthony

IN THIS CHAPTER

**Faithfulness in Little,
Faithful in Much.**

With the parable of the shrewd manager, Jesus teaches us to be aware of the motives of others—and our own. How does our attitude toward money reflect our attitude toward God?



FAITHFULNESS IN LITTLE, FAITHFUL IN MUCH

The Parable of the Shrewd Manager

“Jesus told his disciples: ‘There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. 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.’

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 be—I know what I’ll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.’

So he called in each one of his master’s debtors. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’

‘Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,’ he replied. The manager told him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.’

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.’

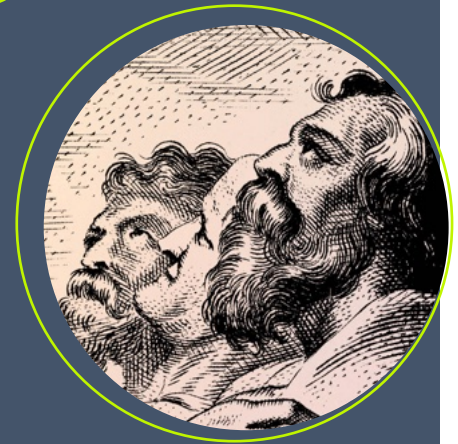
The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

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. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?

... The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, “You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God’s sight.”

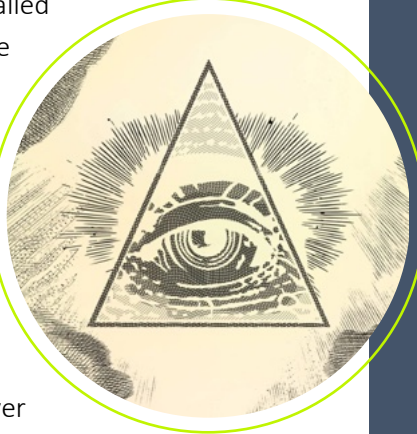
– Luke 16:1–15

WHOEVER CAN BE
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Here Jesus tells us about a man who was loose and limber with other people's property. He was wasteful, squandering resources because they were not his and therefore didn't matter to him. This parable is primarily a story about faithfulness.

Faithfulness with resources is called resourcefulness. Get little from much. Use everything you can as much as you can. Wastefulness could be defined as "getting as little as possible from an ample supply." Resourcefulness could be defined as "getting as much as possible from a limited supply." On the whole, Americans are a wasteful people.

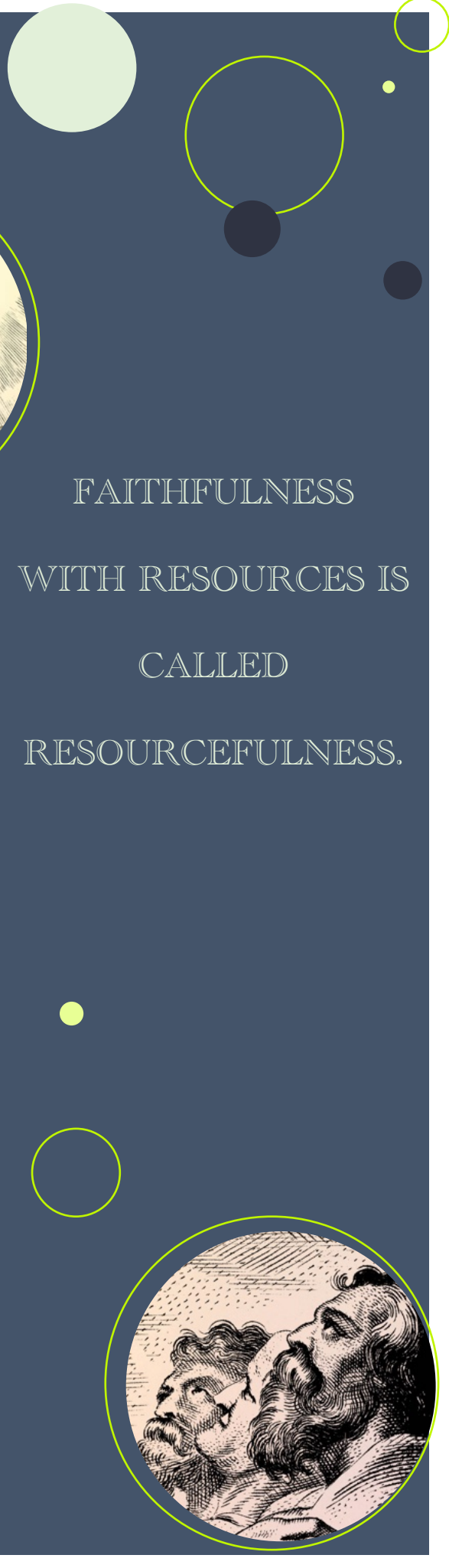


According to America's Second Harvest, over 41 billion pounds of food have been wasted this year. According to a study from the University of Arizona (UA) in Tucson, on average American households waste 14 percent of their food purchases. Fifteen percent of that includes products still within their expiration date but never opened.

Timothy Jones, an anthropologist at the UA Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology, who led the study, estimates an average family of four currently tosses out \$590 per year, (which equals the annual income in many third world countries) just in meat, fruits, vegetables, and grain products. Nationwide, Jones says, household food waste alone adds up to \$43 billion, making it a serious economic problem.¹ A scrutinizing look at what gets thrown away every day in America reveals that there is enough refuse food to feed entire nations. Dumpsters are filled nightly with oversupply and discarded rations. Are we wasteful because we have too much, because it comes too easily?

While visiting Cuba many years ago, I learned a great deal about resourcefulness. Cars from the 1950s were in immaculate condition and ran smoothly because the Cubans had no other choice. I saw children take a destroyed bicycle rim, a crooked nail, and a rock and

attach the rim horizontally to a tree to construct a basketball hoop (which they shot at with their homemade basketball). In North America we have hoops and courts that cost tens of thousands of dollars and never get used. We have cars that get traded in when the tires need to be changed.



FAITHFULNESS
WITH RESOURCES IS
CALLED
RESOURCEFULNESS.

Work Ethic

In this parable we are told about a man, whose job is threatened, saying to himself, “What can I do now? How will I make it?” He admits to himself that he is too weak for physical labor and too proud to pander. His exit plan, a scheme to set himself up for the

future, is to bilk and defraud his boss. Financial dishonesty is quite often under-girded by a lack of work ethic. These are those who have never learned the satisfaction of creating something with their hands and sweating through a project. They look for the easy way out of every circumstance and inevitably end up in want or ruin. They are prey to the scam artists, whose teasers promise that you can “Do less and make more” with their “breakthrough new program.”



"Earn big bucks in minutes per day!"

“Work just one hour a week and make \$20,000 a month—guaranteed!”

It typically turns out that the “breakthrough new program” is a con’s con. Scammers understand that laziness will cause you to believe just about anything that promises “no work.” Some people have wrongly interpreted Jesus’ phrase here that the “children of the world are shrewder with money than the children of light” to be condoning the unfaithful steward’s behavior—but the rest of the story sets the record straight. Jesus finishes this story by accentuating the themes of faithfulness and integrity in all money matters.

Jesus is getting at the fact that many “children of the light” are naïve on money matters and consequently, get taken by the “children of the world.” The children of the world know that if motive is a mystery in any proposition, you simply need to “follow the money” and you will find your answer. The children of the light are often too trusting, too inclined to expect the best from others and can get robbed blind in their Pollyanna state. Jesus is not condoning or encouraging deception or cleverness inspired by greed, He is warning us to keep our radar up for what motivates those around us—the potential for gain at little expense or effort. He goes on to clarify that ultimately, with money, we must prove our trustworthiness in the smallest of matters. “So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true

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riches? And, if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?"

Jesus also parenthetically states that money can be used as a tool of influence in this world and that one of the better uses of your money is to use it to bless others, so that, when you need help yourself, you will have many allies who are happy to return the favor. "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 wisdom of this directive is that it changes one's focus from hoarding wealth to using wealth and moves our vision from material stuff to helping humans. Money, if dispersed with discretion and purpose, can and does help one curry favor in this world. This is what it means to use your worldly wealth to gain friends (or allies) for yourself. The essence of this verse is that when the money is gone, the people will be there. "When it is gone" is a gentle reminder that money doesn't always last—wealth can be fleeting—and your better investment is in the lives and wellbeing of others. One version translates this verse, "Money will eventually fail." There comes a point in all our lives where money eventually does fail. The question we then must answer is, "What am I left with?"

Proving Ourselves

Personal money management is one of God's character tests, plain and simple. God is watching what we do with money and using it as a barometer for faithfulness. What we are willing to trade to get money? Who are we willing to betray or deceive for money's sake? How do we manage our own money versus how we manage resources that belong to another? "So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?" Jesus is now using money as a metaphor for the riches that really matter. If you can't be trusted with a few dollars, why would God entrust you with anything meaningful?

There is not a lot of wiggle room here. If you want to be used by God for higher purposes in life, then the first class you have to pass is Money Integrity 101. Flunk that—and you go to the back of the line. Our interactions with money tell the truth about us. Like a tea bag, we don't find out what's inside of us until we are in hot water financially. This money parable is about demonstrating what we are about on the inside with our treatment of the resources on the outside. We are trusted with "other-worldly" goods when we pass the test on the world's goods.

¹ <http://www.soundvision.com/info/poor/statistics.asp>

PERSONAL MONEY MANAGEMENT IS ONE OF GOD'S CHARACTER TESTS.

