

Learning More with  
**Stories of the Master**

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~ **The Shrewd Servant and the Wealthy Landowner** ~

You can learn much more about this story by doing these three things:

1. Read Luke 16:1-17.
2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.
3. Answer the reflective questions.

**1. Read the text of the story.**

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Luke 16:1-17 NASB	Luke 16:1-17 NLT
<p>Now He was also saying to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and this <i>manager</i> was reported to him as squandering his possessions. <sup>2</sup> And he called him and said to him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an accounting of your management, for you can no longer be manager.’ <sup>3</sup> The manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig; I am ashamed to beg. <sup>4</sup> I know what I shall do, so that when I am removed from the management people will welcome me into their homes.’ <sup>5</sup> And he summoned each one of his master’s debtors, and he <i>began</i> saying to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ <sup>6</sup> And he said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ And he said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’ <sup>7</sup> Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ And he said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ He <i>said</i> to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’ <sup>8</sup> And his master praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light. <sup>9</sup> And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings.</p> <p><sup>10</sup> “He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. <sup>11</sup> Therefore if you have not been faithful in the <i>use of</i> unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true <i>riches</i> to you? <sup>12</sup> And if you have not been faithful in <i>the use of</i> that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own? <sup>13</sup> No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and</p>	<p>Jesus told this story to his disciples: “There was a certain rich man who had a manager handling his affairs. One day a report came that the manager was wasting his employer’s money. <sup>2</sup> So the employer called him in and said, ‘What’s this I hear about you? Get your report in order, because you are going to be fired.’</p> <p><sup>3</sup> “The manager thought to himself, ‘Now what? My boss has fired me. I don’t have the strength to dig ditches, and I’m too proud to beg. <sup>4</sup> Ah, I know how to ensure that I’ll have plenty of friends who will give me a home when I am fired.’</p> <p><sup>5</sup> “So he invited each person who owed money to his employer to come and discuss the situation. He asked the first one, ‘How much do you owe him?’ <sup>6</sup> The man replied, ‘I owe him 800 gallons of olive oil.’ So the manager told him, ‘Take the bill and quickly change it to 400 gallons.’</p> <p><sup>7</sup> ““And how much do you owe my employer?’ he asked the next man. ‘I owe him 1,000 bushels of wheat,’ was the reply. ‘Here,’ the manager said, ‘take the bill and change it to 800 bushels.’</p> <p><sup>8</sup> “The rich man had to admire the dishonest rascal for being so shrewd. And it is true that the children of this world are more shrewd in dealing with the world around them than are the children of the light. <sup>9</sup> Here’s the lesson: Use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends. Then, when your earthly possessions are gone, they will welcome you to an eternal home.</p> <p><sup>10</sup> “If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful</p>

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<p>despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”</p> <p><sup>14</sup> Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him.</p> <p><sup>15</sup> And He said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.</p> <p><sup>16</sup> “The Law and the Prophets <i>were proclaimed</i> until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. <sup>17</sup> But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail.”</p>	<p>in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won’t be honest with greater responsibilities. <sup>11</sup> And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven? <sup>12</sup> And if you are not faithful with other people’s things, why should you be trusted with things of your own?</p> <p><sup>13</sup> “No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”</p> <p><sup>14</sup> The Pharisees, who dearly loved their money, heard all this and scoffed at him. <sup>15</sup> Then he said to them, “You like to appear righteous in public, but God knows your hearts. What this world honors is detestable in the sight of God.</p> <p><sup>16</sup> “Until John the Baptist, the law of Moses and the messages of the prophets were your guides. But now the Good News of the Kingdom of God is preached, and everyone is eager to get in. <sup>17</sup> But that doesn’t mean that the law has lost its force. It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the smallest point of God’s law to be overturned.</p>
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## 2. Discover key cultural and historical insights

From *Poet and Peasant* by Kenneth Bailey, pages 86-118

1. The master in the story would most likely be an upright man who would be part of village life. He was not an accomplice with the unrighteous manager because that would have damaged his good reputation.
2. Renters would pay a fee to the manager who acted as an agent for the master. This was prescribed under the Mishnaic regulations.
3. The manager would also get a little extra at feast times, harvest times, or other social occasions. This was a token amount and was considered legitimate and honorable.
4. What is written in the bills is public information and would be discussed publicly.
5. The steward in the story was an estate manager.
6. Renters could pay in three ways – cash, a percentage of crops, a fixed rate. Jesus’ story points to a fixed rate arrangement.
7. The amounts would not be due until harvest but the renters would be considered in debt from the date they signed the agreement.
8. The master would know the exact amount charged to his renters. He would also keep close watch on his source of wealth. Once he heard of cheating he fired the steward.

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9. The manager does not argue with the master. This shows:
  - he is guilty
  - the master knows the details
  - he cannot get his job back by offering excuses.
10. He summons one of the land renters. Summoning implies authority and the renters assume the master has an important message for them. It is not harvest. The bills are set.
11. He tells the first one, “write quickly,” the steward knows he has only a short time. The renters do not know the steward has been fired, otherwise, they will not go along with the scheme for they would not break faith with the master who then would not rent land to them.
12. The renters assume the master has decided to reduce the bill and that the steward has had a hand in the master’s generosity. The Mishna allows for reduction of debts if trees die, or blight spreads across a field or a spring dries up, the owner would be expected to reduce the bill. The renter would negotiate with the owner. But here, the owner is acting unilaterally.
13. The celebration begins in the village – the word spreads of the master’s generosity. Word gets to the master that he is a gracious and generous man. He cannot afford to tell them what really happened because that would cause him to lose face in his culture. He must go along with the praise.

### 3. Answer these reflective questions.

**Based upon the cultural insights in Part 2, what kind of man do you think the wealthy landowner was? Why was it important for him to maintain his good name as a generous man?**

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**Based upon the cultural insights in Part 2, what kind of man do you think the manager was? What would motivate him to cheat on his master?**

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**What do you think of the manager’s scheme to reduce the debts in the name of his master? What were its strengths and weaknesses? How could this plan have failed?**

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**Jesus said “the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light.” What do you think he meant by this and how did it relate to the story? Do you believe you are as wise in the things of God as a worldly man is in the things of the world?**

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**Jesus said the kingdom of God is being preached and all kinds of people are eagerly coming into it. What is your response to Jesus’ kingdom message?**

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