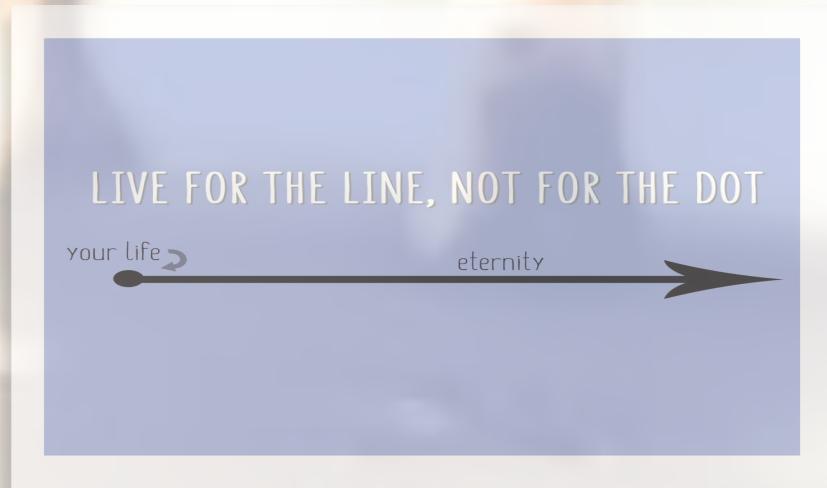


February 2-6, 2026 Edition

Following The Year^(s) Of Jesus Part 213

The Strangest Parable Jesus Ever Told

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner



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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well you knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that. If they help you, great. If not, sorry.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

**** Also you can also get these devotionals on Riverside's website (EagleRiverside.com) by going to the resource section and choosing "Reflections Download".

**** Also Jesus is awesome.

Monday Reflection: This week we are going to be focusing in on what has got to be the strangest parable Jesus ever told. At least it seems like the strangest one he ever told until you get to what he says after he's done telling the story. If all you focus on is the parable itself and you don't look at his explanation – well it can seem pretty surreal. But don't take my word for it, read it for yourself:

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. Luke 16:1-8 (NLT)

See what I mean? It almost sounds like he's telling us that the key to getting ahead in this life is not worrying about our integrity. I mean, isn't that the point of the story? Isn't he saying, "be like this guy"?

No. That's not what he's saying and all it takes is reading Jesus's explanation to recognize this. And we'll spend the rest of this week sort of unpacking that and what Jesus is saying to each one of us with this parable. But I think before we dive into the meaning of this story it would be smart to understand when he told the story, and who was standing within an earshot eavesdropping, while he told this story. Because at the end of Jesus is parable and his explanation, Luke records this interaction:

The Pharisees, who dearly loved their money, heard all this and scoffed at him. 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." Luke 16:14-15 (NLT)

Jesus made sure and told this story where the Pharisees could conveniently overhear him. And so in order to understand the full meaning of this story, we have to understand what was going on with the Pharisees that made Jesus feel like this was something they needed to hear. Or at least he needed us to know that this story is aimed straight at them. Jesus was constantly doing this to them, and yet they still kept coming back over and over like moths drawn to a flame. Or maybe more like mosquitoes drawn to a bug zapper.

When I was in my late 20s, I interviewed for a managerial position at a restaurant. I went through the entire thing and the guy interviewing me never showed one hint of a speech impediment. But when the interview was basically over, he leaned back in his chair, looked at me and said, "so, do you have any questions for me?" But he pronounced the word "questions" like Sylvester, the cat from Looney Tunes. And if you don't know what that means, google it and you'll see why this was such a shock to me (Sylvester's favorite phrase

was, "thuffering thuccotash!". The only thing that I could think (other than to ask him if it was duck season or wabbit season) was to wonder if this guy was messing with me.

I imagine that the Pharisees must've asked themselves that same question over and over. Is this guy messing with us? And the answer would have most assuredly been, yes. Just like I'm pretty sure that the guy that was interviewing me used that strange little moment in my job interview to see how I would react. And in case you're wondering, no, I did not get the job. I must not have passed whatever test that was.

We'll spend the rest of this week unpacking this story to try to understand what it means for each one of us and how we live our lives. But for today, maybe spend some time asking yourself why Jesus would tell this story the way that He did and what do you think the point of this story was?

Tuesday Reflection: So the first thing we see in this story that applies to us is intentionality. You'll notice that as soon as the manager gets called in and accused of disreputable business practices, he gets very focused and intentional about what he's going to do:

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.'

Luke 16:1-3 (NLT)

And what is the guy's focus? It's how to get away with continuing to be the same person that got him into the hot water that he currently found himself in. You'll notice he never asks himself if maybe he should change his ways. He never questions whether to stop being dishonest. He just doubles down on what he's always done. He gets intentional, but not about his character.

And I think it's important to point out at this point, he doesn't own any of this stuff. He is nothing more than a manager. And here is one thing that we all do have in common with this guy – we don't own anything either:

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. Psalm 24:1 (NIV)

The Bible is very clear about this. Everything that we have is on loan from God. We are simply managing it for him. This parable and many others that Jesus tells reinforce that fact, over and over. Our house, our car, our 401(k) account, our clothes. Even our bodies and our souls do not belong to us. They belong to God and one day we will all be called to account for what we've done with what we were given to manage.

If you're a Lord of the Rings, not like I am then you know about Denethor- the steward of Gondor. Denethor what's the 26th steward of Gondor. The reason that a steward managed the kingdom of Gondor was because when the last king of Gondor died, there was no clear air to the throne. So they decided to put a steward or manager in as a placeholder until at some point in the future the rightful king from the line of Elendil would return (hence the

name of the last book, Return Of The King). When Denethor confronts Gandalf about the plan to put Aragorn back on the throne of Gondor and tells him that it will never happen Gandalf drops this line on Denethor: "Authority is not given to you to deny the return of the King, Steward!"

You can just hear the sarcasm dripping from that sentence. But that's what a steward is, a glorified manager. The steward doesn't own anything – he just manages it for his boss. That's what Denethor was and that that's what this unscrupulous manager from the parable was and that's what you and I are. We are managers of everything that we have including our ourselves. And one day, God will call us to account for what we've done with what He gave us.

This story is telling us to get intentional about what we do with what we've been given, and it is using the dishonest manager as a warning. It's like Jesus is that robot from lost in space, waving his arms and shouting, "danger, Will Robinson! Danger!" Because it is so tempting to focus simply on this world and not think much about what comes next. This world seems so solid and life seems so long, but it is a drop in the bucket compared to the eternity that we will spend in the next life. And really drop in the bucket doesn't even come close to covering it. Even drop in the ocean doesn't cover it. Atom in the universe might be a better illustration.

I don't know if you've ever seen the illustration where a guy named Randy Alcorn puts a dot on a whiteboard and then underneath that a line that goes from one end of the whiteboard to the other. The dot he will tell you represents this life. The line represents eternity, but don't think of the line as stopping or beginning where the whiteboard begins and ends. Imagine that line stretches on and never ends in either direction. That's the difference between this life and eternity. Then Randy will turn around and look at the audience and say, don't live for the dot – live for the line.

That's the first question that Jesus wants us to ponder as we consider this parable – are we living for the dot or for the line? He wants us to get very intentional about how we live. Our lives and money is just one part of that. Jesus is saying, "you're already living for something. Are you living for what's temporary or are you living for what will last?"

Tomorrow will continue looking at what Jesus wants us to be thinking about as we consider this parable but for today, maybe we could spend some time asking ourselves, are we living for the dot or for the line?

Wednesday Reflection: The Second question, Jesus is asking with this story is, are we being shrewd? Now that's not a word that we use very often anymore. In fact, I don't know where your mind goes when you hear the word shrewd, but there is at least a little bit of a negative connotation to the word in my own mind. I know that that's not what the dictionary definition would tell you but the way we use it in our culture seems to lean in that direction. So why would Jesus ever tell us to be shrewd? Because it is the mark of one of his followers. He expects us to be shrewd, and this story paints the picture of a guy who was incredibly shrewd:

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." Luke 16:4-8 (NLT)

Shrewdness is what Jesus is praising in this dishonest manager. Not his dishonesty, but his ingenuity. Because this guy looked his resources and asked himself, "how can I use what I have right now to impact my future?" That's that's the question. Jesus wants us all to be asking without resorting to something that will negatively impact our integrity.

If you've spent much time in Christianity, then you know that there is a constant culture war in the church over how much we should be completely withdrawn from the culture that is all around us and how much we should engage with that culture. And there are Christians on both ends of the spectrum- some like the Amish, who will withdraw completely and others who will give themselves wholeheartedly to every aspect of the culture that we live in no matter how toxic it may be. But Jesus ask us to figure out how to walk a fine line that balances the two. At one point, he tells his disciples:

I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Matthew 10:16 (NIV)

Seems like a strange thing to say doesn't it? I mean aren't snakes bad? Seems like that one in the garden of Eden was certainly a shady character. Surely Jesus isn't telling us that we're supposed to have anything in common with that guy?

No. We're not supposed to have anything in common with that guy. But he does want us to navigate this world in a way that is not completely naïve. If you read the New Testament, you can see this playing out in the life of the apostle Paul. Paul is a man of complete integrity, but he knows how to navigate the Roman culture around him. At one point when he is arrested and realizes he is about to be released he appeals to Caesar as a Roman citizen. Because as a Roman citizen- which Paul was- that was his right. Why did he do that when he was getting ready to be released? So he could bring the gospel to Rome.

Paul knew how to work the system, but he didn't let it impact his integrity. That's what Jesus wants from us. To learn how to navigate the culture that we find ourselves in all the while making decisions that will make us more like Jesus rather than less like Him. Paul put it like this:

Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you. Romans 12:2 (MSG)

Notice he doesn't say, don't adjust to your culture at all. He just tells us to think about it before we give ourselves wholeheartedly to it. All the while, fixing our attention on God and here's the tough part for me – to readily recognize what he wants from you and quickly respond to it. That's the innocent as doves part. And if we are able to find that incredibly fine line and walk it in this world, then God will bring the best out of you and develop well formed maturity in you.

That's the difference between Paul and this dishonest manager from Jesus's parable. The dishonest manager simply gave himself to the culture around him, which focuses solely on this life and uses money as a trophy rather than a tool. He never fixed his attention on God. Never tried to recognize what God wanted from him and quickly respond to it. Yes Jesus praises the dishonest manager's shrewdness. But he doesn't want us to become like him.

So how about you? How are you doing finding that fine line of adjusting to the culture in which you live while also keeping your attention fixed on God, readily recognizing what he wants from you and quickly responding to it? Spend some time reflecting on that today and tomorrow will continue looking at the lessons that Jesus wants us to get from this parable.

Thursday Reflection: The third question that I believe we should be asking ourselves as we consider this parable of the dishonest steward is, are we being faithful? Because that's the difference between the dishonest manager and what Jesus wants for each one of us. Are there things about that dishonest manager that Jesus would like us to emulate? Sure we looked at those on Tuesday and Wednesday. But that's not the whole story. If you recall on Monday, I mentioned that if you just read the story of the dishonest steward and don't read Jesus's description, then this is the most unusual parable that Jesus ever told. It seems so confusing – until you read Jesus's explanation and then everything becomes as clear as a bell:

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? Luke 16:11 (NLT)

Yes, Jesus wants us to get intentional about the meaning of our lives and what place money plays in our lives. He does want us to be shrewd in how we go about navigating our place in this world walking that fine line between the culture in which we find ourselves and the character to which God calls us. But ultimately what he's saying, use money in a way that will outlive money. A couple of days ago we talked about Randy Alcorn and his illustration of the dot and the line. We reflected on just how much we were living for the dot.(this life.) and how much we were living for the line that goes on for eternity. Your money is just a part of what that means but it is a pretty substantial part.

Did you know that you have been called by God to make ripples in the waters of eternity by the way that you live your life and partly by the way that you handle your money? That's what I think Jesus is getting at when he says to use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends because then when your possessions are gone. (which they will be when

you die and leave this die of a world behind) those friends that you impacted with your money while on this side of eternity will throw a party for you when you get to the other side. And you may think that you don't have enough to make much of a ripple in the waters of eternity, but you'd be wrong. It's not about how much you have – it's about the generosity that you approach what you have with.

There's a story in the gospel, where Jesus and his disciples are at the temple, watching as people bring their money to donate to the temple. His disciples are amazed as rich people come in and drop fat stacks of cash into the offering all the while, making sure that everybody notices how much they are giving. Jesus just stands by and yawns. But then a widow walks up and drops two pennies into the offering and Jesus sits up and takes notice. He turns to his disciples and says basically, "did you see that? That was awesome!"

His disciples are confused, I mean it was just two cents. What kind of difference could two cents make in this world and especially in eternity? And Jesus' reply says it all:

*All these others made offerings that they'll never miss; she gave extravagantly.
Luke 21:4 (MES)*

It turns out it's all about what's on your heart and not about how much she gave. When we start thinking that we don't have enough to make ripples in the waters of eternity remember that widow and what Jesus said about her and how much she impressed him. She used what she had to be a blessing and here we are 2000 years later being blessed by her again.

Basically this story is Jesus saying, you can't take your money to heaven, but you can send it on ahead by investing in the people who will be there. And believe me, that will make ripples in the waters of eternity.

Now it's at this point that most churches might ask you, so how big of a ripple are you making? Are you giving enough to us to be making a ripple in the waters of eternity? Or do you need to dig deeper and give more until it hurts so badly that you can make a tsunami? Often churches will tell you what that number needs to be or at least a percentage. I'm not going to do that, because Jesus didn't. This is not about a number – this is about our hearts. And all Jesus is asking is that we get intentional about how we spend our money, we are shrewd about figuring out how to make the biggest splash in the waters of eternity with what we have and then we are faithful with what he has given us in order to accomplish that.

Tomorrow we will finish this story up by looking again at the people that Jesus made sure were standing with an ear shot so that they would hear this message – the Pharisees. But for today, maybe you and I can spend some time reflecting on how faithful we are being with what he has trusted to us as stewards.

Friday Reflection: This week we've been looking at the story of the dishonest manager. One of the strangest parables Jesus ever told if all you do is focus in on the story and ignore Jesus's explanation. Today I want to finish where we kind of began on Monday – by talking about the Pharisees and why it was that Jesus wanted to tell this story while they were obviously eavesdropping on him.

Basically, in this story, Jesus ask us three questions, are we being intentional about our lives and what the purpose of those lives is? Are we being shrewd about how we use the resources that have been interested to us as managers as we try to explore the depths of what our purpose on this earth is? And are we being faithful with what we've been given in order to make a difference, not just in our own lives, but in the lives of the people all around us. Differences that will make a splash not just in this world, but in the waters of eternity.

Then Jesus finishes up his explanation by telling us this:

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.

Luke 16:12 (NLT)

Notice He doesn't say you should not serve two masters – He says it can't be done. Why not? Well, because money is not satisfied with simply being spent. It wants to be worshiped. It wants to become your God and if we're not careful, that's exactly what it will become. Even if we are attempting to spiritualize our attachment to it, which is exactly what the Pharisees did. Because after Luke gets done recording, Jesus is parable and Jesus's explanation of the parable. Then Luke gives us the setting, in which all of that took place:

The Pharisees, who dearly loved their money, heard all this and scoffed at him. 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." Luke 16:14-15 (NLT)

What is Jesus talking about? The Pharisees were the greatest rule followers that have ever lived in the history of this world. They followed every instruction to the smallest detail. But they used their pompous piety to cover over a deep flaw in their hearts that Jesus points out over and over again. Turns out the Pharisees were trying to serve two masters, and it just wasn't working out very well for them. At least not from God's perspective.

In Matthew chapter 15, we see this working with something that the Jews called Korban. The word, Korban literally means gift and the way that it was used by the Pharisees in the first century was that you could designate all of your money as Korban and that would mean that you couldn't give it away to people who needed it and instead, you would keep it and use it yourself. I know that it works the mind to try to imagine how they explained this in a way that left them looking super spiritualized, but that's exactly what they had done. And Jesus calls them out on it:

Why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.' But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is 'Korban,' they are not to 'honor their father or mother' with it.

Matthew 15:3-6 (NLT)

And now Jesus is really stepping on their toes. You can see why they were so desperate to kill Him, can't you? Turns out you should never get between a Pharisee and his money. But that's what Jesus did. And then he dropped this on them:

You [Pharisees] nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules." Matthew 15:6-9 (NLT)

This is why it's so important to use these parables of Jesus' to reflect on what's going on in our own hearts. Have we let one of our sacred cows get in between us and Jesus? It is so easy to just sort of adjust to the culture around us without even thinking about it, isn't it? I don't know about you, but I felt my own toes being stepped on several times this week, but that's what Jesus does. Not because he doesn't care about you. But because he cares about you so much that he can't stand by and watch as we waste. Our lives on something as ridiculous as an attachment to money. Is it easy? No. At least it isn't for me. But Jesus is trying to let us know that it will be so worth it.

It turns out that our money can be a wonderful servant, but it makes a horrible master. So for today, maybe you and I could spend some time reflecting on which it is in our own lives. Is money, our servant or has it become a cruel taskmaster? That's ultimately what Jesus is asking in this parable. Turns out it's not such a strange parable after all, huh? It's just hard to hear.