



**LC STUDY GUIDE**  
**On the Road Series**  
 The Passage: Luke 16:1-9  
 Week 3 (Mar 6-12)

**Intro:** It's the third week of our LC Lenten study in the "On the Road" series and we come to what will likely be our most challenging parable, "the Shrewd Manager." Eugene Peterson reports that one of the greatest Bible interpreters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Rudolph Bultmann declared this parable to be "incomprehensible."

So why are we looking at this passage today? Well, one reason is because Jesus gave these words and Luke recorded them as Scripture. And while we may be able to find a few nuggets of truth, the wrestling with and studying of Scripture will be good for us as we continue to walk on the road this Lent. We are confident that we will walk away with a greater appreciation of God's generosity and grace.

## **Luke 16:1-9**

**1** Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. **2** So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.'

**3** "The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg— **4** I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'

**5** "So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'

**6** "'Nine hundred gallons of olive oil,' he replied.

"The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred and fifty.'

**7** "Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?'

"'A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied.

"He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.'

**8** "The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. **9** I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings."

**Context:** Kenneth Baily, a professor at the Near Eastern School of Theology in Beirut, contextualizes the story as follows:

The manager is similar to a rental estate manager for the master/land owner. The debtors are farmers who pay their rent with the yield of their crops such as oil and wheat. The manager is fired for either his dishonesty, mishandling or embezzlement (NIV translation implies mishandling but other translations differ).

Baily sees the manager being "fired on the spot" by the manager but because the debtors/farmers do not know this, he acts shrewdly with the brief time window. He decides to give a "bonus" to the farmers/debtors by reducing their debts. The farmers assume this bonus comes from the owner and are grateful to both the master and manager.

When the master uncovers the plot, he realizes his generosity has been used against him and like all of Jesus' parables, something unexpected happens. Instead of throwing the dishonest manager in jail, he compliments him! The generous master knows the manager has found favor with the farmers and will likely receive help or employment from his friends as there is no indication the master has rehired the shrewd manager. The owner knows he does not want to correct the manager's actions as it will upset his farmer/tenants (and further, they are very happy with him now). Thus, the owner offers the takeaway in verse 9 to the "rascal" as Peterson refers to him.

If we see this parable as an allegory of how we take advantage of God's grace we might see ourselves as "rascals" too. "The rascal emerges as a somewhat jaunty metaphor for the surprising improbability of grace... This story has been worked over endlessly by men and women trying desperately to find some edifying moral lesson here, in order to save Jesus from commending a crook for being a very clever crook. This becomes a story of embracing salvation, the kind of story that is at the very core of Jesus' good news." (*Tell it Slant* by Eugene Peterson p. 105)

○ – React to Baily and Peterson's understanding of the parable. What do you find uncomfortable? What do you relate to?

○ – The master catches the manager being dishonest and fires him. Describe the dishonest manager's plan (v. 4).

I – It would be completely understandable if the master threw the manager in jail for his dishonesty/deceitfulness. But he doesn't because Jesus wants us to see what qualities of the master?

*(The master does not care about the money. Whether it's because he has unlimited wealth or that the difference will not affect him, the master seems more interested in generosity, wisdom, and compassion. He allows his generosity to be taken advantage of.)*

I – In verse 8, the NIV (and NRSV) describes/translate the manager's actions as "shrewdly" while the RSV uses the word "prudence", the AV (Amplified Version) says, "had done wisely" and Peterson's *Message* translation describes the scene as "knew how to look after himself." How do we avoid getting the wrong idea about the usage of these words? (We don't want to justify other borderline criminal behavior as being considered wise in the eyes of God.)  
*(Jesus' parable takes place in a different legal system than ours. But more importantly, the backdrop is against God's grace and generosity and our humanity's crafty brokenness.)*

A – Normally we would ask how we can act shrewdly like the manager, but that would likely risk criminal offense 😊 Still, Jesus wants us to learn something from the shrewd manager – what can we gain?

A – What can we appreciate (and celebrate) about the Master?  
*(The Master is not interested in chasing after each wrong. He seems to understand the manager better than manager understands himself. And most importantly, we can celebrate in the Master's generosity and grace-filled heart.)*

## **Central Point – Like the shrewd manager, we are all rascals and the beneficiaries of the Master's generosity and grace.**

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- a. Please note that not all these questions are to be asked in a single meeting. Take some time to prayerfully discern what will serve your LC the best. Select and reword the questions that best fit your voice and your Life Community group.
- b. Complement these questions with "process questions" (what else? what more? what do others think?)
- c. When you ask questions, give people ample time to think and respond. Wait. Take your time; don't rush people but encourage participation. Avoid answering your own questions!
- d. Application: Pace the study to conclude with difference-making application.
- e. Secondary texts—use other texts sparingly, even if they are relevant. Such texts will push you into "teaching" rather than facilitating, causing people to feel distracted or de-powered.