

# A Lesson About Serpentine Wisdom

**Luke 16:8**

## Main Objectives

In this study, you will (1) look at how to use worldly wealth to "gain friends" in eternity, and (2) examine what shrewdness is and how it can be a positive trait if directed in the right way.

## The Love of Money

Scripture emphatically condemns the love of money.

**1 Timothy 6:10-11**

Jesus summed up His teaching on the matter in one clear exhortation in His Sermon on the Mount: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21).

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have. (Hebrews 13:5 NIV)

1. How does the love of money conflict with righteousness, godliness, faith, love, generosity, and gentleness?
2. What are the risks of laying up treasures for ourselves on earth?
3. Does saving money for investments such as retirement or college conflict with Jesus' teaching not to lay up treasures for ourselves on earth? Why or why not?

## Shrewd Resourcefulness

Then Jesus plainly states His whole point. "The sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light" (Luke 16:8). Sinners tend to be more clever and forward thinking and diligent with regard to their short-term temporal well-being than saints are in the work of laying up treasure for eternity. That's the whole point as stated succinctly by Jesus Himself. "Sons of this world" are those who have no part and no interest in the kingdom of God. They have nothing to look forward to except the remaining years of their earthly lives. But they are more concerned and more clever when it comes to securing an advantageous future for their retirement years than the "sons of light," who have an eternal future to prepare for. It's true. Ungodly people bring amazing energy, skill, and focus to the task of acquiring earthly comforts for the remaining years of this life. Mainly because that's all they really have to look forward to.



In as much as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (emphasis added).

This also underscores our duty to use our money to support the ministry of the gospel. Will people be standing on the edge of glory when you arrive) eager to embrace you) because through your investment in gospel ministry and the extension of the kingdom they heard and believed and gained eternal life in Christ? That’s the imagery Jesus’ exhortation evokes.

7. How can we use worldly wealth to gain friends for ourselves in our eternal home?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. What shift in our thinking is required in order for us to treat money as a resource to be used for the good of others?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. Take a moment to imagine going to heaven and being embraced by people who heard and believed in Christ because of your investment in gospel ministry. What thoughts, images, and feelings does that evoke in you?

#### **Acts 2:44-45**

#### **Hebrews 12:1**

### **Make the Connection**

Read the following Scripture passages and answer the questions provided. If you are meeting in a small group, you might want to have someone read each passage aloud before you discuss the questions related to it.

*Luke 16:1-8 (ESV)*

Steward:

10. How was the steward shrewd? What did he do that demonstrated shrewdness?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
11. What is shocking about this parable?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
12. Why do you suppose Jesus deliberately shocked His disciples in this way?

## Mark 10:24

## Luke 16:9-13

13. How can we demonstrate to God that we can be trusted with the money He has given us?

## Serve:1 Corinthians 4:2

14. Why does Jesus speak about "someone else's property" (verse 12)? In what sense have we been entrusted with someone else's property?
15. What does it mean to "serve" money (verse 13)?

## Explore the Key Points

### The Value of Shrewdness

The master didn't admire the steward's selfishness or wickedness—he admired his shrewdness. Shrewdness is cleverness, caniness, prudence, knowing how the world works, and living accordingly. The Greek word, *phronimos*, has the idea of being cautious, keen-witted, and circumspect. The steward's plan was wickedly ingenious. The steward took careful advantage of a brief and fleeting opportunity. He manipulated what resources were temporarily in his power to achieve ends that were to his long-term advantage. He used the master's resources to do those debtors immense good. He won their friendship with lavish generosity.

Jesus wants His disciples to have that same kind of forward-looking ingenuity, but focused on eternal realities. He wants us to know how the world works (with eternal rewards and punishments) and to live accordingly. He wants us to take careful advantage of this brief life to secure our eternal future. He wants us to use the material resources we have to achieve eternal ends by investing them in kingdom ventures, for those investments are what will prove to be to our long-term advantage. Jesus wants us to think beyond our senior years in this life and plan carefully and shrewdly for the next life. He wants us to use God's resources (and everything we have is God's) to do immense good for others.

### Psalm 37:3

16. How is shrewdness in itself a virtue that can be put to good or evil ends?
17. What is an example of a practice that would be considered shrewd if there were no God and eternal life, but not shrewd if there is a God and an eternal destiny?

18. What is an example of the reverse-a practice that is shrewd if God and eternal destiny are real but not shrewd if they aren't?

## The Importance of Stewardship

Everything we possess ultimately belongs to God. He has entrusted it to us to use wisely by His standards. "The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine," says the LORD of hosts" (Haggai 2:8). "The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein" (Psalm 24:1). The psalmist says to God, "The earth is full of Your possessions" (Psalm 104:24). God has entrusted us with much or little to be invested in the good of others and the glory of God.

Also, everything we have is temporary. "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Timothy 6:7). Those who are not investing in the work of redemption are shirking their duty to be faithful stewards, wasting this passing moment of opportunity, and impoverishing themselves in eternity. God doesn't reward people for frittering away His resources. To spend money on creature comforts and worthless diversions is to rob ourselves of true and eternal riches.

The tragic irony of self-indulgence is that the more we waste on ourselves in the here and now, the less treasure we will have in heaven. The true riches are over there. "We do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18).

Whether we have much or little, we will have to give an account for what we do with it. True character is seen in how we handle the small things. "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much" (Luke 16:10). Truly faithful people are generous because of their character, not their circumstances. If we see the immense value of investing in eternity, we will do it with whatever resources we have-in small ways if our resources are small, and in bigger ways if our resources are greater.

### Proverbs 11:4

19. What are the implications of the fact that everything you possess belongs to God and He has entrusted it to you? What difference does that make in the way you spend?
20. What makes it harder for you to live as if true riches are the riches of eternity? What makes it easier?
21. What is the immense value of investing in eternity? Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. (Matthew 24:35)

We've covered a lot in this lesson. Now it is your chance to pull it all together and decide what is the most important principle(s) you need to take to heart. You probably can't change your life in half a dozen ways this week, so prayerfully consider what is God's top priority for you.

22. What is your main takeaway(s) from this lesson? What do you want to take to heart as you go forward?

23. What are some things you will do to apply what you've learned?