

Can God trust you?

STEWARDSHIP IS A MATTER OF TRUST

1 Samuel 15:17-23; Luke 16:1-13

January 13, 2002

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It is never fun to be out of a job. Job hunting can be prolonged by a tight market, the type of job we're seeking or our own mistakes. I suspect that job hunting may have been prolonged for the individuals who wrote the following comments on their job resumes or cover letters. (This is from the July 21, 1997 issue of **Fortune Magazine**).

Received a plague for Sales Person of the Year.

Reason for leaving last job: maturity leave.

As indicted, I have over five years of analyzing investments.

Instrumental in ruining entire operation for a Midwest chain store.

Employers may have chuckled at those typos, but they probably were less impressed with these statements.

Finished 8th in my class of 10.

Wholly responsible for two failed financial institutions.

Failed bar exam with relatively high grades.

"Less impressed" won't characterize employers' reactions to these statements:

It's best for employers that I not work with people.

Note: please don't misconstrue my 14 jobs as job-hopping. I have never quit a job.

The company made me a scapegoat, just like my three previous employers.

References: None. I've left a path of destruction behind me.

Most of us may be more careful and less self-defeating in job hunting, yet we all act foolishly at times. Today, we are going to discuss the parable of a foolish manager. Some of us may feel like a foolish manager after we get our credit card bills from Christmas shopping. Indeed, that is part of the reason why I'm preaching this series now. Financial strain is pretty common this time of year, and it is the number one cause of marital disharmony. Applying the biblical principles in Luke 16 can help. Although the parable there is more difficult to understand, it appropriately follows one of the most loved and memorable parables of Jesus in Luke 15. In Luke 15, Jesus tells the parable of the prodigal son and confronts a wrong attitude about people. In Luke 16, Jesus tells a parable about a foolish manager and confronts a wrong attitude about possessions. Our attitudes about people and possessions are critical to our relationship with God. They are also critical to our future.

The Bible has a lot to say about our possessions. Jesus talked about money in 16 out of 38 parables and in 1 out of 10 verses from the gospels. The Bible devotes 500 verses to prayer, less than 500 verses to faith; but over 2000 verses to money and possessions. *Is there any doubt that the earning, spending, saving and giving of money compose an important spiritual issue?*

Jesus zeros in on our spiritual life as he talks about our attitude toward money in Luke 16. He shares about a manager who is foolish because of one mistake. It was a fundamental error. The manager ignored the truth that he was accountable. He acted as if he was the owner rather than manager. This steward had great power. He could do with the owner's riches what he pleased. Consequently, he squandered some of the owner's money. However, only for a time does a manager have the power of the owner. There is a time when the manager must give an account. The foolish steward forgot he was accountable.

The accountability of the foolish steward suggests a similar danger for us. What's our attitude toward the resources we manage? Who owns your wealth? You or God? Suppose you earned \$1000 this week. When you came to church this Sunday morning, how much of that belonged to God? Does not all of it belong to God? The Bible says, "***The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it***" (Psalm 24:1). That means that you're working on God's turf and using God's stuff to earn wealth. You're using abilities God has given you. You're operating in a climate provided by God and thus all that you earned properly belongs to God. You're managing his resources and possessions. Who owns the wealth you possess? God. Who manages that wealth? You do. Conflict arises when there is confusion in your mind over who's owner and who's manager.

With this parable Jesus not only focuses on our identity as accountable managers, but he reveals something about the owner. In the parable, the owner has important expectations of the manager. It is vital for the manager for the manager to know and address those expectations because he owner judges the manager by those expectations. What does God as owner expect of us as managers? What are the areas we are managing for God and what does God expect?

For one, we manage our bodies for God. God is the owner of YOUR BODY. The Apostle Paul wrote:

You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body. (1 Cor. 6:19-20)

Second, you manage your POSSESSIONS for God. Jesus said (in Luke 14:33):

No one can be my disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.

Third, you manage your TIME for God. The Holy Spirit warns us in the Bible:

Act like people with good sense but not like fools. These are evil times, so make every minute count. Don't be stupid. Instead, find out what the Lord wants you to do. (Eph. 5:15-17)

Fourth, you manage GIFTS from God. God declares through his Apostle Peter:

God has given gifts to each of you from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Manage them well. (1 Peter 4:10)

Fifth, you manage the GOSPEL for God. Listen to God's word:

God was pleased to trust us with his message. We didn't speak to please people, but to please God who knows our motives." (1 Thess. 2:4)

With the gospel, the good news of Jesus, God has entrusted us with a treasure that transforms people and offers them life. Doesn't it follow that we must give an account for what we've done to share it?

Jesus talked not only of the accountability of the foolish steward, but also of his wisdom. Although the manager suffered for his dishonesty and foolhardiness, Jesus commended him. Why?

In the story there is an interval between the time that the manager hears of what's coming and the time that he actually must give an account. During that window of opportunity, the manager made an assessment:

I'm not strong enough to dig ditches. I'm too ashamed to beg. What am I going to do?

The manager did something very wise. He envisioned his future. He assessed his present situation and the future consequences. Have you done that? He made a personal inventory. *"I'm not strong. I'm not unflappable. I have failed my owner. I will have nothing, but right now, I have everything. What can I do with what I have right now that will change my situation?"*

Do you realize that you must soon give an account regarding everything we've spoken? Have you made an assessment of how you are fulfilling God's expectations for your life? What can you do with what you have right now - with your body, your possessions, your time, your gifts and the gospel - that can change your situation?

The foolish but shrewd manager did not stop with his assessment. He took action. He hopped in his 1st Century pickup (probably a mule), raced up the road to a farmer who owed the owner 800 gallons of olive oil. "Hey," he said, "I think I overcharged you, and I'm going to forgive all your interest. Let's rewrite the bill for 400 gallons." Leaving that farmer in a radiant and joyous state, he tore up the highway to a guy who owned a big operation. "I bet I can get a job there," he thought. His pickup careened into the driveway. *"You know, you're such a good friend. You owe a thousand bushels of wheat. I'm leaving this job, and you've been good to us. Let's forget the interest. We're going to rewrite that bill for 800."* The foolish manager left that place to the sounds of "God bless you", and he knew he was blessed.

Jesus did not commend the manager for being dishonest, but for using his OPPORTUNITY wisely. He was telling his listeners that we must USE OPPORTUNITY WISELY! As long as we have opportunity, the saying is very true:

Though I cannot make a brand new start right now, I can start right now and make a brand new end.

Right now with assessment and action, we can use opportunity wisely and change our future. The water that is under the bridge is under the bridge, but we can still start now and change the end.

In this parable, Jesus taught us that **TRUST MUST BE EARNED!** Why would an owner give someone more if they misuse what they have? Have you been trustworthy with what God's given you? Can God trust you with more? Can God trust you? You can start earning trust now!