

# Sermon Note: Earn All You Can

## Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

### Introduction

This is week two of *Dreaming the Future*, a four-week stewardship series built on *Earn. Save. Give.* by James A. Harnish and *Enough* by Adam Hamilton. As United Methodists, we promise to support the ministries of the church with our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness, and John Wesley's first rule about money is "gain all you can" (which Harnish updates to "earn"). For most of us, our days are filled with work: jobs, classrooms, households, volunteer shifts. In Luke 16, Jesus tells his disciples a story about a manager who's about to lose his job. His master has heard that the manager is squandering his property and has asked for an accounting.

### Illustration Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjjJ-aeBj9Y>

In this clip from *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006), Emily trains Andy, the new second assistant at a fashion magazine, and then Andy takes her first orders from the editor, Miranda...

### Why This Video?

Andy starts a job with rules: answer every call and stay at the desk. Emily reinforces them with a story about an assistant who left her desk with a sliced hand and now "works at TV Guide." Emily brags about an upcoming Paris trip, like a reward that comes with keeping the rules. Soon after, Andy is reminded of her place when Miranda calls her the wrong name and refuses to hear her questions. These interactions show what a demanding job can require, how people can feel harmed, and how people can feel rewarded.

### Video Discussion Questions

1. Emily tells Andy, "you are chained to that desk." What do you think it's like to start a job with that as the first lesson?
2. Emily describes the Paris trip with "it's divine." What do you think that trip means to Emily?
3. Miranda calls Andy "Emily," and Andy answers, "Actually, it's Andy... Andrea, but everybody calls me Andy." What do you notice about how she says it? What could it feel like to have your name overlooked at work?
4. Miranda tells Andy, "Please bore someone else with your questions." Later Emily says, "You would never ask Miranda anything." What might happen to a workplace when questions aren't welcome?
5. Emily sends Andy to Calvin Klein, and when Andy expresses uncertainty, asks if she has "some prior commitment." Do you think Emily is saying something about Andy's time and/or level of commitment? What might that be, and what message might that send to Andy?
6. Have you had a job (or a task or a role) that took more of your time than you expected? When you look back, was it worth it? What made it that way?
7. What helps you keep a sense of who you are in work (or other roles) with heavy demands?

## Luke 16:1-13 (NRSVue)

<sup>1</sup>Then Jesus said to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. <sup>2</sup>So he summoned him and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management because you cannot be my manager any longer.’ <sup>3</sup>Then the manager said to himself, ‘What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. <sup>4</sup>I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.’ <sup>5</sup>So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ <sup>6</sup>He answered, ‘A hundred jugs of olive oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.’ <sup>7</sup>Then he asked another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ He replied, ‘A hundred containers of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill and make it eighty.’ <sup>8</sup>And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly, for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. <sup>9</sup>And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone they may welcome you into the eternal homes.

<sup>10</sup>“Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much, and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. <sup>11</sup>If, then, you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? <sup>12</sup>And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? <sup>13</sup>No slave can serve two masters, for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

## Scripture Study Questions

1. In the previous chapter, Jesus was speaking to a broad audience, and in chapter 16 he turns to his disciples. What do you think this suggests about this parable and who Jesus intends it for?
2. In verse 3, the manager says, “I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg.” Why do you think he does what he does in the following verses?
3. In verse 8, the master commends the dishonest manager for acting shrewdly. Does this seem like an odd—or even challenging—story for Jesus to tell? What do you think Jesus wants the disciples to learn from it?
4. In verse 9, Jesus says to “make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth.” What could it mean to “make friends” by means of dishonest wealth? What use could money be in building relationships?
5. In verse 10, Jesus says, “Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much.” What do you think counts as “very little” or “much” here? Where have you seen small acts of faithfulness grow into something significant?
6. In verse 11, Jesus contrasts “dishonest wealth” with “true riches.” What do you think are the differences between the two? How might true riches relate to money?
7. In verse 13, Jesus says no slave can serve two masters. What do you think serving a master looks like today? Where do work and serving God come together for you?

## Additional (Optional) Questions

1. In *Earn. Save. Give.*, James A. Harnish says John Wesley's advice to earn all you can must have surprised some early Methodists. What surprises you, if anything, about hearing that advice in church?
2. Harnish goes on to say that Wesley spoke of work as a calling for every disciple, pastors included. What might it mean to think of your own work, paid or unpaid, as a calling?
3. Harnish says Wesley asked that earning never come at the cost of a person's health, soul, or neighbors. Which of these three is easiest for you to keep an eye on? Which is hardest?
4. In *Enough*, Adam Hamilton writes that as we allow Christ to work in us, we begin to look for ways to make a difference with our time, talents, and resources. Where do you see yours making a difference right now? What could *more* of a difference look like?
5. Hamilton includes overwork among the symptoms of what he calls "affluenza." When has a busy period of work left less time for the people and practices you care about? What helped?

## Weekly Action

Choose one ordinary workday (whatever "work" looks like for you) this week and pray before it starts, perhaps beginning with: "God, I'm yours in this work today" (or feel free to use your own words). Throughout the day, pay attention to where your time and skills already serve other people: a coworker, a classmate, a neighbor, a family member. At the end of the day, write down one place where you could serve a little more intentionally, whether that's a task done with care, an hour of volunteering, or a financial gift toward something you believe in. Later in the week, talk with a trusted spiritual partner about what caught your attention, and where you feel inspired to do more.

## Prayer

Generous and calling God, you give us hands to work, desks and kitchens and classrooms to work in, and neighbors to work beside. We thank you for the weekdays that fill most of our hours. Forgive us when we give more loyalty to money than to you, and teach us to serve you first. Help us to celebrate what you celebrate. Use our time, our skills, and our gifts to serve the people around us, including in the places we work. Through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

*This content was developed by Rev. Bob Rhodes using source materials from Discipleship Ministries of The United Methodist Church, his own original writing, and AI tools in alignment with La Jolla UMC AI Usage Guidelines. AI assisted with drafting and iterative refinement. All final text was reviewed and approved by Rev. Rhodes.*