Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 19th July 2026.
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Invest In What Lasts: Luke 16:1-15

Jesus challenges us through the story of the shrewd manager to think differently about what God has entrusted to us. Kingdom people use their time, resources, and opportunities with wisdom, investing in what lasts forever and seeking the advance of God's Kingdom. But Jesus also reminds us that the issue is not simply what we do with our resources, but who our lives are ultimately serving. Our response is to surrender all we have to Jesus and allow His Kingdom purposes to shape the way we live.

Introduction: Back into Luke

Welcome back to our series called **King and Kingdom Come: The Gospel According to Luke.** As we've been journeying through Luke's Gospel, we're encountering Luke's understanding of the kingdom of God, expressed primarily through the words of Jesus. The kingdom of God is where God's values shape life and the way we live life, as opposed to the kingdom of the world where other priorities, like power, wealth, and status are king. Through the gospel we're seeing that the kingdom of God constantly overturns our assumptions. Again and again, Jesus challenges the values of the surrounding culture - the outsider becomes the insider, the lost become the found, the humble are lifted up and the powerful are brought low.

Throughout Luke, Jesus invites us to see life not through the lens of earthly kingdoms, but through the lens of God's kingdom.

Luke 16:1-15

Today's passage is perhaps one of the most enlightening, and challenging, examples of that. In fact many people, including me, regard **Luke Chapter 16 Verses 1-15** as one of the most difficult passages in the entire Gospel as it feels confusing when we first read it. Jesus tells a story about a manager who is accused of dishonesty, so much so that he's going to get sacked. Facing an uncertain future he goes out and contacts people who owe debts to his master (his boss) and <u>reduces</u> what they owe. Let's read the passage, ***"Jesus told his disciples: 'There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. 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.' 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 - I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.' So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked them first, 'How much do you owe my master?' '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.' 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.'"***

These are not insignificant amounts – the values here represent years of income. But then comes the surprise in Verse 8(a), ***"The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly."***

Read that slowly … ***"The master commended the dishonest manager."*** The natural question is, why? Why would Jesus appear to praise someone who seems dishonest? And that's why this is a difficult passage to get our heads around – it's so difficult that people have wrestled with this passage for centuries, and trust me, it feels like I've been wrestling with it for a century to get to where I think it lands.

The interpretation and explanation that I find the most compelling is that the manager is not actually continuing to steal from his master at all. Rather, he's sacrificing what ultimately belonged to him - his own commission, his own future profit, his own margin, in order to create friends that will sustain him once he's … unemployed. In other words he's giving up short-term gain for long term benefit in order to create goodwill with those who owe his master money as he recognised that his circumstances have changed and that his future is approaching quickly. His opportunity is limited, and so he acts decisively while he still can.

Jesus says, in effect, "Now that's ***shrewd***." Not because he was dishonest and not because he manipulated the system, but because he understood that sometimes wise people sacrifice short-term advantage to secure a greater future outcome, and that sometimes now is the time to act.

Shrewd (*Phronimos*) = Wise

What I need to clarify is that the word ***shrewd*** doesn't actually have a negative connotation to it, even though it probably does to most of us – it did for me. Luke uses the Greek word ***phronimos*** which is the same word Jesus uses in Matthew Chapter 7 Verse 24 when He says, ***"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise / phronimos man who built his house on the rock."***

The actual meaning of ***phronimos*** carries the idea of being wise, or prudent, or sensible, or able to see what matters and to act accordingly; it's about the ability to perceive reality and make decisions that align with that reality.

So in Luke 16 the manager is called ***phronimos*** because he recognises his current situation has changed; he understands his future is uncertain and so he acts decisively while he still has the opportunity and uses the resources available to him to prepare for what is coming. The manager was not commended because he was dishonest; he was praised because he was ***phronimos*** - he saw clearly, he understood what mattered, and he immediately acted accordingly, and that principle sits right at the heart of kingdom living because throughout Luke's Gospel Jesus has been teaching us that the kingdom of God requires a different way of thinking about the future.

The difference is that in our society we've been taught to organise our lives around immediate rewards. Immediate comfort. Immediate security. Immediate benefit. But kingdom people are called to live differently; Jesus is suggesting that kingdom people make present decisions in light of God's future. This is one of the recurring themes throughout Luke. Whether Jesus is speaking about prayer, discipleship, generosity, forgiveness, or service, He continually calls people to look beyond what is immediately visible and invest in what will ultimately last.

It seems that the manager in this story understands that principle remarkably well. Faced with uncertainty, despite his dishonest past, he asks himself a simple question, *"What can I do today that will create a better future tomorrow?"* It's actually a question that in certain contexts people do ask today:

- Athletes ask it when they choose training over comfort.
- Students ask it when they choose study over entertainment.
- Parents ask it when they make sacrifices for their children.
- Investors ask it when they defer spending for future returns.

The manager asks the same question. What can I give up now because of what I believe lies ahead? And there's another dimension here. The manager responds in the present; he's urgent. His window of opportunity is closing. He knows he will not always have the chance to act. And perhaps that's where this parable begins to challenge us most deeply, because Jesus then says a very direct statement in Verse 8(b) as He draws away from the parable and moves into talking about its meaning, ***"For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light."***

That's an 'ouch' statement! Jesus is effectively saying, *"If people can think carefully about their earthly future, why are my followers sometimes so casual about eternal realities?"* The manager acts because he knows time is short. The kingdom of God calls us to live with the same awareness. We know that life is fleeting - one phone call can change the future you thought you had, one diagnosis, one redundancy, one funeral, one conversation with a child who suddenly leaves home. The manager thought he had years but by lunchtime he had hours. We know that opportunities don't last forever, and we know that God's kingdom is coming in its fullness. We know that people matter eternally. The question is whether those realities shape the decisions we make today.

God calls us to be intentional stewards

Throughout Scripture, God repeatedly calls His people to be intentional stewards of the opportunities He places before them:

- Think about Joseph storing grain during years of abundance in Genesis 41.
- Think about Nehemiah carefully planning the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls.
- Think about Paul developing missional strategies to reach key cities throughout the Roman empire in Acts 13-19.

None of these people were passive. They understood that faithful discipleship often involves prayerful planning, wise stewardship and intentional action.

The question for us is this, *"Are we thinking as intentionally about God's kingdom as this manager was thinking about his future?"* Because every one of us has been entrusted with resources. Not just money, but time, relationships, skills, influence, experience, networks and opportunities. The issue is not how much we have; the issue is what are we doing with what God has placed in our hands for the sake of the kingdom of God.

And this is where verse 9 becomes so important. Jesus says, ***"Use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings."*** Jesus is not telling us to buy friendships; He's teaching us that temporary resources can have eternal impact. He's teaching us that money is temporary, that possessions are temporary, that opportunities are temporary, but that people are eternal and kingdom people should use temporary resources to create eternal opportunities.

Jesus is suggesting that kingdom people should invest in people, that kingdom people should invest in relationships, that kingdom people should invest in the mission of God, that we should invest in things that help others encounter Jesus.

Practical examples

One of New Zealand's largest Christian philanthropists is an organisation called Trinity Lands. Some of you will know about it. The Trinity purpose is driven by faith and a shared objective of never tiring of doing good in the community. The original trust was founded in 1951 by one man who cleared a small paddock for sheep farming just in from Putaruru with the goal of being able to support Christian ministries. Today that organisation farms over 7,400 hectares of land carrying 16,000 head of livestock, as well as 215 hectares of kiwifruit farming and a range of other investments. One farmer. One paddock. One kingdom vision. Seventy-five years later, more than ten million dollars each year is being invested in Christian mission.

One day, according to Jesus, there may be people in eternity whose lives were influenced because we chose generosity over accumulation, mission over comfort, and investment over consumption.

That's why this passage follows Luke 15 so naturally. Just one chapter earlier we saw shepherd search for a lost sheep, a woman search for a lost coin, and a father ran toward is son. We saw the extraordinary heart of God for lost people. Now Jesus turns to His disciples and asks, *"If that's what God is willing to do to reach lost people, what are you willing to invest?"*

Another of the recurring themes throughout Luke is that God's Kingdom advances through ordinary people faithfully using ordinary resources for extraordinary purposes. A shepherd searches. A woman searches. A boy offers his lunch. A tax collector opens his home. A group of women support Jesus' ministry. Again and again, God takes what people place in His hands and uses it for kingdom impact. Kingdom thinking changes the questions we ask. Not, *"How do I preserve this?"* But, *"How do I deploy this?"* Not, *"How do I protect this?"* But, *"How do I use this?"* Not, *"How do I hold onto this?"* But, *"How can God use this to bless others and advance His Kingdom?"* That changes how we view our finances, our homes, our retirement, our leadership, our businesses and our church.

Even as a church, we're continually called to ask not how we might just maintain ministries, or keep buildings, or run programmes, or hold structures, but how can we leverage them for kingdom impact. How can our buildings serve our community? How can our resources help people encounter Jesus? How can we, today, become a blessing to future generations? How can we invest today in ways that bear fruit long after we're gone? Those are kingdom questions. Those are shrewd, wise, ***phronimos*** questions, and those are the kinds of questions Jesus seems to be encouraging His disciples to ask.

The warning

But at this point Luke introduces a warning. Verse 14 says, ***"The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus."*** Notice Luke doesn't say they simply had money. He says they **loved** money. The issue was not wealth. The issue was worship. The Pharisees were probably very strategic people. They were disciplined, organised and influential. They knew how to build systems, maintain influence and protect their position. **Their problem wasn't a lack of strategy. Their problem was allegiance.** They had become very skilled at building the wrong kingdom. And perhaps that's the hidden warning in this passage. Strategic thinking is not automatically a kingdom virtue. We can strategically build our own reputation. We can strategically accumulate wealth. We can strategically protect our comfort. The question is not whether we have a strategy. **The question is which kingdom our strategy serves.**

That is why Jesus concludes with those unforgettable words, ***"No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve both God and money."*** Not difficult. Not unlikely. <u>Impossible</u>.

Every life is organised around something. Every heart serves a master. Every person places their trust somewhere. Jesus us saying that money simply reveals where our allegiance lies. He then says something equally confronting at the end of Verse 15, ***"What people value highly is detestable in God's sight."*** He seems to be saying that there is often a significant gap between what impresses people and what impresses God:

- Our culture celebrates wealth, but God celebrates faithfulness.
- Our culture celebrates prominence, but God celebrates humility.
- Our culture celebrates success, but God celebrates obedience.
- Our culture celebrates accumulation, but God celebrates generosity.

The manager understood that future realities should shape present decisions. The Pharisees also understood strategy, but they attached their hearts to the wrong future.

And that leaves us with one last searching question ... *"What future are we investing in?"* Are we primarily investing in comfort, security, reputation, and success in the kingdom of the world, or are we investing in the advance of God's kingdom, the transformation of lives, the discipleship of people, and the mission of Jesus in the world? Because ultimately:

Every investment serves a kingdom.

Every plan serves a kingdom.

Every strategy serves a kingdom.

The issue is which kingdom are we serving.

In this confronting parable, the [previously dishonest] manager was willing to sacrifice his commission because he believed there was a future worth investing in. Jesus says His disciples should be even wiser, because we know something the manager didn't. We know that God's kingdom is coming in its fullness; we know that lives matter eternally; we know that what is done for Christ lasts forever, and we know that the King is building a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

While the manager gave up his commission because he believed there was a future worth investing in, Jesus gave up infinitely more. He gave up the riches of heaven and embraced the poverty of the cross so that we might be welcomed into an eternal home. The manager sacrificed for his own future. Jesus sacrificed for ours. And now He invites us to live in light of the future He secured. And every sacrifice made for that Kingdom is ultimately an investment in something that will last forever.

I want to suggest a few things for you to think about:

1. Firstly, what about the range of things we talk about here at Windsor that are worthy of the investment of ... you. Mentoring a teenager, fostering children through the Open Homes Foundation, discipling grandchildren, volunteering at Haven, opening your home, creating ethical business ... all things that keep the kingdom larger than just our church.

2. Secondly, for several years now we've been suggesting that child sponsorship with Tearfund in projects in Cebu in the Philippines is a great investment. But it's more than just money. When we first started sponsoring children in Cebu, I thought we were just helping someone else. What I didn't expect was how much it would change me. Every letter reminds me there are realities beyond my own comfort, beyond Auckland, beyond my own concerns. Sponsoring has quietly reshaped my understanding of what matters. And I know this after listening to the adults who have come out the other side of being sponsored. There is something very prophetic in embracing child sponsorship in ways that are more than just financial. I know that something in me has changed as a result. I have 10 profiles of children from these communities with me and I'm hoping that ten people will start that spiritual journey of adopting a child and their family into yours, investing in lives for the sake of kingdom of God

3. Thirdly, at the end of last year we introduced the **Windsor Park Endowment Fund** as a way of investing into the future of this church in a more substantial way than what most of us will see. An endowment fund means we make ***phronimos*** decisions for the generations that come after us. I'd want to champion that cause and suggest that, if you're able, donating to that cause at some point is investing wisely for the future of this community of faith and contributing to every future baptism, every child who comes to faith and every person who is strengthened to thrive in Jesus through the ongoing ministry of this church.

4. Lastly, I've thought about some things, but not all things. Here at Windsor, we believe God has gifted us with a whole range of people with all kinds of skills. Some of you are skilled at making money, investing wisely, building business or using all that ***phronimos*** in your own way. I'd love you to think about the church in the same way; what else could we be doing that invests in the future mission of this church for the sake of our children who will one day be the inheritors of what we sow today. Blessed are those who plant a tree under whose shade they will not rest. I'd love to hear those ideas and deploy you to bring them about.

If I was to sum up this first half of Luke 16, I'd say, **The manager invested in the future he believed was coming. The question Jesus asks us is: what future are we investing in?**

One day every investment account will close. Every property title will pass to someone else. Every career will end. Every achievement will fade. But every person will still exist somewhere. And Jesus will ask, *"Did you invest in what lasts?"* **The issue isn't strategy. The issue is which future we're living for.**

If somebody examined our calendar, our bank statements, our conversations and our ambitions this week, which kingdom would they conclude we're living for? May the Spirit guide us and unite us in being wise managers of all that's entrusted to us for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Amen

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questions for reflection

Reflecting on Sunday 12th July 2026:

Last week Pastor Aidan Wivell challenged us to 1) Get on our knees, 2) Get our hands dirty, and 3) To get out there. He was talking about practically living out our faith as part of Windsor's first Serve Day that we've held on a Sunday morning. How did you serve last week, either as part of our Serve Day, or in your own life during the week?

These questions help you think more about this message. We hope they might be a conduit for conversation and reflection, encouraging us to wrestle with how this message might practically work itself out in our lives.

1. What stood out to you most from Jesus' teaching in Luke 16:1–15, and why?
2. What resources has God entrusted to you (time, relationships, skills, influence, finances), and how might He be inviting you to use them more intentionally for His kingdom?
3. The manager acted in light of the future he believed was coming. What is one area of your life where God's future could shape your present decisions more intentionally?
4. If someone looked at your calendar, spending, conversations, and priorities this week, what might they conclude about which kingdom you are living for?
5. Spend some time praying for wisdom (*phronimos*) - that God would help us see what matters most and use what He has entrusted to us for His kingdom and the sake of others.

If you'd like to chat with someone about your spiritual journey or anything else going on in your life, please contact us at care@windsorpark.org.nz; **we're better together** and **no perfect people are allowed**.

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further resources

Below are some further resources that may take the message further and deeper and enable you to explore other viewpoints on the same theme. We also encourage you to engage with the preacher if there are further questions you have or if you'd like clarification on anything. Email info@windsorpark.org.nz and we'll direct your query to the appropriate person.

1. Luke 16:1-15 (or 1-13) is a rare parable due to the many interpretations that people have articulate over several centuries. AI can be our assistant here. Use an AI provider that you usually use and ask, *"How many different interpretations are there of Luke 16:1-15 (or 1-13). Summarise each one."* Then spend some time reading each description and thinking through how you might discern which one God leads you to.

2. To read more about the **Windsor Park Endowment Fund** and what we're hoping to achieve over the coming decades, click here to see the information: https://www.windsorpark.org.nz/endowments. Perhaps you'd be willing to contribute to this fund, either now, or to make a plan for the future.

3. Fifteen percent of Jesus's teachings deal with money and possessions–more than his teachings on heaven and hell combined. And when we take seriously his teaching–when we understand that everything we believe we own is actually God's and we are merely managers–we can experience firsthand the incomparable joy of giving in ways that will live on in eternity, long after earthly riches have disappeared. Randy Alcorn's book, **The Treasure Principle: Unlocking The Secret of Joyful Giving** is an excellent resource that you can find online to help you delve into this key aspect of stewardship in a comprehensive way.