

A God-Lived Life
Sample Sermon – Month 4
Luke 16:1-15

Now what shall I do?

- I. Live for the now?
- II. Live for the new.

This is the final Sunday of our stewardship challenge—*A God-Lived Life*. As we've said before, normally when you hear the word *stewardship*, you think money. Yes, money is a part of stewardship—it is something that God has given us, and he wants us to use wisely. But for the past three months, we haven't really touched on money.

- Month 1 – We talked about appreciating the gift of God's Word and being good stewards with that—**living the life of a disciple**.
- Month 2 – We talked about being good stewards of our time and talents by **living lives of service for others**.
- Month 3 - We talked about **living lives of hospitality**—opening up our hearts and even our homes to others in generous and giving ways.

Today as we explore the God-lived life as a **life lived shrewdly**—we'll touch on money a bit. But really, even as we talk about money—it's more the *attitude* about money than the money itself.

To think about this, I want to use the question asked by the jerk in Jesus' story. I know that's not a nice word, but this guy is a self-centered narcissist who is dishonest and unjust: Does that description really make you want to listen to him? But here's the thing. In this story, Jesus takes us from the known to the unknown. Jesus introduces to us a character we can relate to—Mr. Selfish. And I think you know how we can relate to him. Too often, we are him. We make decisions based on three factors: me, myself, and I.

We'll get back to that. First though, his question. It's the first thing we hear him say—"Now, what shall I do?" Jesus uses his example and tells us to ask the same question. "Now what shall I do? Shall I live for the *now*, or live for the *new*? What shall I do?"

Let's set the stage. Jesus tells a story not to make us want to be like this guy whole cloth, but to point out one particular characteristic. Jesus is not asking us to emulate his selfishness, dishonesty, or stealing. The ONE thing Jesus points to as worthwhile, the one thing Jesus wants to demonstrate in his story: he was *shrewd*. That's the thing Jesus was illustrating. He was shrewd, prudent, he thought through the situation and thought about his goal and used what he had to reach the goal. Let's read the story. (Read Luke 16 or review as printed/projected).

Jesus told his disciples: (Notice, he is now talking to his disciples. He wants *us* to learn something here.) **"There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. ² 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 man had been given responsibilities. The job of household manager, often translated "steward," was an important one. He had full control of the master's stuff, his business dealings, his resources, and his job was to use all of that for the master's good. Apparently, he had done something wrong and was now getting canned. Now remember, this word *steward* or *manager* is the same word often used to describe us

as believers. Everything belongs to God. We are stewards of it, managers. Knowing what God says about how we are to use our stuff, I think there are more than a few of us who should be right there with the guy in the parable getting canned. But here's where we see the guy's shrewdness. He thinks through his situation:

³ **“The manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do now? (There’s our question). My master is taking away my job. I’m not strong enough to dig, and I’m ashamed to beg—**

His options for taking care of himself aren't good. But then it strikes him. The steward's great insight is to see that the solution has to come from outside of himself. He doesn't have the resources in himself. But for just a little bit of time yet, he still has use of his master's stuff. Until he hands over the books, he's got something. Think of how that applies to the stuff we have here until this life is done—just a short bit of time. So, this steward says, ⁴ **“I know what I’ll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.”**

⁵ **“So he called in each one of his master’s debtors. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’**

⁶ **“‘Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,’ he replied.**

“The manager told him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.’ These are huge numbers. Likely we're talking about long-term renters of the land, those who are partners of sorts with this wealthy master.

⁷ **“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.’

That steward used the authority over that stuff he had been given with a goal in mind. Obviously, the master had plenty of reason to be upset with what this guy was doing. This guy who failed him was now giving away his money, his wealth. But he was also doing something else. He was counting on what he knew of his master. His master was, at heart, merciful. Otherwise, he wouldn't have even imagined he could get away with this. The only way this works is that the master goes along with the steward's plan and does this kind thing for those people. The master realized it and commended that unjust manager for it. Did you notice why? It wasn't for being unjust. Listen to verse 8: ⁸ **“The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly.** (That's the point of Jesus' story—acting shrewdly—using what we have for a specific purpose.) Jesus goes on: **For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.**

The lesson we learn is to be more shrewd with the things we've been given—but with a different purpose. That becomes really clear as Jesus goes on and gives his application of this story. Verse 9: **I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.** (We have an eternal purpose far greater than anything in this short life. But what we do in this short life matters.) Verse 10: ¹⁰ **“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.** ¹¹ **So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?** ¹² **And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?**

¹³ **“No servant can serve two masters. 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 both God and Money.”** There is only one number one. It’s been said, “There are a lot of things God will put up with, but 2nd place is not one of them.” Our text goes on:

¹⁴ **The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. ¹⁵ 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.**

There’s a lot there. But notice the main point. Jesus isn’t defending the man in the story for what he did. He’s commending him for how he used the stuff he had for the time he had it. His goal was wrong—his own self-preservation. He wanted to find a way to serve himself. Jesus makes clear, we have a *better* goal. We have true riches. We have what is valued by God instead of what is valued in men’s eyes. So, be all the more shrewd with it! Jesus tells us to use our money, our resources, for what *really* matters.

Jesus, the teller of the story, is a great example of just that. While the parable focuses in on money, Jesus showed it in every aspect. He came to earth for a limited time—somewhere around 33 years. He had that time to work with like every human. Notice how he used his time and resources.

- Already as a 12-year-old in the temple, he was using his time to live his life as a disciple, growing in the Word.
- Then, again and again, we see him prioritizing time for prayer—committed to growing in his relationship with His Father.
- We see him prioritizing souls—those he had compassion on who were like sheep without a shepherd, so that he gave them time even when it was inconvenient for him.

Throughout it all, we see him prioritizing our eternity. He was committed to going up to Jerusalem to be betrayed and beaten, to suffer and die, for us. For all the times we put our now life over our new life, he gave his life. He put us first. He remembered our eternity when all we could think about is how to enjoy our best life now. He literally saved us from ourselves.

That changes how we look at things. That gives us NEW life—life forever in heaven, and a new kind of life now—one that is a God-lived life. As his disciple, it’s a life of service, a life of hospitality, and a life that is shrewd—that uses what we’ve been given in order to live that new life, like that new life is as important as it is.

What does that look like for you? Well, look at your challenge cards. There are some great ideas on there, ways to be more shrewd with what we have—things like prioritizing God’s work in our budget. That’s remembering what Jesus says about that mindset that remembers eternity instead of focusing so much on the now. And remember, it has always been his stuff! We can trust that he is a merciful master and that he’ll keep his Word to us that we will have plenty. Then, assess your offerings to God. From all that he’s provided, find the offering that tells him, “Dear Lord, I challenge myself to trust you even more because your mercies are so great!” Consider a true tithe—challenge yourself—because what is most important comes first.

(Note: A congregation may offer a budgeting seminar here—perhaps resources such as “Financial Peace University” or Heart in Focus Finances—to help congregation members better track what they have and where they spend, so they can actually make their giving practice line up with their giving intent. Remind them to take the time to be shrewd, to be prudent, to think about what’s going on like that steward in the story. And help them to realize what’s more important, and be shrewd for a better purpose.)

We come back to the question “Now, what shall I do?” May God strengthen you to live a God-lived life—a life lived shrewdly. God grant it.

In Christ,

Amen