

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben on Luke 16:1-15 on November 19, 2017 at Victory of the Lamb.

**Series: Generosity**  
**Today's Focus: Generous Life**

**"Lumosity + Generosity x Jesus"**

At best he was incompetent. At worst he was a crook. And yet there's something that Jesus says Christians can learn from this guy when it comes to using money! Aren't you just a little bit curious what this could possibly be about? In a moment I'm going to read a story that Jesus told and there's going to



be a little bit of math involved. Based on Jesus' story I have a little equation we're going to learn today and I'll be explaining it as we go along. It goes like this... Lumosity + Generosity x Jesus. Here's the story:

**Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. <sup>2</sup> 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.'**

**<sup>3</sup> "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— <sup>4</sup> I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'**

**<sup>5</sup> "So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' <sup>6</sup> "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.' <sup>7</sup> "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.'**

**<sup>8</sup> "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. <sup>9</sup> I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.**

So did you follow all that? In the parable that Jesus tells there's a rich landowner. He has a vast estate. And he had hired a business manager to handle all his dealings. The people who owed debts were likely renters or sharecroppers who paid their rent by giving the owner a certain amount of the yearly produce. The manager's job was to responsibly collect these debts. But then one day a report gets emailed to owner with the subject line in all caps: GROSS MISMANAGEMENT OF YOUR ESTATE! You ever get one of those? It certainly has the owner's attention. He opens it and discovers detailed accusations about how his manager had been wasting his possessions. So the owner calls him in. "What's your explanation for this? Clean out your desk. Turn in the books. You have till the end of the day. You're fired."

You ever been fired? You ever find yourself without a job? You ever face the prospect of eviction? Those are difficult spots for anybody to be in. And that's the spot this guy finds himself in. So what is he going

to do? Well he thinks to himself, “I’ve been sitting behind a desk with a calculator my whole life so baling hay isn’t for me and for a man who likes his business suits...standing on the corner holding a sign and begging is simply out of the question. So what am I going to do about the future? How can I feather my nest? Aha...I know just the thing!” And as the idea forms in his brain he acts quickly. His plan is to make these renters personally indebted to him so that if he needs to... he can call in a few favors.

One by one he meets with those who owed debts. Two examples are given—a guy who owed vast quantities of olive oil. Another guy who owed vast quantities of wheat. (Apparently there wasn’t a large gluten free market). And I imagine this went on all morning and afternoon with one debtor after another. The manager cuts a deal with each of them. He changes the amount owed. And it’s not entirely clear whether what he does is flat out wrong or not. Was the manager shadily discounting the bill and thereby cheating the owner or was he cutting out what would have been his personal commission? We’re not really sure. That’s not the point of the story so Jesus doesn’t tell us.

But what’s the owner’s reaction when he finds this out? Does he call the police? The FBI? No. Surprisingly, he praises his former manager! <sup>8</sup>“**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.**

Now don’t get distracted from the point that’s being made. The master is *not* commending his former manager for being dishonest. Jesus is *not* telling this story to praise crooks or to promote pyramid schemes or anything like that! Like any parable we need to focus on the main point of comparison. What is the owner commending the manager for? For *acting shrewdly*. For being clever. For his foresight. His resourcefulness. His ingenuity. For the sake of our equation today, let’s call it *Lumosity*.

You know what Lumosity is? It’s actually an online program or an app for your phone that’s basically a bunch of games designed to improve memory, attention, mental flexibility, processing speed and problem solving. It’s short, it’s an app design to make your brain work better. (There’s an app for that of course!) But that’s the first part of our equation today. Lumosity—or as we heard in the story...*being shrewd*. Using the brain that God gave you. As a Christian, how well are you using yours?

**For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.** Now let’s use our brains and think about this a little bit. You get what Jesus is saying? People in the secular business world are often more savvy and clever in advancing their careers and secular pursuits than Christians are in their pursuit of advancing the cause of Christ and the Gospel. Have you noticed this? Sometimes people are more fully engaged, all in, and forward looking when it comes to their earthly pursuits than many Christians are when it comes to their spiritual pursuits.

For example, I’ve noticed that sometimes parents are all in when it comes to their kids’ athletic pursuits. They’ll research just the right leagues, coaches, trainers and teams. They’ll even plan their lives around their kids’ practice and tournament schedules making huge sacrifices for what they hope will pay off in their kids’ future success. They’ll spend significant amounts of money on getting just the right name brand equipment and gear. They’ll buy them whatever they think they need no matter what it costs. But then when it comes to taking a few moments to discuss the Bible as a family or sit down together on the couch to have a devotion and pray together at home or when it comes to worshipping the Lord in church every Sunday or being part of a Bible study group and volunteer team to serve others...their schedule is

just too full and No, they can't come at this or that time because they're busy. Have you ever noticed this?

I've noticed that sometimes people are incredibly resourceful in researching just the right exercise or nutrition programs for their health, purchasing new gadgets and apps so they can be disciplined and track their progress, will learn about all the latest life changing products and they're willing to spend almost any amount of money on what they think will make them look or feel better...but when it comes to their spiritual health they aren't willing to put in hardly any effort, they won't spend a dime looking for or purchasing a devotional book, don't feel the need to join a small group or even make the effort to download a free Bible app that has a structured reading plan.

I've noticed that sometimes people are incredibly clever when it comes to their career decisions or their investment strategy or even planning out their fantasy football roster...how much time and effort they will put into it all and yet how little forethought they give to volunteering their time in the community, helping others in need or giving to the work of the Lord. Every dollar of their investment strategy or remodeling budget is carefully allocated but giving to church is an afterthought or something they long ago put on autopilot.

Imagine in other words what would happen if Christians were as clever, resourceful, savvy and shrewd with things that have spiritual or eternal significance as some can be when it comes to their secular, earthly pursuits? Can you see the potential of the church in the world to make a difference? And what if you started to realize that how you manage your earthly resources and opportunities could actually have spiritual or eternal significance for you and others? What if your use of God's money is a training ground where God is testing you so that you can grow and he can entrust you with greater spiritual responsibilities? What if we combined Lumosity + Generosity and then multiplied it by a factor of Jesus?

Here's what Jesus says, <sup>9</sup> **I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.**



What's Jesus teaching us in this parable? I'm convinced what he's saying is use your brain wisely (*Lumosity*) so that you can be the best possible steward of all the resources that God gives you in life so that you can be as generous as you can possibly be (*Generosity*) with those resources to advance the cause of Christ and the gospel (*Jesus*). In this way more and more people might have the opportunity to hear the message of Christ's victory and have their eternal destinies altered by it when the Holy Spirit brings them to faith in Jesus as their Savior and because of his victory get to go to heaven. **"Lumosity + Generosity x Jesus."**

So something we need to wrestle with is the fact that money in and of itself it not evil. It is not the root of all evil. The Bible doesn't say that. What it does say rather is, **"The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil"** (1 Tim 6:10). So we need to guard our hearts against greed and envy and the constant trap of always thinking we need more. The love of money for money's sake will destroy you. But money can also be a great blessing. In fact money and the opportunities in life to make it are blessings of God—but

they're not just blessings that he gives us just for our own earthly wellbeing and physical needs, but also so that we can be a blessing in helping provide for the needs of others.

In other words if we practice the equation “Lumosity + Generosity x Jesus” we can help meet the needs of others. And you know what the greatest need that we can help meet is, right? It's the universal need that everyone has for a Savior—for everybody to know with certainty the joy of Christ's victory! And so the more money God enables you to make and save...the more you can give away to advance the cause of Christ and the Gospel! So you don't have to feel guilty if God has blessed you with business savvy or special opportunities in life. Rather thank God for them. Be grateful for them. It's not like you just earned them all on your own apart from God's blessing. And make the most of them. Use your brain. Be savvy. Make the most of what God has given you.



You see ultimately God is calling all of us to have a bigger picture perspective. Jesus says, <sup>9</sup>**I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.** What's Jesus saying? Simply this. Be generous in sharing the gospel so that the party in heaven will be full of friends—maybe even some of whom you never even had a chance to meet here on this earth.

Like this man right here. I'll call him Titus. And I apologize if you're watching online...we can't put his picture or real name on the internet. It's too dangerous. But he's one of the pastors in Nepal whom we are supporting with our More Than Bricks offerings.

Years ago this man was imprisoned and tortured for 3 months for being a Christian pastor. His church was torn down. Once he was beaten so severely he was unconscious for three days. He was told, “Don't ever worship Jesus again.” And you know what this small, thin little man said? He said, “I will always worship Jesus. Even if I do not worship him in a church, I will worship him in my home – and others may come to my house and worship with me. I cannot make this promise.” Amazingly (God be praised!) Titus made it out alive. And now here is in this recent picture in his 70's—twenty years past the normal life expectancy for men in this remote, mountainous, impoverished, predominantly Hindu country. He serves three churches. He has to walk great distances to get to them. Once a month he walks six hours to a church to give the Lord's Supper to the people there.

And I want you to notice this {pic}. On his back here he is carrying a bag of books—Christian literature provided by your offerings. The bag on his back weighs about 100 pounds—which is about what Titus himself weighs. He is small and thin and did I mention he's in his 70s? And yet look how happy he is to carry these books on his back across long distances to deliver to people in the churches who are grateful to receive them. Friends, that's because of you. Because of your generosity. It's because of “Lumosity + Generosity x Jesus” that our little mission church here that started with 8 people just over a decade ago now has over 425 baptized members and over the last 3 years has donated over \$83,000 to support mission work all over the world just through our More Than Bricks offerings. We've also donated thousands more through the synod so that future pastors can be trained and new churches can be started all over the world.

I don't know all their names now—the people who've recently become Christians in Nepal. I'll probably never meet them here on this earth. But imagine this scene. There's a party going on. It's in a lavishly appointed mansion. There are people there with smiles on their faces. They are people from every nation. You've never met them before yet somehow now they're your friends. They're like family. And with one accord with arms outstretched they say, "Welcome! Thank you for sharing Jesus with us." And did I mention yet...Jesus is right there too with arms outstretched...those same arms that once stretched out for you on the cross, saying, "Welcome. Welcome home to heaven."

Now right now I feel a little guilty. Because I think about all the opportunities and resources that I've wasted in my life. I think about the dresser full of mostly worthless baseball cards that I bought over the years and the time I've frittered away on the internet and things like that. In some ways I feel like I too have wasted the owners' possessions, you know what I'm saying? And maybe you do too.

Well you know what's interesting? In this story that Jesus told in Luke chapter 16 it starts out, **There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions.** Well the word translated "wasting" here is the same word that Jesus used in the story that comes right before this one in Luke chapter 15. You know what that story is? The parable of the prodigal son. It's the story where a man's youngest son takes his inheritance and then "squanders" it in wild living far from home as a way of rebelling. So what did the prodigal son do with his inheritance? He "wasted" it. Ok, that's really you and me sometimes, isn't it? How many opportunities we've squandered and how many selfish decisions we've made.

And yet in that story of the prodigal son, when he sets out to return home ready to say, "Father, I've sinned against heaven and against you and I'm no longer worthy to be called your son" ... you remember what happens next? Without any hesitation, the father gives him a big hug, clothes him with his best robe, puts a ring on his finger, and declares, "It's party time, everybody! For my lost son has been found." In other words the Father forgave him fully and freely, just as he does for us. Why? For the sake of Jesus Christ—God's one and only Son who paid our debt in full on the cross. He went all in, giving generously of himself even though it meant suffering the full penalty for the poverty of our sins. And this good news has the power to change people's lives. "Lumosity + Generosity x Jesus." Amen.

