

**Leader's Guide  
for  
The Bible Stories Video Project:  
The Parables of Jesus**

*Straight to the Heart*

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# The Parables of Jesus Leader's Guide

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction to this program .....</b>	<b>p. 3</b>
<b>Lesson plan for Program 1 .....</b>	<b>p. 4</b>
<b>Lesson plan for Program 2 .....</b>	<b>p. 7</b>
<b>Lesson plan for Program 3 .....</b>	<b>p. 10</b>
<b>Lesson plan for Program 4 .....</b>	<b>p. 13</b>
<b>Lesson plan for Program 5 .....</b>	<b>p. 17</b>
<b>Lesson plan for Program 6 .....</b>	<b>p. 20</b>
<b>Lesson plan for Program 7 .....</b>	<b>p. 23</b>

## **Introduction to *The Parables of Jesus***

When Jesus told parables, people enjoyed them. He was a brilliant communicator.

The parables are not just truths about Jesus, they are truths taught by Jesus himself. But for many people today, two thousand years distant from their original setting, some of these stories are not easy to understand. That is why we have tried to show them in the culture of Bible times. I hope you enjoy the video.

At the end of each lesson you will see some notes I call “Odds and Ends.” These are not the detailed footnotes you would find in an academic paper or a book. Some of them are Bible texts which relate to the ideas in the story. Others are references to ancient sources, and a few are comments of my own which you may find interesting.

There are many books available on the parables. For a good introduction story by story, I would recommend *The Parables of Jesus*, by Simon J. Kistemaker, published by Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI., 1980. On the parable of the prodigal son the book which has influenced me most is *Finding the Lost Cultural Keys to Luke 15* by Kenneth Bailey, published by Concordia, St. Louis, 1992.

Most of all, I hope you will feel the impact of these stories, almost as if you were hearing them for the first time. Some of them are disturbing. I have found them so. But they are wonderfully insightful and encouraging. They go straight to the heart.

Christopher Gornold-Smith,  
Director and Host of *The Parables of Jesus*

## **Lesson 1: The Good Samaritan**

**Scripture Reference: Luke 10:25-37**

**Theme: God calls us to show love to those who are different from us. He calls us to radically re-think the calling to be a good neighbor.**

*Opening questions for use before viewing program 1:*

1. Name a place where you would feel unsafe walking alone. What frightens you about this place? What justification do you have for these fears?
2. Think of several ethnic or religious groups that have strong hatred for each other. Can you think of global, national, and local examples? Describe the basis for their feelings towards each other.
3. What qualities would you look for in a “good neighbor?” Now imagine the groups you mentioned in question #2 trying to live together in a single neighborhood. How might the neighborhood dynamics play out?
4. Think of your own family of origin. What ethnic slurs were part of your household’s vocabulary? What prejudices might have been communicated to you during your formative years?
5. Do you struggle to view all people as equally valuable and precious to God? When you ride public transportation and have your choice of seats, how do you choose? Do you tend to sit near people of an ethnic and economic background similar to your own?
6. What tangible ways are prejudices evident in your community?

***Read the Scripture aloud and then view Program 1: The Good Samaritan***

*Questions for use after program 1:*

1. Describe the relationship between Jews and Samaritans at this time. What adjectives might a Jew use to describe a Samaritan?
2. What prevented the Priest and Levite from pausing to help the injured man? What was the potential cost to them?
3. As God's chosen people, the Jews had reason to feel elevated in importance. How did their pride affect their ability to understand Jesus' plans to enlarge the kingdom?
4. What is the heart attitude of the Samaritan? What risks was he taking in stopping to help the injured man? What was he willing to give to help this man?
5. The Samaritan gave the innkeeper two *denarii*, or two days' wages for a working man (Matthew 20:2). How much would that be today?
6. Is there an ethnic or religious group that you might have difficulty in helping during a time of need?
7. What types of needs are you aware of in your circle of influence, or in your "neighborhood?" Do you see more physical needs or more emotional and spiritual needs?
8. At the beginning of this story, Jesus is asked "Who is my neighbor?" How does he change the whole question around?
9. How will you heed Jesus' calling to be a better neighbor even when it is difficult, risky, and costly?

***Now try using the three “heart” questions:***

1. Heart Check Up. (*Where am I now?*)
2. Straight to the Heart (*What does Jesus teach?*)
3. A Changed Heart (*What do I need to change?*)

***ODDS AND ENDS FROM THE DIRECTOR:***

The scribe’s reply to Jesus was from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18.

Even in Old Testament times there was confrontation between the Samaritans and the Jews. (Nehemiah 4:1-2)

About 128 B.C. the Jews under John Hyrcanus destroyed the temple of the Samaritans on mount Gerizim. (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XIII.254-258). How do you think the Samaritans felt about it?

Then, during a Passover festival between 6 and 9 A.D., the Samaritans put the bones of pigs in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVIII.29-30). How do you think the Jews felt about this?

The Samaritan’s use of oil and wine was very practical. Wine was used as a disinfectant for wounds (Nigel F. Hepper, *Baker Encyclopedia of Bible Plants*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House. 1992). Olive oil has biostatic properties which help to prevent infection. It also stops the bandages from sticking to the wounds and thus promotes healing. (B.M. Bennet and D.H. Scott, *Encyclopedia of Bible Life*. London, UK: A&C Black, 1979). Compare Isaiah 1:6.

## **Lesson 2: The Unmerciful Servant**

**Scripture Reference: Matthew 18: 21-35**

**Theme: Jesus calls us to forgive others from the heart. Forgiveness is not a sign of weakness, but rather a sign of strength.**

*Opening questions for use before viewing program 2:*

1. Brainstorm a definition of 'Forgiven.'
2. Name some specific offenses you have had to forgive or have needed to be forgiven.
3. How can you tell if forgiveness is genuine and complete?
4. Is there any validity to the phrase "forgive and forget?" Why or why not?
5. What offenses would be particularly difficult for you to forgive?

***Read the Scripture aloud and then view Program 2: The Unmerciful Servant***

*Questions for use after program 2:*

1. What sin has the unmerciful servant been confronted with? What words would you use to describe his character?
2. Give some adjectives to describe the king.
3. What is motivating the king's forgiveness?
4. Why is the servant's subsequent action so shocking?
5. The king in Jesus' parable is representative of God. Discuss the parallels.
6. Read Matthew 18:21. Peter thinks he is being quite generous in offering to forgive someone up to seven times. However, Jesus turns the whole concept around, effectively saying we should forgive an unlimited number of times. Considering all that Jesus has forgiven us, why do we find it hard to follow this command?
7. Seeking God's forgiveness is highly important when we sin. Why is it also important to seek forgiveness from those we've offended or hurt?
8. Have you had the experience of someone confronting you when you've sinned or hurt them? How did you handle that?
9. What can you do to build genuine relationships so that your close acquaintances are comfortable sharing your faults with you?
10. Make a commitment to build genuine, honest relationships; to seek forgiveness when needed; and to forgive generously.

***Now try using the three “heart” questions:***

1. Heart Check Up. (*Where am I now?*)
2. Straight to the Heart (*What does Jesus teach?*)
3. A Changed Heart (*What do I need to change?*)

***ODDS AND ENDS FROM THE DIRECTOR:***

At the time of Jesus one *talent* (monetary unit) was equal to six thousand *denarii*. The *denarius* was a silver coin, which was one day’s wage for a working man (Matthew 20:2). Ten thousand *talents* multiplied by six thousand *denarii* would have been sixty million days wages for a worker. The whole point is that it is unimaginably large, the kind of money we can’t even comprehend. Even for a rich and powerful king this loss was painful. Forgiveness was not expected.

The title “servant of the king” could be used of a very high official. When we say “the Secretary of State” or “the Foreign Secretary” we don’t mean someone who just types letters and files documents. So, “the servant of the king” could mean someone with enormous power, or it could mean someone much further down the scale. You must look at the context. In view of the enormous sum of money involved, this man must have been a high ranking courtier, a powerful and corrupt official. This was public money. It belonged to the kingdom. And no one can just lose that amount of money.

The theologian Karl Barth said, “Sin is not a child’s prank that God will tolerate. It is very grievous, and God can blot it out only by entering the lists with the totality of his Godhead.” The forgiveness of sins is not a weakness, a soft spot in the character of God. It is certainly not the pushing aside of justice. The forgiveness of sins took God to the cross.

Jesus said, "If you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive other people, neither will your Father forgive your sins." (Matthew 6:14, 15)

## **Lesson 3: The Treasure and the Pearl**

**Scripture Reference: Matthew 13:44-46**

**Theme: The kingdom of God is more important than anything else.**

***Opening questions for use before viewing program 3:***

1. If you were given a huge amount of money to spend on yourself, what would be first on your list of items to purchase? What “treasure” have you admired or longed for?
2. Which of your possessions has the highest monetary value?
3. Which of your possessions has the highest sentimental value?
4. Compare these two possessions. Which would you rather give up if you were forced to make a choice?
5. Think about your faith walk. Are there items you’ve given up because of your faith? What sacrifices have you made in order to follow God more fully? Think beyond material items.
6. Brainstorm a definition of the word “idol.”

***Read the Scripture aloud and then view Program 3: The Treasure and the Pearl***

*Questions for use after program 3:*

1. In the first story, Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to treasure buried in a field. A poor farm worker finds it accidentally. Have you ever known anyone to stumble on the treasure of the Kingdom by accident? Tell about that.
2. The second story describes a merchant who is searching for fine pearls. This man is diligently seeking the treasure. Have you known someone who found the Kingdom of God through diligent searching? Which of these two ways more accurately depicts your own faith journey?
3. How do the two men in the parables show that the treasure they've found is worth far more than all they have?
4. This treasure is not only the best of all their possessions, it's better than all their possessions combined. Why is this an important distinction? Can you imagine literally giving all that you have in order to gain the Kingdom of God?
5. Consider Matthew 19:24. Why would it be harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God than a poor man?
6. As Christians, we are to be good stewards of all that God has entrusted to us on earth. Beyond possessions, this includes time and talents. Which of these things is hardest for you to give to the Lord?
7. God wants to be first in your life. How do you know if something or someone has become an idol in your life, taking the place of God as your top priority? What can you do to put God back on the throne of your life?

***Now try using the three “heart” questions:***

1. Heart Check Up. (*Where am I now?*)
2. Straight to the Heart (*What does Jesus teach?*)
3. A Changed Heart (*What do I need to change?*)

***ODDS AND ENDS FROM THE DIRECTOR:***

Jewish law recorded in the Mishnah, Baba Bathra 4:4, relates the rights of ownership when treasure was discovered. The story follows this exactly. While it is true that the Mishnah was written at a later date, the oral tradition behind it is much earlier, much of it from the New Testament period.

In the Roman Empire some pearls came from the Red Sea and were famous for their brilliance; others came from the Indian Ocean. We forget how valuable pearls were in the ancient world. What we call pearls today are often synthetic imitations. Even real pearls are cultured by putting an irritant into the oyster. In ancient times pearls were found by diving in the ocean, without any breathing equipment, of course. No scuba diving in those days! And the pearls themselves had formed naturally, so some oysters contained nothing of value. A large, perfectly shaped pearl was rare.

“Cleopatra said she would spend ten million sesterces on one banquet... [She] took off one ear-ring, dropped the pearl in the vinegar and... swallowed it.” Pliny, *Natural History*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Classics, 1991. p.137.

The Roman writer Suetonius tells of Julius Caesar giving a pearl to Servilia, mother of Brutus. “But beyond all others Caesar loved Servilia, the mother of Marcus Brutus, for whom in his first consulship he bought a pearl costing six million sesterces.” Suetonius, *Life of Julius Caesar*, L. Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1979. p.69.

Proverbs 4:7

“Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom.  
Though it cost all you have, get understanding.”

## **Lesson 4: The Lost Son**

**Scripture Reference: Luke 15:11-32**

**Theme: The great welcome. God loves and receives the lost.**

*Opening questions for use before viewing program 4:*

1. Describe the heritage/legacy that is yours by virtue of your family of origin. Besides possessions, what values, morals, and beliefs were given to you as an “inheritance” through your family?
2. When have you shunned that inheritance to pursue other things?
3. Come up with a group definition of “Prodigal.” Once you’ve got an agreed upon definition, consult a dictionary.
4. Do you know someone who is a prodigal? Have you personally been a prodigal?
5. We usually think of a prodigal squandering material wealth. What other types of things might a prodigal squander?

***Read the Scripture aloud and then view Program 4: The Lost Son***

*Questions for use after program 4:*

1. Describe the various blessings and benefits that were available to both the sons. Who was responsible for giving these men such a rich heritage?
2. In what ways is their heritage similar to the heritage and blessing we receive as members of God's kingdom?
3. The foolishness of the younger son is almost comical and seems plain enough for all to see. Why do you think he is the last to recognize his poor choices?
4. In his darkest hour, the younger son's humiliation is made complete by having to feed pigs, which were "unclean animals." What evidence do we see that his repentance is genuine?
5. Discuss the reaction of the following people to the prodigal's return: The townspeople, the brother, the father.
6. The older brother is blind to his own sins of self-righteousness and pride. Which brother is right with the father at the end of the story?
7. The father's love for his son is extravagant! He not only forgives this repentant sinner, but joyfully welcomes him back as a beloved and cherished son. When you have repented of sin, have you felt this extravagant, undeserved forgiveness from God?
8. Have you been able to fully forgive those who've been lost but have now returned to faith? Have you been able to extend to them a genuine and sincere welcome? If not, how can you do so?
9. Who is the story really about? The prodigal, the older brother or the father?

***Now try using the three “heart” questions:***

1. Heart Check Up. (*Where am I now?*)
2. Straight to the Heart (*What does Jesus teach?*)
3. A Changed Heart (*What do I need to change?*)

***ODDS AND ENDS FROM THE DIRECTOR:***

The story of the prodigal presented an interesting challenge. When the text of Luke 15:13 literally says, “He scattered his property in unsaved living,” what precisely do we show on camera? A preacher, teacher or writer may refer to this without being specific, but a script writer or film director has to show something concrete.

We know that he went to a “distant country”, so he was living among Gentiles. Jesus nowhere implies that the prodigal joined the local Jewish community and attended synagogue. Quite the contrary. So we must see him eating non-kosher food and attending the entertainments enjoyed by his Gentile companions.

The most impressive buildings in any Greek or Roman city included temples to the various gods, so if the prodigal wanted to explore, which he clearly did, a visit to a pagan temple would have been on his agenda.

What else? Gladiators? We know of at least 186 arenas for gladiators in the Roman Empire. While most of these amphitheaters were in the western part of the empire, it is quite possible that Jesus’ hearers would have imagined just such a scene which would have intensified their loathing of the prodigal.

The patron-client relationship the prodigal obtained with “a citizen of that country” was a normal part of Roman society, but to Jews who were conscious of the brotherhood of all Israelites it was one more reason to feel

disgusted with his behavior. Feeding pigs was the ultimate betrayal. Jesus had set them up for his punch line.

Even today we hear of “honor killings” in the Middle East. In the story of the prodigal, the men of the village felt the honor of their community had been stained by this stupid, headstrong young man, and they were ready for him. This meant the father must run through the village, not just in his eagerness to embrace his lost son, but in order to get between his son and the punishment he will get from the men. Lifting his robes in order to run would expose his legs, which was considered disgraceful for the father, bringing him shame. But if this is what it took to save his son’s life, he would willingly bring shame upon himself.

A fatted calf was prepared. At first I had the idea of roasting it on a spit, but nowhere could I discover a single mention of a spit roast for a large animal either in the Roman Empire or in the Bible. The carcass was cut up before cooking. Of course that much food was not just for the family. The whole village was expected to attend. And that’s the point of the parable. The man or woman who has been forgiven by God must be welcomed by the whole community of God’s people.

For whom was the celebration? Was it for the son or the father? In Luke 15:6 when the shepherd said, “Rejoice with me. I have found my sheep which was lost,” his neighbors rejoiced over the fact that the sheep had been found. However, this was not in honor of the sheep, but in honor of the shepherd. The lost son had done wrong, but the father was happy to have him home again. The feast was to share his happiness and to honor the father.

The older son is quick to condemn the prodigal. “This son of yours” he calls him. Not my brother, but “this son of yours.” What he does not see is that in his refusal to enter the home, he is insulting his father in front of the whole community. The father did not have to come out and publicly plead with his older son any more than he had to publicly forgive the younger son. But he chose to do so.

## **Lesson 5: The Midnight Visitor**

**Scripture Reference: Luke 11:5-13; Matthew 7:7-11**

**Theme: God is more generous than we think. When we pray he answers out of his love for us, not just from a sense of duty.**

***Opening questions for use before viewing program 5:***

1. What's the best gift you've ever given to a child? What compelled you to give that gift and what was the reaction of the recipient?
2. How does it feel to you when you've selected and presented a "perfect gift," one that is appreciated and valued by the recipient?
3. What types of things usually make it on to your Christmas wish list? Do you prefer more practical or more extravagant gifts?
4. When you come to God for personal prayer, do your requests focus more on needs or wants?
5. Do you view God the Father more as an angry judge or as a benevolent giver of good gifts?

***Read the Scripture aloud and then view Program 5: The Midnight Visitor***

*Questions for use after program 5:*

1. In Bible times the rules of hospitality were expected to be followed without fail, no excuses. What was expected of the family receiving the visitor?
2. If a friend dropped by your home for an unexpected overnight stay, what courtesies and preparations might be expected of you?
3. If you found yourself unable to meet the expectations, whom would you call upon?
4. Why did the neighbor finally succumb and give the bread?
5. Would you go out of your way and endure personal discomfort to help a neighbor or friend? How about to help an enemy?
6. How is God's response to our requests different from that of the neighbor?
7. Considering that God is a generous giver of good gifts, what types of requests should we bring to him?
8. What extravagant gift could you ask God for today? What more practical or even spiritual gift could you ask for? Read Luke 11:13. Do the requests you came up with fit with this Scripture?
9. Read Matthew 6:32. Do you trust God to provide all that you need and what is best for you?

***Now try using the three “heart” questions:***

1. Heart Check Up. (*Where am I now?*)
2. Straight to the Heart (*What does Jesus teach?*)
3. A Changed Heart (*What do I need to change?*)

***ODDS AND ENDS FROM THE DIRECTOR:***

In Hebrew poetry, meaning is expressed by creating parallels between things: the same thing is said two ways, or this thing is like that thing. Meaning can also be presented through contrast in Hebrew poetry: this thing is the opposite of that. This form of language helped to make a whole way of thinking in parallels and in contrasts. The parable of the midnight visitor creates a contrast by showing that God does not treat us the way some people do.

The parable here in Luke 11 is very similar to the story of the corrupt judge and the persistent widow in Luke 18.

Both these parables show three things. The first thing is that it is not God’s nature to be callous and uncaring. God is not insensitive to our needs. In Matthew 6:32 Jesus said, “Your heavenly Father knows what you need.” God is not an unhelpful neighbor or a corrupt judge.

The second thing in both these stories is passion. The friend who showed hospitality and the widow who wanted justice cared passionately about these things. Lack of immediate success did not make them give up. They were committed. They had perseverance and persistence.

The third thing both these parables show is that faith has nerve. It is not a passive attitude; it is a motivator. Faith does things.

Put these things together. If we understand God’s character as caring and righteous, if we care passionately, and if we have nerve and faith, our prayer life can be transformed.

## **Lesson 6: The Dinner**

**Scripture Reference: Luke 14:1-23**

**Theme: God wants everyone to enjoy His Kingdom blessings**

*Opening questions for use before viewing program 6:*

1. Describe the last dinner party you attended. Who was there? What was the meal like? What types of preparations had been made?
2. If you could choose to dine with anyone in the world, who would it be? Where would you have this dinner?
3. Imagine planning an extravagant dinner party. You've spent weeks planning every detail and days preparing choice food. Your home is immaculate. You are anticipating a perfect evening. As the hour approaches, the table is set, soft music is playing, candles are lit and the appetizers are just coming out of the oven. Yet, the guests don't show up! Not one of them even calls to express regrets. How would you handle such a situation?
4. Have you ever attended an event or a dinner that was almost too good to be true? Imagine being selected to attend dinner at the White House where you would dine with international dignitaries. What feelings would the arrival of the big night evoke? Why?

*Read the Scripture aloud and then view Program 6: The Dinner*

*Questions for use after program 6:*

1. When the invited guests made up excuses for not coming on the day of the feast, why was this so insulting to the host? Why would these people trivialize the host's generosity?
2. When the first guests won't come, to whom does the master extend an invitation? What conditions does he place on their invitation?
3. They don't deserve this invitation, they're not prepared to dine in such a fancy setting, and they can never repay the host's generosity! Yet, these folks are welcomed into the banquet hall as honored guests. How did this group respond to the opportunity to dine with the master?
4. Do you identify more with those who made excuses about why they couldn't come to the banquet or the servants who went out to tell others about the banquet or those who joyfully came to the banquet?
5. Read Isaiah 25:6 and Revelation 19:9. The King of Kings has prepared a feast for each and every one of us! We don't deserve it, and we can't prepare for it, but He invites us to come just as we are and He will welcome us. Are you ready to lay aside your excuses and go to the banquet?
6. Are there people that you can invite to the banquet that you've been overlooking? The master of the banquet made a point of including society's outcasts. Who might fit that description today?
7. Dream a bit about what type of banquet God is preparing for the believers. What aspects of this banquet are you most looking forward to?

***Now try using the three “heart” questions:***

1. Heart Check Up. (*Where am I now?*)
2. Straight to the Heart (*What does Jesus teach?*)
3. A Changed Heart (*What do I need to change?*)

***ODDS AND ENDS FROM THE DIRECTOR:***

“The length of time during which invited guests were welcome was indicated by a cloth hung from the house, and this was removed only after the three introductory courses had been served.” (Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1975. p.93)

The attitude of the guests is very interesting. The excuses they made are so obviously false, they cannot have been intended to deceive. “I have bought land without seeing it.” “I have bought ten prize work animals without knowing if they can do the job.” “I didn’t realize I would be a married man.” These were not excuses. They were jokes. They were insults, and these men had planned these insults ahead of time. They had deliberately ganged up on the host to publicly humiliate him, to despise his generosity, and to make him a figure of public fun. It was a horrible thing to do. Remember the theme here is honor and generosity. These men had no honor.

They also lied because, if they had not accepted the first invitation some days earlier, the servant would not have asked them to come when the meal was ready to be served. They had set him up for this, and it was a mean trick. No wonder the host was very upset.

In ancient times people sometimes regarded physical disability as an outward expression of something warped in the personality. Tragic. But Jesus confronted this head on. When the servant was told to bring in the blind, the maimed and the lame, he was saying the Kingdom of God is open to people who are rejected and condemned by society. All we have to do is respond.

## **Lesson 7: The Manager**

**Scripture Reference: Luke 16:1-14**

**Theme: Be Generous and use your opportunities in this world wisely. You can't take it with you.**

*Opening questions for use before viewing program 7:*

1. Brainstorm a definition for the word “Shrewd”. Consult a dictionary for an official definition. Describe someone you know who is shrewd. What would be an antonym or opposite of “shrewd”?
2. Do you think of this as a positive or a negative quality? Do you associate the term “shrewd” with people of faith?
3. Do you consider yourself to be shrewd with money?
4. How is being shrewd different from being dishonest? Are the lines between shrewd and dishonest ever blurred for you?

*Read the Scripture aloud and then view Program 7: The Manager*

*Questions for use after program 7:*

1. How were the master and his manager breaking the Law of Moses? See Leviticus 25:35-38 and Deuteronomy 23:19-20.
2. The Jews were permitted to charge interest from Gentiles, but not from other Jews. Do you think this has any implications for Christians today?
3. When the manager learns he will lose his job, what steps does he take to protect his future? Why are his actions seen as shrewd?
4. Who benefited from his actions?
5. Consider the resources you've been blessed with. Include financial resources and material possessions. You've worked hard to accumulate all that you have, yet in terms of eternity, you are really only a steward of these things for a very short time. How can you make the most of what you have and use it for eternal purposes?
6. Each believer must decide for himself or herself how to use their resources. Read Matthew 6:19-21. How do you put these verses into practice?
7. How might a Christian's definition of "shrewd" differ from that of a non-believer?

***Now try using the three “heart” questions:***

1. Heart Check Up. (*Where am I now?*)
2. Straight to the Heart (*What does Jesus teach?*)
3. A Changed Heart (*What do I need to change?*)

***ODDS AND ENDS FROM THE DIRECTOR:***

“Do not charge your brother interest, whether on money or food or anything else that may earn interest.” Deuteronomy 23:19 (Compare with Leviticus 25:35-38.)

The financial arrangement which lies behind this parable is similar to Islamic banking as it is practiced today in some Muslim countries where taking interest is forbidden. The clue to what is going on here is in the words of the borrowers - not “I owe your master this much money,” but “I owe him this much *oil*,” or “this much *wheat*.” What the lender did was to buy futures in a share of the crop, but the share he got paid back was worth more than what he loaned. So this was where he made his profit and figured in a kind of insurance premium at the same time.

Olive crops were a risky business. The size and quality of the fruit were not always predictable, so the interest rate on a loan was exorbitantly high. Some scholars have suggested it was eighty percent, plus twenty percent more to cover losses on a bad crop. If that is right, then to borrow cash valued at fifty measures of oil, the olive grower would have to pay back a hundred measures.

In the scene at a first century granary, we see the farmer with sacks of grain. The money he had borrowed was against his next crop of wheat, so the sacks of grain would have been from the previous year’s harvest. It was a difficult time of year for the farmer. The interest rate on the loan would have been twenty percent, with perhaps another five percent for price changes on the market.

This parable in Luke 16:1-9 is followed by another in verses 19-31. At first glance it looks like a different subject, but on a closer reading the second parable relates directly to the first. Also read 1 Timothy 6:17-19.

Worldly wealth lasts for only a short time, but our home in heaven is everlasting. Yet, what we do with the opportunities we have in *this* life can affect outcomes in eternity. What we do with our financial and material possessions can and does impact the lives of others, both physically and spiritually. Think of someone who helps financially to rescue a child from human trafficking and a life of slavery, and pays for her to have a good home and education, to learn of God and his love for all people, and to live her life helping others. Has not this person helped to make a difference which will last for eternity?

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