

KINGDOM.

LESSON 37

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. *Pray* for God's guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Commit your group and this lesson about preaching God's kingdom to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) <i>[QUIET TIMES]</i> ISAIAH 48, 49, 52 and 53
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Take turns and **share** (or **read** from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times with God out of the assigned Bible passages (Isaiah 48, 49, 52 and 53). Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) <i>[GOD'S RESOURCES]</i> (1) HEBREWS 13:5-6
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The twelfth series of memory verses (series L) is about "God's resources". The titles of the five memory verses are:

1. God's presence. Hebrews 13:5-6
2. God's Word: Psalm 119:105
3. God's strength. Isaiah 40:10
4. God's wisdom. James 1:5
5. God's healing. 2 Chronicles 7:14

Review two by two.

(1) God's presence. Hebrews 13:5b-6. God said: Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence: "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

4	TEACHING (85 minutes) <i>[THE PARABLES OF JESUS]</i> THE SHREWD MANAGER
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"The parable of the shrewd manager" in Luke 16:1-13 is a parable about STEWARDSHIP IN GOD'S KINGDOM.

"A parable" is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It is a true-to-life story or illustration designed to teach a spiritual truth. Jesus used the commonplace and the events of everyday to illumine the mysteries of the kingdom of God and to confront people with the reality of their situation and their need for renewal. We will study these parables by using the six guidelines for studying parables (See manual 9, supplement 1).

Read. Luke 16:1-13.

1. Understand the natural story of the parable.

Introduce. The parable is told in figurative language and the spiritual meaning of the parable is based on that. Therefore we will first study the words and the cultural and historical facts of the background of the story.

Discuss. What are the true-to-life elements of the story?

Notes.

The rich man. He was probably the owner of a large estate. We must assume that he was a man of integrity, because not he, but his manager was dishonest.

The manager. He was a household manager, economist or steward, entrusted with caring for the business of the estate. This manager was accused of wasting his master's possessions. We are not told who accused him and how he wasted his master's possessions. He must have been guilty, because the manager did not loudly protest his innocence.

The debtors. They were probably renters of a piece of the estate. They paid their rent by giving the owner a fixed amount of their yearly produce. They could also have loaned money or bought goods on credit from the owner. Nevertheless, each debtor owed a considerable amount of money to the owner of the estate.

Giving an account of his management. The owner demanded that his manager surrender to him the account-book of how he managed the business affairs of the estate. The manager was not necessarily accused of fraud, but almost

certainly of mismanagement. He could have wasted his master's possessions, or he could have been careless and negligent. The owner of the estate wanted to terminate his manager's job and gave him an opportunity to get the account-books in order before he departed.

What the manager did. The manager remained silent after he had been fired. He thus admitted his guilt. First, he was at a loss what to do. He was not strong enough for manual labour and he was ashamed to be dependant on other people's kindness. Then he got a bright idea and devised a plan. He would do a great favour to certain people, so that later they would return this favour to him. He would reduce their financial debts to the owner, so that later they would help him out financially.

Changing the amounts on their bills. These "bills" were written acknowledgements of debts, signed by the debtors. They were 'I owe you' notes, signed by the debtor, just like modern bank notes. At the time he incurred the debt, the debtor made a written statement that he owed a certain sum to the owner and was obligated to pay it. The dishonest manager called his master's debtors one by one and made them change their bills to their own advantage and to the disadvantage of his master. How this was done, is not said. The original written statements could have been on wax tablets, so that the wax could be melted and re-written. If they were written on paper, the old could have been destroyed altogether and new bills, in which the amounts of the debts were considerably diminished, could have been drawn up and signed.

The debtors would probably not have known that this was dishonest. Due to unfavourable weather conditions affecting the crops, it was not unusual for an owner of an estate to reduce the debts. Moreover, the debtors would have thought that the manager was executing the owner's instructions.

The master commended the dishonest manager. "The master" commended the manager, not because he was *dishonest*, but because he had acted *shrewdly*. The "master" refers to the owner of the estate (verse 3 and 5) and it does not refer to Jesus. Jesus was telling the story and he said that the owner or master or the manager commended his dishonest manager because he had been so shrewd and had acted *with foresight*. He had *planned ahead* for his future. That was a very *clever, shrewd or wise* thing to do! The owner could not really change the bills back to their original state, because by that time everybody thought that the owner had been very kind to his debtors.

2. Examine the immediate context and determine the elements of the parable.

Introduce. The context of "the story" of the parable may consist of "the setting" and "the explanation or application" of the parable. The setting of the parable may state the *occasion* for telling the parable, or describe *the circumstances* at the time of telling the parable. The setting is usually found *before* the story of the parable and the explanation or application is usually found *after* the story of the parable.

Discover and discuss. What is the setting, the story and the explanation or application of this parable?

Notes.

(1) The setting of the parable is contained in Luke chapter 15 and 16.

In Luke chapter 15, Jesus told three parables about the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son, in which he taught God's attitude towards the lost people in the world. This was in response to the bad attitude of the Pharisees and teachers of the law towards the tax collectors and sinners. In these three parables, Jesus exposed *the wrong attitude towards people!*

In Luke chapter 16, Jesus told two parables. In the parable of the shrewd manager, Jesus exposed *the sinful use of material possessions*. According to Luke 16:1, this parable was addressed to the wider circle of Jesus' disciples, although it was definitely heard and also meant for the Pharisees (Luke 16:14).

Luke 16 has three related parts:

- Verse 1-13 exposes the sinful use of material possessions.
- Verse 14-18 exposes the hypocrisy of the lovers of money.
- Verse 19-31 teaches the terrible result of the wicked handling of both people and wealth, thus, a combination of the themes of Luke chapters 15 and 16.

(2) The story of the parable is contained in Luke 16:1-8a.

(3) The explanation or application is contained in Luke 16:8b-13.

The explanation of the terms "sons of the world" and "sons of the light" (Luke 16:8). These are Semitic (Hebrew and Arabic) idiomatic expressions. They indicate that the person or thing so described stands in a close relationship to the object mentioned after "son of" or "daughter of". This relation may be one of "belonging to" or "resembling", for example:

- "The daughter of Zion" = Zion (Hebrew: bat Tsijon) (Isaiah 1:8)
- "The daughter of Jerusalem" (Hebrew: bat Jerushalajim) = Jerusalem (Isaiah 37:22)
- "The daughter of Babel/Chaldea" (Hebrew: bat Babel/Kasdim) = the Babylonians (Isaiah 47:1)
- "Son of a man" (Hebrew: ben adam) (Ezekiel 2:3).

- “Someone like a son of man = a human/man” (Hebrew: bar enash) (Daniel 7:13).
- “Out of Egypt I called my son (Hebrew: beni) = Israel” (Hosea 11:1).

And for example:

- “children of the world” (Greek: hoi huioi tou aiónos) refers to non-Christians who belong to the sinful and dark world
- “children of the light” (Greek: tous huious tou fótos) refers to Christians who belong to the Light (Jesus Christ) and visibly resemble Jesus Christ. They possess the light of wisdom, holiness, joy, etc. (Luke 16:8b; 1 Thessalonians 5:5). They form a sharp contrast with “the sons of this age” who are the people of this world or worldly people (Luke 16:8a). Thus, Jesus says that often non-Christians act with more foresight than Christians.

The explanation of the term “manager of unrighteousness” (Luke 16:8). This refers to the dishonest manager. The fact that Jesus calls the manager in his story unrighteous or dishonest proves that Jesus does not commend dishonesty in using worldly wealth! Also verses 10-12 prove that Jesus does not commend dishonesty.

The explanation of the term ‘Mammon of unrighteousness’ (Luke 16:9). This is a personification of worldly wealth, possessions or money. Jesus does not say that wealth, possessions and money are in themselves unrighteous or bad, but his intention is to say that often in the accumulation of wealth and the use of possessions and money a lot of unrighteousness takes place (1 Thessalonians 6:9-10)! Therefore, the term is translated with worldly wealth to show that it refers to the temporary material wealth as opposed to the eternal and true heavenly riches (Luke 16:11).

The explanation of the expression “that they may welcome (subjunctive, aorist middle) you into eternal dwellings” (Luke 16:9). The expression means that those people who have benefited from your investment of money on earth may receive or welcome you in the future in heaven (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:1). It stands in contrast to verse 4 where those people who have benefited from the dishonest manager’s cheating may receive or welcome this manager into their earthly homes when he is destitute.

This term or passage does not teach nor suggest that some people’s bodies will be resurrected and taken up into heaven before others (the so-called “rapture” of the Church). At most it speaks of the souls of those who have benefited from your investment of money on earth will acknowledge your good deeds on earth before God in heaven. In the same context, the soul of Lazarus could not give the rich man such a welcome in heaven, because the rich man had invested none of his riches in the life of the poor Lazarus on earth (Luke 16:23-25).

The application. Be shrewd as the people of the world. In Luke 16:8b, Jesus says, “The people in this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind (literally their own generation) than are the people of the light.” The master commended his dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. Jesus agrees with the master of the dishonest manager in commending, not his dishonesty, but his shrewdness in planning ahead. Jesus says that Christians should also do that: with foresight make good plans for their future!

Thus, Jesus is teaching his disciples to be clever (shrewd, sharp, wise) as the non-Christians in the world. They must be shrewd today and also in the future. There is however a difference: between Christians and non-Christians. The non-Christians plan their future by crookedness (dishonesty), while the Christian plans his future with honesty (justice) (the norms and values of the kingdom of God).

The application. Use worldly wealth to gain friends. In Luke 16:9, Jesus says, “I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, they (that is, the friends) will welcome you into eternal dwellings.” Jesus teaches his disciples to look ahead, plan and act with a view to their future. By means of worldly wealth, possessions and money, the people of the world make friends. That is, they create for themselves a network of contacts through whom they can make a profit or be successful in this world. But often their friends only last as long as they have money (Proverbs 19:4). And because they often do business by dishonest means, like bribing and cheating, they also make lots of enemies. Moreover, all their efforts have only temporary value, because their contacts, profits and success last only till their death. They will have no eternal dwelling in heaven and no one in heaven to welcome them.

In contrast, by means of their worldly wealth, possessions or money, Christians should also make real friends. As long as they live on earth they should use their worldly wealth to advance God’s kingdom. When they die, all the people who had benefited from their kind-hearted giving on the earth will give them a big welcome when they come into heaven! Christians should plan ahead for their eternal future and spend their present resources with a view to eternity! Thus, Jesus teaches his disciples to use their worldly possessions and money to win people for God’s kingdom, to build up people in God’s kingdom, to help the needy in God’s kingdom, in short, to do anything that will advance God’s kingdom and glory on earth! Christians actually invest their money in heaven by managing their wealth (possessions) on earth in this way (cf. Ecclesiastes 11:1; Matthew 6:19-21; 1 Timothy 6:17-19).

The application. Be trustworthy with little and with much. This refers to possessions and to responsibilities. In Luke 16:10-12, Jesus emphasises trustworthiness and honesty in small matters, that is, in earthly possessions and money. In Luke 16:10 he says, “Whoever can be trusted with very little (literally a very small, unimportant or insignificant thing) can also be trusted with much”, thus with big, important and significant things. Temporary worldly wealth, possessions and money are comparatively trivial and insignificant when they are compared to the eternal

heavenly possessions! Trustworthiness in the small matters will lead to trustworthiness in the great matters. Making wise and practical use of the earthly possessions, which God has entrusted to a Christian, will lead to God entrusting far greater heavenly possessions in God's kingdom to him. Being responsible and effective in the managing of earthly possessions and money, which God has entrusted to the Christian on earth, will lead to God entrusting him with the far greater responsibility of managing heavenly possessions in God's kingdom.

In verse 11-12, the parallelism is as follows: "The unrighteous mammon" (worldly wealth) is parallel with "someone else's property" and refers to *earthly possessions* and money, which always belongs to God, even if he entrusts it to us to use wisely and responsibly. And "the true riches" is parallel with "property of your own", and refers to *heavenly possessions*, which is God's kingdom that God gives to believers as their inheritance (Matthew 25:34; Hebrews 12:28).

When a Christian shows that he is trustworthy, that is, that he makes wise and responsible use of the earthly possessions and money, then God will also entrust to him the true riches, which consists of God's kingdom, which has been prepared for Christians from the creation of the earth and thus belongs to them! Thus, Jesus teaches his disciples that there is a close relationship between how they manage what has been entrusted to them on earth and what will be entrusted to them to manage in the new heaven and new earth. It is true that to a certain extent, the inheritance of God's kingdom begins when a person believes in Christ (John 3:3-8), and thus a trustworthy Christian will already here and now on earth be entrusted with the management of the affairs of God's kingdom, or with the management of Christians and Christian activities in the Church. Nevertheless, the emphasis is on the inheritance of God's kingdom in its final phase, the new heaven and the new earth. The rule for Christians is not to fix their eyes on the visible reality (that is temporary), but on the invisible reality (that is eternal) (2 Corinthians 4:18; 5:7).

The application. You cannot serve God and Mammon (money) at the same time. In Luke 16:13, Jesus emphasises that a Christian cannot serve God and Money at the same time. The psychological tension that builds up in the soul of a person who imagines for a while that he is able to serve both God and Money as masters, becomes so severe and unendurable, that he will sooner or later show in his attitude, words and behaviour where his real allegiance lies. Some people think they can use God to make money or that they can worship God in order to become rich (1 Timothy 6:5). But Jesus teaches his disciples that they must choose to love and serve God, including by using their worldly possessions and money to advance God's cause in this world.

3. Identify the relevant and irrelevant details of the parable.

Introduce. Jesus did not intend every detail in the story of the parable to have some spiritual significance. Parables are not allegories. The relevant details are those details in the story of the parable that reinforce the central point or main theme or lesson of the parable. Therefore, we should not ascribe independent spiritual significance to every detail of the story of the parable.

Discover and discuss. Which of the details in the story of this parable are really essential or relevant?

Notes. Jesus does not give any of the details any particular meaning. In this parable there are several details that should not be given any particular meaning.

The rich man. This is not a relevant detail. *The rich man* should not be interpreted as representing Jesus Christ or Mammon or anybody else.

The manager. This is relevant, because he is the central figure in this parable. He does, however, not represent the Christian, because a Christian may not be dishonest. "The dishonest manager" is rather the opposite of what a Christian ought to be!

The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. This is relevant. Not the manager and not his characteristic of being dishonest, is relevant. What is relevant is his characteristic of being shrewd. His foresight, sharp discernment and practical wisdom in making use of worldly possessions and money to secure his future, is the central point or main message of this parable and thus very relevant. Just as the earthly master commended this manager's practical wisdom on earth, so our heavenly Father commends the practical wisdom of Christians in making use of their worldly possessions and money to advance God's kingdom on earth.

The debtors and their debts. This is not relevant. The rich man's debtors and the amounts of their debts have no specific meaning. These are simply details that enhance the story of the parable.

4. Identify the main message of the parable.

Introduce. The main message of the parable is found either in the explanation or application or from the story itself. From the way Jesus Christ himself explained or applied the parables, we know how we should interpret parables. *A parable normally has only one main lesson, one central point to make*. Therefore, we should not try to find a spiritual truth in every detail of the story, but instead look for the one main lesson.

Discuss. What is the main message of this parable?

Notes.

The parable of the shrewd manager in Luke 16:1-13 teaches about “stewardship in God’s kingdom”.

The main message of the parable is the following. “Christians must be smart (shrewd, sharp) by using their worldly possessions to make friends for themselves for eternity.” To be smart means to devote oneself to the cause of the kingdom of God with foresight (vision), discernment and practical wisdom.

Stewardship is one of the fundamental characteristics of God’s kingdom. The genuine people of God’s kingdom use their worldly possessions and money here and now to advance God’s kingdom and to win people for God’s kingdom. The wise and responsible use of earthly possessions will certainly be rewarded. All people, who have been won into God’s kingdom or who have benefited spiritually because of the wise and responsible use of the earthly possessions of Christians, will welcome these Christians when they come into heaven!

To a certain extent, a trustworthy Christian will already here and now be entrusted with the management of the affairs of God’s kingdom or with the care of Christians in the Church. Nevertheless, the emphasis is on the inheritance of God’s kingdom in its final phase, the new heaven and the new earth. The people of God’s kingdom fix their eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. What is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

5. Compare the parable with parallel and contrasting passages in the Bible.

Introduce. Some parables are similar to one another and can be compared. However, the truth in all the parables has parallel or contrasting truth taught in other passages of the Bible. Try to find the most important cross-references that help us to interpret the parable. Always check the interpretation of a parable with the direct clear teaching of the Bible.

Discover and discuss. How does what each of these Bible passages teach, compare to what the parable of the shrewd manager teaches?

(1) The parable of the shrewd manager (Luke 16:1-13).

The parable of the shrewd manager teaches that a Christian must *be smart* (shrewd). Christians must use their possessions and money with foresight, discernment and practical wisdom. A Christian is responsible to be continually focused on the spiritual reality, which although unseen is an eternal reality (2 Corinthians 4:18; 5:7).

Matthew 6:19-24 teaches a related responsibility. He should continually store up treasures in heaven and not on earth. Nothing can destroy his treasure in heaven. Of course, the Christian should do this in an honest, wise and responsible way. The way to multiply genuine valuable possessions is to give up earthly things for the sake of Christ and his kingdom and by giving it to worthy causes.

(2) The parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:13-21).

The parable of the rich fool teaches that a Christian must *be unselfish* with respect to his wealth, possessions or money. He must not live for himself, but must reckon with God in every aspect of his life. He must be thoroughly conscious of his dependence on God.

(3) The parable of the rich show-off and the beggar Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31).

The parable of the rich show-off and the beggar Lazarus teaches that a Christian must be responsible how he *relates to the underprivileged people* in the world and how he uses his wealth, possessions or money. The consequences of his responsibility or lack of responsibility with respect to his life-style on earth before death are irreversible after death! A Christian is responsible to make friends with the lost, underprivileged and despised people of this world.

(4) The parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30).

The parable of the talents teaches that a Christian must *be faithful* in using the possessions, relationships, abilities or opportunities, which God has entrusted to him, even if it is but one talent!

6. Summarise the main teachings of the parable.

Discuss. What are the main teachings or lessons of the parable about stewardship in God’s kingdom? What did Jesus Christ teach us to *know* or to *believe* and what did he teach us to *be* or to *do*?

Notes.

(1) All people must know what God is like.

God has entrusted his possessions on earth to people so that they should be good managers of the earth and everything on it. Together with the related parables, it teaches that God is very much concerned and involved in the affairs on this world. The world and everything on it has been created by God and has been entrusted by God into the care or stewardship of man (Genesis 1:28). God will definitely hold all people responsible for how they have managed God’s earth and everything on God’s earth.

(2) Christians must know what they should be.

God not only demands that people live unselfish lives, but also are faithful and trustworthy with respect to what God has entrusted to them. It also teaches that God demands that Christians have foresight, sharp discernment and practical wisdom how they use the wealth, possessions or money, which after all belongs to God and which God has entrusted to them, in order to serve the interests of God’s kingdom on this present earth.

No individual may claim that what he possesses belongs exclusively to him. Man is not owner, but a steward of God's possessions! What he possesses has been given to him as a trust from God. God holds him responsible and will require him to give an account of what has been entrusted to him.

No nation or company or individual may claim that the raw materials of the land belong exclusively to him. They are only stewards of these raw materials. No company has the right to destroy rainforests, pollute rivers, through fishing empty the sea or killing all the wild animals on earth, etc. Everything on earth belongs to God and every government, company or individual will have to give an account to God of its stewardship of God's trust. In the final judgement, God will hold everyone responsible and accountable to how they have been stewards of God's possessions here on earth!

5	PRAYER (8 minutes)	[REACTIONS] PRAYER IN RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD
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Take turns in the group **to pray short** to God in response to what you have learned today.
Or divide the group into two's or three's and pray to God in response to what you have learned today.

6	PREPARATION (2 minutes)	[ASSIGNMENT] FOR NEXT LESSON
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(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. **Commitment.** Be committed to make disciples, build the Church and preach the kingdom.
2. **Preach, teach or study** "the shrewd manager" together with another person or group of people.
together with another person or group of people.
3. **Personal time with God.** Have a quiet time from half a chapter of Isaiah 55, 58, 59 and 61 each day.
Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
4. **Memorisation.** (2) God's Word. Psalm 119:105. Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
5. **Bible study.** Prepare the next Bible study at home. Romans 11:1-36.
Make use of the five steps method of Bible study. Make notes.
6. **Prayer.** Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
7. **Update your notebook** on preaching God's kingdom. Include your notes on quiet time, your memorisation notes, your teaching notes and this preparation.