

Empowering God's Ministries Together  
The Power of a Wise Investment  
Luke 19:11-27

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Dr. J. Howard Olds

After church one Sunday a small boy walked up to his pastor and said, "When I grow up and get a job, I'm going to give you lots and lots of money." A little shocked, the pastor replied, "Well, thank you very much, but what is prompting you to do something like that?" "Well," said the kid, "My daddy says you are the poorest preacher we have ever had."

If stewardship were a matter of paying the preacher, we could lower his salary and get on with life. If stewardship were a matter of raising a budget, we could assess each member their fair share and bill them by the month. Stewardship is about our relationship with God. It involves our time, our talents, and yes, our tithes. God not only calls us to quit what is wrong, but to do what is right. And to illustrate that point Jesus tells the sobering parable of the Ten Minas, or the ten pounds. And that's where I want to land today.

**MONEY IS A TRUST WE RECEIVE.**

One of the constant criticisms of the Church is that we talk too much about money. Unless you are addicted to religious television, that is simply not true. Jesus talked more about money than he did about prayer. While stewardship involves devotion to prayer and commitment to service, it also involves the spiritual management of our financial resources. Stewardship has to do with what we give of what we have, what we do with what we keep, and what we plan for what we leave.

Jesus tells a story. It's a sobering story, not a happy one at all. I am sorry, but Jesus told it and I need to tell it to you today. A man of noble birth, whom nobody liked and nobody admired, took a trip to Rome to have himself appointed king. At this point the parable is history for that is exactly what happened in the reign of King Herod and King Agrippa. They had to get themselves appointed as a part of the Emperor's cabinet.

So this would-be king called ten of his servants together and gave them ten minas. Now a mina, or pound, is a Greek word for a unit of currency. My Bible tells me that a mina was about three month's wages. You do the math. The point is that they had nothing and he gave them something. If a greedy, self-serving, power-hungry, want-to-be king would make a gift to his servants for his own benefit, how much more has a loving, graceful, sacrificial Lord, given his best for you and me? All Christian stewardship begins here. We are not owners. We are managers or trustees. All that we have or hope to acquire belongs to God.

*In the 24th Chapter of Psalms we read, "The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof," and then in Psalm 50, "God owns the cattle on a thousand hills," and in Psalm 8, "the sun, the moon, the stars are his." "The silver is mine and the gold is mine, declares the Lord Almighty" (Haggai 2:8). James 1:17 says, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father in Heaven."*

Through the years Sandy and I have been privileged to vacation in other peoples' houses. While our hosts always say, "Make yourself at home," there are a thousand reminders that we are visitors. The décor reflects the owners, the pictures are portraits of their family, the mail is addressed to them, and the workers are employed by them. All these are reminders that we are temporary stewards of things which belong to another.

Capitalism has taught us to say this is my house, my life, my car, my job, my investments. Who am I kidding but myself? We are never more than one breath away from leaving it all behind. The question is not how much of my money should I give to God? The question is how much of God's money should I keep for myself? Maybe it's time to stamp all our possessions with a label that says, "Given by God, owned by God, to be used for the purposes of God." If we don't get that worked out down in our souls, all of the rest of the stuff about supporting the Church is useless. Money is a trust we receive from God.

#### **MONEY IS AN INVESTMENT WE MAKE.**

"Put this money to work until I come back." "Do business until I come back." The Greek word is pragmatic and practical. Your potential is God's gift to you. What you do with it is your gift to God. The aim of life is not to live as safe as possible, but as purposefully as possible. You're blest to invest.

H.G. Wells said, "The only true measure of success is the relation between what we might have been and what we have become." Teddy Roosevelt put it this way, "Do what you can with what you have where you are." John Wesley said, "Earn all you can, save all you can, give all you can." Life is an investment we make with what we have and we have to learn that lesson in our souls.

Tony Campolo is a fiery Baptist preacher with a social conscience that will put us all to shame. Tony says, "I was speaking at a World Day of Prayer Conference. There were about a thousand women there. The leader read a letter from this missionary in Venezuela saying they desperately needed \$5,000 to extend their overcrowded hospital." Upon finishing the letter, the leader asked Tony if he would offer a prayer that God would provide their needs. Tony jumped to his feet and said, "No, I'm not going to ask God for something that you've already got in your pockets. It's already provided." With that Tony emptied his pocket of the cash he was carrying and when he finished he asked the leader to do the same. Between the two of them there was \$112.00 on the altar. Turning to the congregation, Tony continued. "Now if you all are serious about helping the people of Venezuela, I want each of you to come here and do the same. There will be no checks, no credit cards, just the cash you have in your pocket." After they

looked at me as if I had lost my mind, they started filing forward one at a time and when the offering was completed there was \$7,000 in cash on the altar. We are in the investment business. Do you understand? Everything we have is a trust from God, but what we do with what we have is God's question of each of us. Money is an investment we make.

**MONEY IS AN ACCOUNTABILITY WE ASSUME.**

*"Then he sent for his servants to whom he had given the money in order to find out what they had gained with it" Luke 19:15.*

American Statesman Daniel Webster once said, "The most profound and important thought ever to occupy my mind is that I am individually accountable to Almighty God." On the day of reckoning, one servant took a mina and made ten, another took a mina and made five, one took a mina and held his own, and seven failed to show up at all.

Are you handling your resources wisely for the glory of God and the good of people? My observation is that we tend to live in denial of our spending, in faithlessness about our finances, and in ignorance of our assets. Jesus said, *"Don't invest your treasures where moths eat it up, rust destroys it and thieves break in and steal it"*—You have got to be smarter than that. You have to relate to life from a different frame of reference.

Some of you are drowning in debt. You would do yourself and God a great service today to cut up your credit cards, sell the boat, buy a less expensive car, move into a house that you can afford, eat at home more often, and find ways to have fun without compromising your family's future. The name of the game is not keeping up with your neighbor. We need to learn how to possess money without having money possessing us.

Some of you have more money than you ever dreamed possible. You earned it fair and square. You took one mina and turned it into ten. The Lord's been good to you. Now what are you going to do? Spend it on yourself? Buy a bigger home than you need? Indulge yourself in the luxuries of life? If money determines what we do or do not do, then money is our boss. If God determines what we do or do not do, then God is our boss. Who is your boss?

Some of us are ignorant about our assets. We've got more money than we think we have. We have property that has multiplied in value, savings that could yield more return than we imagine, retirement accounts that could be invested for the benefit of others, as well as ourselves. When are we going to alert ourselves to the possibilities and maximize the potential that is at our fingertips?

Abraham managed large holdings for the glory of God and the greater public good. So did Job, David, Solomon, Nicodemus, Zaccheus, and Lydia. They learned to use their resources for the good of other people. So can we. Money is an accountability that we take.

### **MONEY IS A RESPONSIBILITY WE EMBRACE.**

The parable gets hard here. The wicked king says to the bystanders, "Take the mina away from the one mina man and give it to the one who has ten." Even the bystanders protest. "Sir, you can't do that," but the king does it anyway. Then he has his enemies killed in his presence.

I come away from this story saying, "Is God like that?" I hope not. Robbing the poor to pay the rich. That hardly rings true for the One who said, "*Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" The parable is a lesson in contrasts. The parable does imply that we who have also bear responsibility for those who do not have.

Over the last few weeks I have worked with three families facing a major crisis in health care amounting to thousands of dollars. These are not people who live on the streets; these are people who live in Brentwood. I don't pretend to understand the health care business and I am not smart enough to answer the predicament of Tenn. Care in this state. But this much I know; historically the Church has thrived by finding a need and trying to fill it. It's done that with colleges, with hospitals, with retirement homes and children's homes. We must now find a way to bridge the gap between those who have health coverage and those who do not. We must offer ourselves to medical clinics and our expertise to solve insurance problems for the good of all. Some of you know the answer. When are we going to get beyond ourselves and provide a solution for the world?

If we are going to encourage people not to have abortions, then we must do our part to find loving foster homes and adoptive families for children at risk. It is our responsibility. That's why we support Miriam's Promise. If we are going to live in a world community, then we better find ways to understand and respect the people and religions of the world. If the government is not going to feed the hungry and house the homeless, then the Church has no choice but to engage in such ministries. By far the largest projected increase in our spending for 2005 is denominational and local church outreach—in Williamson County, in the Greater Nashville Area and around the World.

So it's time for some of us to start tithing. It's time for some of us to move beyond a tithe. It's time for others of us to begin percentage giving. It's time for all of us to do something for the glory of God and the good of others. Life is a wonderful trust, but what we do with it is our response and responsibility to God. Amen.











