

“Listen to Your Future You” // Luke 16:1–14 // *Lasting Legacy #1*

[BUMPER: Generosity]

Celebrate: More than 100 people professed faith in Christ through baptism, last week and this.

Also last week, I got together with about **500 leaders from churches** we’ve planted in the last decade. It’s been a great week as God is blessing and multiplying this church.

Hey, I don’t know if y’all know this, but there’s an election coming up. Anybody heard anything about this? 2 quick things I want to say: 1st, I want to point you back to a short series we did in May called “Citizens of Another Kingdom. “ We did it months ago so we could prepare our hearts for this moment; you might find it helpful to go back and review it. **Second this:** Next week we’ll be praying together about this, but I want to remind you now that we do see it as your biblical responsibility to vote. You say, “I don’t know of a Bible verse where it commands me to vote?” In Jeremiah 29:7 God tells us that even though we live as exiles here, and are really citizens of another Kingdom, we are to own this city as our city and work for its blessing; to make its problems our problems. One of the most important ways you can do that is by voting. Os Guinness explains that in a government like ours, *“where every citizen is responsible for the health and vitality of the Republic... (not to vote) is ‘failure of citizenship.’”* And I agree. So, I hope you’ll vote.

LUKE 16, if you have your Bible... Do you know what **this** is? It is the infamous **flux capacitor** that allowed Michael J Fox to travel from 1985 to 1955 and then BACK to the Future.

This is a real one so I have to be careful not to touch it or I might suddenly vanish off stage. Although I think I have to be going 88 miles an hour for that to work.

(BTW, did you know--DeLoreans **(pic)**, the awesome-looking car that Michael J Fox used to travel back to the future--were not fast cars in any way? The DeLorean’s 0 to 60 ratio was 11 seconds. Just by contrast, your grandma’s Toyota Camry does 0 to 60 in 6 seconds. The new Tesla does it in 1.9! The DeLorean took 11 seconds! The speedometer on the DeLorean only went up to 85 because it was so slow, and they had to replace the actual speedometer with a fake one so it could look like Michael J Fox got up to 88 mph!

Here’s my question: **If you stumbled onto an ACTUAL one of these (a real flux capacitor, and, SPOILER ALERT--these aren’t real).** But if you found one, and you could travel back to any one point in your life, what year would you choose?

I think I’d choose **1997**. July, 1997 to be exact. I had just met Veronica and she was hopelessly in love with me and she’d commenced her desperate quest of locking me down. (Sometimes she tells the story differently, but whatever. I’d still love to relive some of those incredible moments. I was also preparing to leave for SE Asia as a missionary and I was filled with excitement about that.

I’d **also love to tell 24 year old J.D.** about a small investment he should make. 24-year old J.D. didn’t have a lot of money, but he was trying to scrounge up enough to buy a DVD player to take with him to SE Asia. BTW, do you know what the **2 hottest-selling items** were in 1997? If you were a guy with an extra \$1000 in your bank account, you were trying to buy a DVD player so you could watch the original *Twister* and a Nintendo 64 so you could play *Goldeneye*. But **1997 was also the year that a little company called Amazon** went public. You

could buy one share back then for about \$1.50,¹ and today each of those shares would be worth over \$2000, or 1000x on your investment. I'd tell J.D., forgo the DVD player and messing around with Mario and Luigi; take your \$1000 and spend it all on shares.

Over the next few weeks, we're going to look at what Jesus tells us a future version of us would tell us NOW to do if we could come BACK from the future and talk to ourselves.

We're starting a new series today called "Lasting Legacy." A legacy is what you **leave behind** for the next generation. We're going to talk about the legacy the *future version of us* will want the present us to have left when we die.

Our passage today is Luke 16, but let me first introduce you to the key passage for the whole series before we dive into Luke 16. [Psalm 112:5-6](#): "It is well with the man who deals generously and lends; who conducts his affairs with justice. For the righteous will never be moved; he will be remembered forever."

The way to leave a lasting legacy that is remembered forever, the Psalmist says, is to deal generously and invest in the Kingdom of God. If we do that, we'll leave a legacy that will last and be remembered forever. And that's what I want. Amen?

Now, *I know some of you are like, "Well, I'm not really thinking about LEGACY yet. I'm just trying to make sure I have enough to pay the bills this month."* But this is not just for rich people. The Bible tells us all

that simple stewardship of what we have now is the way to leave a lasting legacy later. Let me show you what I mean:

Luke 16:1, now, 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 my 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,' [First, why would you ever need to borrow 900 gallons of olive oil from someone? I don't know.] 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.'

OK, here's what's happening. Jesus is telling a fictional story, a parable, about a rich guy's money manager who unexpectedly is given his 2-week notice.

So, he goes home and in despair says to his wife, "**What am I going to do?** I've gotten used to drinking my \$9 Starbucks venti quad shot, white mocha with almond milk, extra hot, caramel drizzle, extra whip every day and sitting in first class on the way to work and there's **no**

¹ Adjusted for splits

way I'm going back to drinking Sheetz Coffee and sitting in economy."

And then his wife **has a brilliant idea**: You've been given your 2-week notice, but that means you still have 2 weeks during which you can act in your capacity as the rich boss's money manager.

You see, this guy's boss apparently forgot to take away his security clearance and his power-of-attorney authorizations when he gave him his 2-week notice; and so, for two full weeks, he can still negotiate and sign contracts on behalf of his boss.

So, he **calls up several people** who still owe the boss money, and he tells them: "OK... I see here that you owe my boss \$100,000... I tell you what, if you'll pay \$75,000 right now, I'll give you an official 'debt-settled' certificate and we'll just call it even." And they are like, "Are you serious?!" And he says, "Yes... (hit chest 2x) **Just remember later who took care of you.**"

Well, this guy does this with **all his boss's debtors**. And so, **after his two weeks are up**, he has no more job, but he's got a bunch of grateful friends who feel like they owe him a big, huge favor.

Jesus then says, ⁸ "The master (the rich man, who'd just gotten hosed, btw!) commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. (Seriously. Did you see that coming? Jesus **praises** the shady manager for his shrewdness.)

And then, Jesus explains the lesson: 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.

A lot of people find this parable confusing. What in the world is Jesus saying? Why is he praising a money manager whose behavior is morally dubious at best and outright fraudulent at worst?

This parable is like one of those pictures where you look at it one way and it's the face of a decrepit old woman, but then someone shows you that if you look at it another way, it's the profile of a beautiful young lady. And once you see it the new way, you never look at it the same again. You know what I'm talking about? This parable is like that. It's initially confusing, but once you see the meaning, you'll never forget it.

You ready? Here we go: The Rich Boss represents God and the manager who just got fired is us. The money we're managing represents all the resources God has entrusted under our care--our life, our breath, our possessions, everything.

The firing notice the manager receives represents our awareness of our coming death. We don't know exactly how long you got--it could be 2 weeks, 20 years or 70 years, but we all know we're going to die, and when we do, we're gonna lose access to the Master's money--our life, our breath, our resources, everything--all of it goes away. We came into this world with nothing and we leave with nothing.

And that means if you're smart, Jesus says, you'll use your money now (like this fired \$\$ manager did) to prepare for your coming future. You can't take any of your money with you into the future, you see, but you can use that money NOW in ways that will prepare you for that future.

Jesus then concludes the parable with this: ¹⁰ "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much... ¹¹ So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? (**Somehow**, our faithfulness with the

resources God has given us in this life determines our responsibility level and your enjoyment level in the next.)

I chose to open our ‘Lasting Legacy’ series with this parable because of 2 clear things it teaches us: FIRST, all we have ultimately belongs to God; and SECOND, the wisest thing we can do with our resources is leverage them for eternity.

OK, **1. It all belongs to God.** The whole premise of this parable is the manager is handling SOMEBODY ELSE’S money, money he ultimately has to return one day.

The first element in a proper attitude toward your possessions is the realization that *it’s not really yours*. And I know some of us, because we’re Americans, bristle at that.

- You say, “**But I earned what I have.** Nobody gave me anything. I pulled myself up by my bootstraps and made myself a success story.” I’m not saying you didn’t. But think with me for a minute:
- **The talents and the drive** you used to make yourself a success, where did those come from? Did you bestow all those things on yourself? Did you program your own DNA?
- You say, “Well no, but I developed my talents.” And sure, I’m not taking away from that. But the **opportunities you had to develop them**--did you provide yourself with all those? Do you really think that if you'd grown up a blind orphan in South Sudan that you'd have all the opportunities you have now?
- **Not to mention that the air you breathe and the health you’ve used to** pursue your life all comes from God.
- My point is **not to take away from your hard work**, just to say that when you trace it all back to its origins, so much about our lives goes back to things that God gave to us.
- **God says**, “Trace your stuff back to its origins and it all comes back to Me, and you’re going to have to give Me an account for what you did with it.”

- I’ve always heard there are **2 questions each of us** will be asked in eternity: **Question 1: What did you do with my Son?** Did you receive my Son Jesus and his offer to save you? Did you submit to him as Lord? That’s the salvation question. **Question 2:** What did you do with my stuff? Did you use it for the purposes I gave it to you! That’s the **stewardship** question.

So, the **FIRST** reason I use this parable to open this series is it teaches us that all that we have belongs to God.

The **SECOND** reason I use this parable is that it clearly shows us that **2. The wisest thing we can do with our money is leverage it for eternity**

- What this fired-money-manager did was very logical--smart, even. His ethics may be questionable, but his logic was sound. That’s why Jesus praised him for it. He says, **vs 8**, “*I wish my people were as SMART with their lives as this shrewd manager was with his money.*”
- I mean, if you know death is coming, and you know that at that point all that you’ve enjoyed and built for yourself on earth comes to an end, isn’t leveraging your stuff now for eternity then the only logical thing to do? You can’t take any of your money with you! The ancient Pharaohs often wanted to be buried with all their riches and their favorite possessions and sometimes even their favorite wives but that just seems silly because all the riches of their gilded tombs didn’t help them in death. Eventually tomb raiders broke into the tombs and stole it.
- Sure, you’ll leave some of it to your kids, and that can be a blessing. Or maybe you’ll leave some of it to a local university or an art foundation or a hospital, but the ultimate question this parable asks is, “**Who do you think the rich Boss in your life really is--and what does HE want you to do with that money?**” He’s the one you’ll answer to one day.
- It’s why I have told you that **one of my life mantras** is: “*Only one life to live, ‘twill soon be past; only what’s done for Christ will last.*” He’s the rich boss to whom I’ll give an account.

- **It's simple logic. You can't take your money with you: Imagine you are walking through Nordstrom.** Not Nordstrom Rack, but the expensive Nordstrom. And as you walk through this incredibly expensive store, all kinds of things catch your fancy. Designer clothes, nice jewelry, expensive watches, handbags from Gucci, Saint Laurent, and Burberry. And so you start trying stuff on and walking around the store in it, loading up your arms, carrying around all this stuff you like. I see you walking through the store with all this fancy stuff and I know you don't have any money, so I say, "What are you doing? You can't afford this stuff!" And you say, "Yeah, I know. I'll have to leave it all at the counter before I walk out, but it just feels really good to wear it around during my journey across the store." I'd say, "That's a dumb thing to do. Why load yourself up with a bunch of stuff you can't take with you?"
- Jesus said from the perspective of eternity, that's what it looks like to use your material possessions to make a nice, comfortable life for yourself here.
- Randy Alcorn, in his book, *The Treasure Principle* says this about money: **"You can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead."** Meaning, you can't take your money with you, but you can use it now to prepare for your eternal dwellings then.

Listen: this is **not the only motivation** the Bible ever gives you for giving. Love and compassion are big motivators for the Christian, too. But this one gets at the core of something the Bible says is absolutely necessary to live the Christian life: FAITH.

Do you actually believe in Jesus and eternity *enough* to let it affect what you do with your money now? Cuz here's the thing, y'all: the needs you have now are *real*; the material comforts that money can buy *now* are real. That car is real. That vacation is real. That house is REAL. And it's hard to forego what you can see and touch now for an eternity that you can't see or feel yet.

That's where faith comes in. Hebrews 11 which we just studied together taught that faith was the evidence of things hoped for, the assurance of things unseen and without faith, it is impossible to please God. And when it comes down to that moment of faith, when we need to say, "I'm going to invest in something *I can't see yet*," that's when most of us fall off the wagon.

Confessing Jesus as Lord with your mouth is relatively easy; what we actually believe is shown by what we do with our resources. Money don't lie. If I want to see what you **actually believe** about eternity, more accurate than what your mouth says or how high you raise your hands in worship is what you do with your money.

OK... those are the two principles: 1. *All our money ultimately belongs to God*, and 2. *The wisest thing we can do with our money is invest it in eternity.*

Now, let me use those **2 principles** to give you a little **3-step evaluation tool** to see where you are on this stuff. To show you what you actually believe about Jesus.

The **first two reveal how well** you understand the principle of ownership, and the last one reveals how much you grasp the wisdom of eternal investment. *Think of this like a 3-step ladder.*

Rung 1: The Firstfruit Offering (The Tithe)

The Bible teaches that the tithe--at least the first 10%--of all that we get should be given back to God in recognition that all of it comes from him.

This is the **most basic, fundamental premise of stewardship**--present in literally the first stories in the Bible.

- God told Cain and Abel, the first 2 sons of Adam and Eve, that they were to give the first fruits of their produce or their livestock

to him. Abel did that, but Cain, by contrast, waited to the end, after everything had come in and all his needs were met, and then gave God some of the leftovers. God accepted Abel's offering and rejected Cain's.

Sometimes people say, "Well, pastor, you know, "the tithe" isn't in the NT; the "tithe" is part of OT law and we're no longer under the law, we're under grace."

- And I always say, "Yes, but the firstfruits principle on which the tithe is based precedes the Law." And not just with Cain and Abel: Abraham, hundreds of years before the Law was given, gave God the tithe, the first 10%, of everything God gave to him.
- Jesus **himself endorses it in Matthew 23:23**. It's the most basic giving principle in the Bible.

In fact, this is interesting: whenever Scripture talks about our first fruits, it doesn't even use the language of "give," it says "bring." We **BRING** the first fruit back to God, not give it to him.

- You say, "Well, what's the difference between bringing and giving?" When you "give" something to someone, the implication is that it's yours and you are choosing to give it to them.
- But that's not the language you'd use if you've borrowed something from someone else and they'd asked for it back. If I borrowed your car and later you say, "Hey, I'd like that car back!" and I say, "OK, I'll come by later and donate this car to you!" You'd say, "You can't donate that to me; it already belongs to me. I want you to **BRING** it back to me."

That's how God talks about the firstfruits. In Malachi God said that NOT to bring it back to him is like *stealing* from him: **Malachi 3:8:** "Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing me!" "How do we rob you?" you ask. "By not bringing the tithe and the contributions. 9 You are suffering under a curse, yet you—the whole nation—are still robbing me. 10 Bring the full tithe into the storehouse so that there may be food in my house."

A lot of people **resent whenever God talks** about the tithe. "Why you always gotta be messing with my money, God?" But, honestly, y'all, that just shows **how out of touch we are with who it all ultimately belongs to.**

It reminds me of a story I heard—a true story, one of my favorites--about a young mother of 4 who recounted that her favorite moment of each week was Tuesday mornings when she got a babysitter so she could go out for a little "me" time. Her ritual was to go down to the Food Court in the mall and get a cup of Starbucks coffee and a bag of Mrs. Field's cookies. She'd go to both stores because... **"Treat yo'self."** Well, one Tuesday morning, she said, she got to the mall, bought her coffee and her cookies, and looked for a place to sit down, but the place was pretty crowded so she had to sit down at a table across from an older man that she didn't know. He nodded and acknowledged her and went on reading his book. But then, she said, after a few minutes, he reached his hand out across the table and put it in her bag of Mrs. Field's cookies, took one out and ate it. She locked eyes with him and thought, "I can't believe this guy! The audacity to eat one of my cookies!" So, to make a point, while not removing her eyes from his, she reached her own hand into the little paper bag, took out a cookie and ate it. He smiled at her and went back to reading his book. She was outraged! So, she reached out and slid the bag up closer to her. A few minutes later he reached all the way across the table and took another cookie. She was genuinely flummoxed now, and just stared death at him. She took another cookie. By this point, she said, there was just one cookie left, and this guy had the nerve to reach over, take her last cookie, break it in two, and offer her half! This was too much. She stood up in a huff, grabbed her stuff and stormed off. She got to the next store, still seething, and

reached into her pocketbook to get her phone so she could vent to a friend, and when she did her hand came to rest on a still-warm and still unopened bag of Mrs. Field's cookies. Her bag. The whole time she had been dueling with this guy over his bag of cookies.

That kind of changes your perspective on the story, and on that man, doesn't it? Instead of being some rude guy imposing on her, he becomes quite patient and generous. **When you and I resent bringing the tithe to God, we're like that woman:** It's not our stuff that we are *sharing with* him; it's his stuff he's shared with us. And when we obey him by bringing him back the firstfruits, we're not "donating" that stuff back to him; we're giving back to him what already belongs to him, as he graciously allows us to enjoy the rest. To not do that is stealing from him.

But, and don't miss this, there's a **positive side of this Malach 3:10**, too. Look: "Test me in this way," says the Lord of Armies (bring the tithe to me first, and...). "See if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing for you without measure." Try me, he says. Put me first, and see if I won't use your obedience as a channel of blessing back into your life. Test him! Listen, I've done this, as have many people in this church, and he's proven true. Sometimes it comes in the form of a financial blessing--often it's that. Other times he blesses you in other ways beyond financial! Either way, he promises here to use your obedience as a channel of blessing into your life. That's an invitation to you, my challenge to you. Test him!

See, here's the reality: Most studies show that only 10-20% of church attendees tithe. ***What does that say about what the majority of people sitting in church each week understand about God's***

ownership of their lives? At Summit, our percentage of people who tithe is actually a little higher--in our most recent church survey, 24% said they tithed. And I guess that's good news, but still, only 24%! (This was anonymous and self-reported). That's something we need to reckon with. BTW, 28% of our attenders say they give nothing at all.

Again, **this is one of the most basic questions of discipleship.** I'm not sure if you could call yourself a follower of Jesus and not do this. And I always say, "If my talking about this bothers you because you had some bad experience in the past where you saw a church leader abuse this, and you think this is some kind of ploy, a manipulation tool, to get money out of your pocket and into mine, I'd urge that you apply what I'm saying by giving somewhere else. Genuinely. It's more important to me that you learn to be an actual disciple of Jesus than it is that you give here. I trust God will take care of our needs--but for your sake, I'm telling you, you can't be a disciple until you are investing in God's kingdom and this is where it starts. Maybe you can't get fully to a tithe in a year. God is patient. Maybe you'll need a 3 year ramp up or something. I just urge you to get started. And again, if you feel like this is manipulative, I bless you, I officially bless you in giving somewhere else.

Alright, we've got to keep moving... That's rung 1.

(Rung 2: Stewardship Living (The Recognition that All of It Belongs to God))

You're at rung 2 when you start to regard all of your possessions as belonging to God and you ask God what he wants you to do with all of it.

- **Many Christians stuck on rung 1 treat the tithe like a 10% God-tax they pay, and after that they can do WHATEVER you want with the remaining 90% as long as it's legal and moral.**
- **But if we are truly followers of Jesus, Jesus says, then we'll see all of our possessions as his.** The first 10% automatically goes back to him; but beyond that, like this money manager, I ask what he wants me to do with **ALL** that he's given me.

When the **Rich Young Ruler** came to follow Jesus, Jesus told him that if he wanted to be his follower, he'd have to give away all his money, because Jesus could see that this rich guy's money was the most important thing in his life. Jesus was not saying that every person who followed him from that point on has to give away everything immediately as some kind of buy-in, just that to follow him we have to surrender everything in our lives to him. Let me ask you: If Jesus had asked this of you: If he'd said, to follow me, leave all your possessions behind, would you do it? Don't even think about saying yes if you're not doing this.

His point was that to follow him, nothing can be held back from him. Every breath, every moment, every dollar, from that point on belongs to him.

I've compared it to the difference between giving someone a **BLANK CHECK** and a **GIFT CARD**. **I've talked about this before. This gift card someone gave to me...**

- **Many of you want to give a gift-card to Jesus. It might be a generous gift-card. What he wants is a blank check. He's like, You can keep THAT [the gift card]. I don't want it. I only want that blank check.**
- **So the question for you is this:** *Have you honestly ever given all your resources to God, like a blank check, and said, "God, it's all yours--what do you want me to do with this?"*

- **Be honest.** Who do you see as the one really owning your stuff?

That's rung 2. And like I said, those 1st 2 have to do with whether you understand ownership.

Rung 3: (we'll call) **Legacy Investing:** This has to do with whether you **grasp the concept of eternal investment**. Do you realize, like the manager in this parable, that life is short and that you can't take any of your possessions with you, and that the wisest thing to do with the majority of your money is to invest as much as you can of it in eternity? *You can't take it w/ you, but you can send it on ahead.*

Some of us have gotten ourselves to **(RUNG 1)**; we may even have said **(RUNG 2)**, "Jesus, it's all yours, tell me what you want me to do," but have you gotten to a place where you are actively trying to transfer your treasures to heaven?

A couple of weeks ago in my **Quiet Time** I was reading Acts 4, where it describes the generosity of those first Christians in the early church, and it says this, **Acts 4:34** **And there was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 4:34–35)**

- **Nancy Guthrie, a Bible commentator,** says there is something in that short description of their generosity that we usually miss. They sold their land. These early Christians were almost all Jews, and for a Jew in 1st century Israel, property was by far their most important possession, because land in Israel represented their stake in Israel's future Kingdom--land was the divine inheritance they passed down to your kids; it was their security for the future. That's why, btw, property laws in Leviticus and Deuteronomy were structured to help keep land in the family.² God even set it up so that every 50th year, what they called the year of Jubilee,

² Deut 25:5–6; Lev 25:28.

any land that a family had lost through poor financial decisions could be returned to them!

- So, bottom line, for these **early Jewish Christians** to give away their land meant giving away what represented their earthly security and security for future family.
- And why would they do that? Because Christ now was their true inheritance; his Kingdom was their eternal Kingdom; and his mission was the legacy they wanted to invest in.

So, again: **What about you? (IMAGE: LADDER)**. I mean, it's one thing to give him back the firstfruits; it's another thing to acknowledge it all belongs to him. Those are both awesome--but **how many of you have been so impacted by the gospel** that you'd actually consider selling off worldly assets you've held on to as security for your future, or planned to hand down to your children, to invest in Christ's Kingdom, his eternal legacy?³

When we brought the Hebrews 11 series to a close a few weeks ago, I told you the story of William Borden, the young millionaire, heir to the Borden Milk Company, who in the 1920's walked away from all of it to be a missionary in Egypt and died there less than 3 months later. Some of his last words had been the phrase "No regrets," and engraved on his tombstone today, in Cairo, are the words: **APART FROM FAITH IN CHRIST, THERE IS NO EXPLANATION FOR SUCH A LIFE.** That's where God has been challenging me. To live in a way with respect to our finances that **DOESN'T MAKE SENSE** if eternity is not real, but if it is, it's the only way that does.

God is challenging me and Veronica in this season to give in ways beyond what we ever have before. In ways that just would not make sense if Jesus and his kingdom and this parable aren't true. But see, we believe that Jesus and his Kingdom are true, and we've staked our

lives on that. And **we know that if a future version of us** could use this flux capacitor and come back to talk with ourselves, we'd tell ourselves: INVEST IN ETERNITY.

(BTW, next week I'm going to tell you about an EXCITING NEW thing CALLED LEGACY LANES WHERE YOU CAN GIVE SPECIFICALLY IN WAYS TO IMPACT eternity. INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS, CHURCH PLANTING, LOVING OUR COMMUNITY, LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND BUILDING AND EXPANSION, and all our giving in December is going exclusively to those 5 lands. But more on that next week.

OK, let me wrap this up by giving you a few practical things to put this into practice, and then I'm going to make one final observation from Luke 11. I really want to make this as practical as possible for you.

1. **Choose to live generously and start somewhere (LADDER)** First-time giving? That's awesome!
2. **Make a plan to give.**
 - I'll tell you right now, good intentions won't get you anywhere.
 - You have to make a plan. **1 Cor 16:2: "On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income."**
 - Paul's talking about being intentional with your money.
 - Budgeting.
 - For most of us, generosity starts with budgeting.
 - I love what **Dave Ramsey** says (some of you love Dave Ramsey; you've invited Dave Ramsey into your heart, I know). He says: **"If you don't tell your money where to go, you'll wonder where it went."**

³ Nancy Guthrie, *Saved: Experiencing the Promise of the Book of Acts*, 57–58

- Take some time to **honestly assess your situation**. Talk with your family and spouse and make a plan. Paul says, “*in accordance with your income;*” (you can’t give what you don’t have.)
 - We have resources that can help you here, go to summitchurch.com/stewardship and you can get free coaching on setting up a budget that works for you!
3. **Do your giving first!** Give him the first fruit! Remember Cain and Abel: the only reason we can see in Genesis why God accepted Abel’s offering and rejected Cain’s was that Abel gave God the first fruits, before the rest came in, and Cain waited until it had all come in, all his needs were met, and then gave to God out of the overflow, the leftovers. One took faith. The other didn’t. God is saying, “Put my kingdom first. **Put me to the test!**” I’d invite you to accept God’s invitation!
4. **Seek to grow your margin**
- How can you structure your life to invest in eternity? It’s going to be different for everybody. As Paul said, it’s “in accordance with your income.”
 - But you can and should invest in eternity.
 - For some of us, that might mean cutting things away from your lifestyle to increase margin for investment. Things like:
 - Eating out less and packing a lunch for work every once in a while. Did you know: the average family in the Triangle spends \$1,000/ yr on soft drinks alone
 - Here’s one: Make your coffee at home. The average Triangle family spends \$128/mo on coffee.

- Consider cutting your cable bill or 3 of the 14 streaming services you subscribe to. The average cable/TV bill in Raleigh is \$108 per month, and that’s not even counting internet access
- Here’s one more: Consider **getting rid of your car payment** and buying a less expensive car with cash. The avg car payment in Raleigh is \$480

That’s some of you. Maybe for others of you, it might mean selling off some asset that you have that you want to invest into eternity. Some piece of property or savings thing that you want to send on ahead, to invest in Christ’s eternal kingdom, knowing that when you die you can’t take it with you, but you can send it on ahead.

Now, let me warn you in advance... if you choose to live this way, you’re going to have to get comfortable with not being able to afford things that other people who make roughly the same as you can afford. And you’re going to notice that. You see, here’s what I know about human nature. We all tend to know who makes generally the same amount of money as us. And we’re constantly evaluating how they are living compared to how we are living. What kind of car do they drive? Where are they sending their kids to school? What kinds of vacations are they going on? ***But here’s the thing.***

- **Most people in the Triangle are in debt.** The average monthly credit card balance for people in the Triangle is \$8158.⁴ Scripture definitely tells us not to go into unsecured debt to support a lifestyle--as Dave Ramsey says, “learn to act your wage”--you’ve heard, ‘learn to act your age; also learn to act your wage’--so simply not going into debt is going to put you behind, in terms of lifestyle, others who make the same as you.

⁴ See [here](https://wallethub.com/edu/cities-where-people-are-adding-the-most-debt/135923). According to this site, that makes Raleigh the 38th worst American city when it comes to CC debt:

- Second, **Scripture teaches us to tithe.** If you're bringing the first 10% back to God, that's going to put you behind.
- So, at this point, you're already two steps behind everyone else.
- Scripture teaches us that the wise man saves for the future. So if you're going to save, that puts you at least 3 steps behind, in terms of lifestyle, others in the same income bracket as you.
- And believe me, three steps behind is noticeable! And then, if you do eternal investment on top of that, that is going to take faith!

But remember the FLUX CAPACITOR. This is definitely what the future you would tell you to do if you could come back from the future and talk to yourself.

Which brings me to **this card** you got that your campus teams referred to when you came in. We aren't filling it out today, but I want you to be aware we'll do this together at the end of this series in a few weeks.

This is not a contract you're filling out; it's just a discipleship tool. It's relatively simple. It says, **"To leave a lasting legacy, the Lord is leading me to ..."** either **(1) start giving** (That's a big step. And I don't want you to feel ashamed that you haven't given before. This is a big, life-changing step that's going to reshape your whole eternity), **(2) tithe—that is, give 10%, or** (Maybe you've been giving, but you aren't giving 10%. This series could be when you ask God to help you work up to that number. I challenge you to TEST him. Like I said earlier, you may not get there all at once and may have to ramp up over the next year or two, but you should start somewhere). Start testing him to see if he's faithful **(3) give beyond the tithe** (Consider how you can invest in eternity).

We're not doing this today... but I wanted you to go ahead and start praying through it. Talking about it with your family.

I also want to give you a devotional our team put together that will help you process everything we're teaching over the next few weeks-- you can access it online in the weekly email that comes out, or there are paper copies you can pick up at your campus. Our entire staff team has gone through this; I have too. Build it into your quiet time. You parents, it will be a good thing to do with your families.

Conclusion

OK, let me land the plane here by returning one final time to Lk 16...

VAMP

Luke 16:14: The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this [heard what you just heard, what I just explained] **and were sneering at Jesus.**

- **Why were they sneering?** Isn't it obvious? They loved money, and Jesus was attacking what was precious to them, what was the core of their lives, and sneering is what you do when someone threatens you at your core.
- Listen, I know, but some of you are sneering. You've been sneering since I got up here. I'm just saying, "Classify yo'self." This is not a good group to be associated with in the Bible.

But Jesus talking to us about generosity shouldn't make us sneer.

Listen, Jesus didn't teach on generosity because he needed something from us. He proved that time and time again, right? When he had a need, he could multiply loaves and fish or send Peter out to catch a fish with a gold coin in his mouth. Jesus was good on money. And he came not to take from us, but to lay down his life for us! He's not here to take your money. When you and I were nothing but poor, condemned sinners, he laid down his for us. He left heaven's throne and all of its riches to pursue you in the pig sties of the far country.

Isaiah says he was oppressed. Afflicted. Silent. Judged. Cut off. Stricken. Crushed. Poured out. Because it was the Lord's pleasure to put him to grief, because God made him who knew no sin to become sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

He's a God of extravagant generosity.

No, Jesus invited you into generosity because he wants you to experience the joy of being like him.

The **heart of the gospel is that God so loved the world that he GAVE;** he gave his one and only son that whosoever believes in him would NOT perish. God gives you a chance to be like him, because that's where real joy is.

AND he wants you to test him so you can see how faithful he is, and he wants to give you a chance to invest in eternity.

So, will you take this invitation? Generosity is not something he wants from you, it's something he wants *for you*. But as always, I'll say again: if this bothers you... because of some bad experience where some leader violated your trust (and there's a lot of them out there, I get that, and that's understandable you feel this way), and you can't shake the idea that I'm doing this to get money from your pocket into mine, I want to give you permission, and bless you, in giving somewhere else. Hopefully in time we'll earn your trust, but until then, I'd rather you be able to experience the joy of generosity and living by faith and leveraging your life in eternity than I am concerned about you giving your money here. OK? We OK? On the same page?

This is more about you being a disciple than it is getting our needs met. We're gonna be fine. God isn't in heaven, wringing his hands, saying, "Oh, what are Jeff and Margie going to do?," worried about how he's going to fund his mission. I want you to do this because this is what a disciple does.

Let's BOW our heads for prayer... "God, this is going to be a great and challenging journey. I can't wait to see what you're going to do in me and in this church in these next few weeks..."

