

**“Wily Love”**  
Luke 16:1-13  
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Imagine life if everyone put as much energy into loving as they put into attaining money?

**Luke 16:1-8 NLT** “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. 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.’ “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. Ah, I know how to ensure that I’ll have plenty of friends who will give me a home when I am fired.’ “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?’ 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.’ ““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.’ “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.”

There are a wide array of translations and interpretations of this parable. Amy-Jill Levine reminds us, “If the interpretation does not raise for us more questions, if it does not open us up to more conversation, if it creates a neat and tidy picture, we need to go back and read it again.” Moreover, a parable should disturb. “If we hear it and are not disturbed, there is something seriously amiss with our moral compass.” Parables are meant to shock us into a new way of thinking and living.

One shock is that the master commends the bad manager instead of punishing him. Another shock is that one should do all within their power, even being dishonest, to make friends. Another shock is this dishonest manager was not arrested. Another shock is that these debtors became his friend merely by a better deal. Another shock is how did this manager stay on in his role to negotiate all these deals after he was fired? Another shock is that all the money that the manager stole is suddenly gone leaving him with few options. Another shock is the manager didn’t try to justify his behavior, didn’t make excuses, rather immediately assessed the situation and his skills then quickly put a new plan into action. What shocks you about this story?

Before we even get to interpretations there are at least three ways of inferring what is happening with the reduction of debt. According to the first option, the manager is a crook, plain and simple, who dishonestly falsifies the records in order to gain the affection of the debtors. In this case, he is cheating his master by reducing the size of the debts, and he is running the risk of being thrown in the slammer for stealing.

A second option sees the manager as a shrewd businessman, one who is willing to sacrifice short-term earnings for long-term security. The manager cuts his own commission out of the amount that the debtors owe. The 800 gallons of olive oil can be broken down into 400 for the owner, and 400 for the manager, and in the same way, the 1000 bushels of wheat can be itemized as 800 for the owner and 200 for the manager. When the manager calls the debtors to settle their accounts, he simply eliminates his own commission, knowing that he will benefit in the long term from having a place to stay once he is out of work. This option helps us make sense of the owner’s reaction commending the manager for acting shrewdly, because he knows that there are times in which it is beneficial to resist the lure of a quick buck and make a long-term investment. On top of this, the owner knows that he hasn’t lost anything himself — he’ll still get the olive oil and the wheat that the debtors owe him. What does he care if his former employee takes his commissions with him or not? It might even be good for future business because the debtors just got a great deal. In this option everyone benefits from the managers scheme. The debtors owe less. The owner collects on his debts and appears generous. The fired manager makes new friends.

Another option is that the manager was overcharging the debtors. The lower debt represents what they should have been charged in the first place. In order to make friends, the manager does creative lying to convince them that he is not a thief rather merely renegotiating for them a better deal.

Saint Augustine believes the message is “to have foresight for the future.” G. K. Chesterton concludes, “To be clever enough to get all that money, one must be stupid enough to want it.” Thomas Fuller wrote, “One is not poor that hath not much but craves much.” Synthesis says the takeaway is “to assess dire situations, act cleverly and adapt.” Kathy Thorne believes the insight is “to use the things of the world in the service of God as astutely as the wiliest of schemers would use the resources at their disposal.” Beth Quick thinks Jesus is teaching us “to be as wise, as shrewd, in our discipleship as others with their money.” Homiletics concludes, “Thou shalt invest in long-term savings—eternal savings and Thou shalt participate in community, for community endures forever.” On October 2, 1977 Pastor Meisenheimer proclaimed, “Face life squarely and meet every day with resourcefulness and ambition.”

Some of your insights from this scripture are: Trust God not wealth. Think outside of the box to solve problems. What’s really important is God and friends not money. Cannot serve both personal gain and serve others, you must choose. Strive to use all your skills to better the lives of others. Forgiveness has short- and long-term implications—all for the better.

The scripture continues, however Biblical scholars are not in consensus whether these next words are from Jesus, or from Luke, or were valued sayings of that era. **Luke 16:9-13 NLT “Here’s the lesson: Use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends. Then, when your possessions are gone, they will welcome you to an eternal home.” “If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won’t be honest with greater responsibilities. And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven? And if you are not faithful with other people’s things, why should you be trusted with things of your own? “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 God and be enslaved to money.”**

My Dad believes in loving God, family, and the land. He kept teaching and demonstrating care for the land for future generations. We could have made a lot more money and done a lot less work on the farm. Even though we owned the land, my Dad believed the most important thing was to care for the land, to pass the land onto the next generation in better shape than you received it. We used more expensive organic fertilizer that was nourishing to worms and soil microbes. We took land out of production, planting trees as a buffer around the fields to reduce wind erosion. We planted prairie around the wetlands to filter runoff and planted grass waterways to reduce water erosion. We left some of our crop for food and shelter for wildlife. My Dad believed the long-term health of the land was to be valued over a fleeting harvest.

As long as I can remember, I have worried about having enough money to live. Most of my worry is unfounded. A series of disasters would need to happen for me to be destitute, yet I still worry. In addition, I worry about money for this church, schools, organizations, the poor and our country. I am striving to shift my worry about money to creative ways of loving.

Imagine if even most people put as much energy into love as they do into money, how glorious the world and our lives will become. Imagine the freedom, peace, shalom, community, unity, wholeness, health we can attain as a country if everyone, every politician, made loving every person their top priority and based all their decisions on the option that will provide the most love for the most people. Imagine the world if every country loves all countries. Since we are currently in a mess, love starts with forgiveness, letting go of the past, letting go of revenge, letting go of trying to dominate and control others. Love will flourish as each person is honest with themselves about their situation, about their abilities and puts a daily plan into action to love extravagantly. Perhaps we are to live a little like Wile E Coyote always doing something new, creative, imaginative, and despite always failing, always trying again. Is Jesus calling us to have wily love?

Please listen to the parable again for the Message translations. What shocks you? How is God inviting you to change? **Luke 16:1-13 MSG “Jesus said to his disciples, “There was once a rich man who had a manager. He got reports that the manager had been taking advantage of his position by running up huge personal expenses. So, he called him in and said, ‘What’s this I hear about you? You’re fired. And I want a complete audit of your books.’ “The manager said to himself, ‘What am I going to do? I’ve lost my job as manager. I’m not strong enough for a laboring job, and I’m too proud to beg. . . . Ah, I’ve got a plan. Here’s what I’ll do . . . then when I’m turned out into the street, people will take me into their houses.’ “Then he went at it. One after another, he called in the people who were in debt to his master. He said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ “He replied, ‘A hundred jugs of olive oil.’ “The manager**

said, 'Here, take your bill, sit down here—quick now—write fifty.' "To the next he said, 'And you, what do you owe?' "He answered, 'A hundred sacks of wheat.' "He said, 'Take your bill, write in eighty.' "Now here's a surprise: The master praised the crooked manager! And why? Because he knew how to look after himself. Streetwise people are smarter in this regard than law-abiding citizens. They are on constant alert, looking for angles, surviving by their wits. I want you to be smart in the same way—but for what is right—using every adversity to stimulate you to creative survival, to concentrate your attention on the bare essentials, so you'll live, really live, and not complacently just get by on good behavior." Jesus went on to make these comments: If you're honest in small things, you'll be honest in big things; If you're a crook in small things, you'll be a crook in big things. If you're not honest in small jobs, who will put you in charge of the store? No worker can serve two bosses: He'll either hate the first and love the second or adore the first and despise the second. You can't serve both God and the Bank.

What shocks you most about this parable? What new way of thinking is emerging for you? How is God inviting you to be? What is God inviting you to do? Parables are shared to change the way you live, to transform you more into the likeness of Jesus. How will you change today? this week? What will you do different? You are invited to join the conversation about this parable in the Fireside Room after worship. Amen