

# “A Great Leader Must Have The Right Reaction To Accountability”

Scripture: Luke 16:1-15

## Introduction

We now come to the last session in our leadership seminar. I believe that our study in this session is probably one of the most important subject matters that we could ever study if we are going to become great leaders. And, I would like to say that the subject matter of accountability is one of the most neglected, rejected, and refused of any principle that leaders are faced with today. So many people do not want to be held accountable for their actions, behavior, and assigned responsibilities. And, the tendency which most of us have is to get angry, develop resentment, and blame others if we are held accountable for our responsibilities. But, I can tell you this emphatically, “If you can’t handle accountability for your actions and receive constructive criticism for your behavior and ministry responsibilities, you will never be a great leader. Through the years of my ministry, I have only had to dismiss a few people. And, that says a lot in over forty years of ministry. Yet, the truth is that the few that I have had to dismiss were let go because they just could not accept accountability for their ministry performance, and they could not handle constructive criticism. And, in going back to our study in session three on having the right attitude, I need to remind you that unless we have a teachable spirit, we will never accept accountability for anything we do. Thus, unless we have the spirit of a servant who respects the authority of the one over us, there is no way that we will ever accept accountability for our leadership responsibilities.

In this final session of our seminar, I want us to take a look at a much neglected passage of scripture and discover some principles about how to react to others holding us accountable for our leadership responsibilities. Some of you may have attended another staff seminar a few years ago in which I used this same passage of scripture, **Luke 16:1-15**, and talked about accountability. But during that seminar, I spent most of my time talking to you about accountability for handling money. This time, I want to go far beyond the handling of money and use the same passage to talk about how we should react to accountability in every area of our lives and leadership responsibilities. Sometimes we just need to stop and remember some other scriptures like **Proverbs 27:5**, where the Bible says, **“Open rebuke is better than secret love.”** Also, in **Ecclesiastes 7:5**, we find, **“It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.”** In other words, accountability may require a rebuke, but on the other hand, it may only require an accounting to make sure that the work has been carried out, the job has been finished, and the assignment has been performed. Therefore, to associate accountability with only rebuke may be totally wrong. Thus, once again, let me say that we must keep a teachable spirit when others try to hold us accountable for the jobs we have been assigned. So, today, in this final session, let’s take a look at this scripture passage and learn some truths which God is trying to show to us. Just remember, accountability is vital to the success of any ministry or project, and to not hold people accountable is far less than God’s plan for every one of us who will be ultimately held accountable by God Himself for the work and ministry He has called us to. Now, let’s open our hearts and get what we should learn from this study.

In this unique passage of scripture, Jesus presents a story about man who was the steward or governor over another man’s possessions. It was the steward’s responsibility to manage the possessions and property of his lord, and he was to make sure that his master’s welfare and wealth was his primary consideration. In other words, he was not the owner, but he was to take care of, protect, and make sure that everything his master owned and that for which he was accountable was to be taken care of, protected, and kept safe for his master. And, he was to make sure that his master’s investments brought forth a good dividend, and that no one stole from his master in any way. Yet, it is obvious from this story that this steward had not done a good job, and that he had forgotten that the day of accounting was coming when his master would truly hold him responsible for that which was in his care. Thus, accusations were made by someone that the steward was wasting his master’s goods, and that he was not doing a good job. So, when the master heard these accusations, he called for a meeting with the steward and held him accountable for his actions. It is obvious that the master must have given him a short time period to put everything in order, and then he would meet with him again. We might say that the steward was put on probation before he was to lose his job. Now, things really got serious.

Let’s begin with the verse by verse exegesis and see what this man did, and especially how the lord approved his decisions, even when what he did was wrong. This is why this passage is so unique! It indicates that he was approved for his wisdom, although in his decision he did wrong. His wrong was not approved, but his wisdom was.

**I. A GREAT LEADER WHO REACTS PROPERLY TO ACCOUNTABILITY LIVES WITH THE AWARENESS THAT THE DAY OF ACCOUNTING MAY BRING A REBUKING ACCUSATION. vs. 1-2**

A. In this story the steward was accused of wasted money. v. 1

As I mentioned before, this story is basically about money, but let's go deeper than money today. Think about all of the blessings, the goods, the talents, the skills, and the opportunities that God has given to all of us. Have we used them wisely, or have we wasted them with wrong decisions and mismanagement? Let me ask you right now, "Have you wasted what God has given to you?" Have you been faithful in being a good steward over what God has called you to be and do for Him? Do you live your life and ministry every day in such a good way that you don't dread the day of accounting which you are going to face? I hope you do, but if not, maybe you need to take a personal inventory of your life and ministry and see if you are a wise steward.

B. In this story the steward was accused of worthless management. v. 2

I can think of nothing more serious on earth than to be called by God to a position of leadership and authority, and then be found guilty of mismanaging the position or place of authority that God has given to us. We must refuse to take casually our role and responsibilities as leaders under God's authority so that we will be faithful to our calling, and so that we will not have to stand ashamed before God. If we can't face the day of accounting before the people that God has put over us, how do we think that we will be able to stand before Jesus one day to give an account to Him? Folks, this is serious stuff that we are talking about. Why? Because there is the possibility that God might take away our stewardship responsibility and give it to another! God help us to not relinquish our God-given position as a steward because we have not reacted well to accountability.

**II. A GREAT LEADER WHO REACTS PROPERLY TO ACCOUNTABILITY LIVES WITH THE AWARENESS THAT THE DAY OF ACCOUNTING MAY BRING A REVERENTIAL ANXIETY. v. 3**

Let me tell you something! It is much better to fear God and the ones He has placed over us with a respectful fear than it will be to lose our position, and then be brought down to a place of humiliation where we will fear God and those over us out of a heart of real fear. Forced fear is not a good thing. Therefore, let's surrender our will to God's will and humble ourselves before the Lord and those over us lest we one day be forced to bow in humble submission because we have been poor stewards.

A. This steward had anxiety because of the possible loss of his position. v. 3a

In this verse three, we find that the steward really began to ponder deep down in his heart what was about to happen. He suddenly came to realize that he was about to be out of a job! Maybe he was too old to go to work in some other role, or maybe his pride would not allow him to beg, but he knew one thing for sure. That was that if he did not get his house in order, he was about to lose everything, including his source of income, his respected position, his ability to take care of his family, and everything else.

B. This steward also had anxiety because of the power level of his pride. v. 3b

So, deep within the recesses of his proud heart, he concocted a plan that he felt sure would cause his master to go light on him and even commend him because he was going to collect some money from delinquent people who owed his master some funds. He came up with the plan, but even with this new plan, his motives were not right. Why? Because he was only thinking about himself and who would take care of him. Yet, when his master discovered what he had done, he did indeed commend this unjust steward for making provision for his future; something that a lot of professing believers don't do in view of eternity.

### **III. A GREAT LEADER WHO REACTS PROPERLY TO ACCOUNTABILITY LIVES WITH THE AWARENESS THAT THE DAY OF ACCOUNTING MUST BRING FORTH A RESOLVED ACTION. vs. 4-7**

It is one thing to know that you have been a poor steward of what belongs to someone else, it is another thing to take some quick action to make sure that your poor stewardship doesn't cost you everything. So, in this story we find this poor steward making a quick decision to try to make everybody happy. First, if he only asked those who owed his master to pay half of what they owed, this would make them happy. And, if his master could collect even half of what was owed him, this would be better than nothing. Therefore, he made a quick decision. Let's look at his action and see what we can learn.

#### A. His action was impudent. v. 4

In verse four we learn that this poor steward's action was defiant and disrespectful. He was totally disrespectful of his master, but by now, he was only concerned with what would happen to himself. So, he went against all integrity and came up with an illegal plan to try to protect himself. May I say right here, that usually the reason that most people don't accept accountability for their behavior and actions is because of their selfish and proud ambitions. I have seen this over and over in the realm of Christian people who are trying to serve as leaders. Up until this point, this poor steward was not doing a good job, and he was negligent toward taking care of responsibilities. So, when he knew that the day of accounting was coming, he just made a defiant decision to do something, even if it was wrong. Why? Because all he could think about was himself!

Let me mention right here that at this time in most stories is where the negligent person begins to blame others for his failures. But, since there was no one else to blame, he needed to come up with some selfish plan regardless if it was an evil plan.

#### B. His action was impulsive. v. 5

In this verse, the unjust steward decided to implement his unethical plan. He called one of his lord's debtors and asked him to tell him how much he owed his master. At this point in the story, this sinning man decides to appeal to the sinful and selfish heart of the debtor to join him in the conspiracy to defraud the lender of the money. Could I just tell you that people who start out reacting improperly to accountability usually end up dragging others into their sin trying to get someone to assist them in their defiance. When a person refuses to accept accountability or constructive criticism, that person usually ends up resorting to bringing others into the situation to assist or defend him in his rebellion. When a man is captivated by fear as this unjust steward was, he reacts impulsively rather than stopping and contemplating the ultimate end of his decision. Decisions made on impulse and at a time of emotional upheaval usually are wrong decisions.

#### C. His action was improper. vs. 6-7

In verses 6-7, this unjust steward started carrying out his concocted plan so that he would have somebody that would feel obligated to him in case he lost his job and means of support. I would call this manipulation or expected pay for play as we have heard a lot about in America recently. And, we see this all the time here in Africa. If a politician gets elected, he usually rewards those who have helped him get elected, no matter how corrupt and vile his supporters may be. The deed of this unjust steward was wrong and sinful, but his actions were wise in view of the future. Now, let me ask you again, "How do you react to someone in authority holding you accountable?" Your answer will reveal whether you are on the way to becoming a great leader.

#### **IV. A GREAT LEADER WHO REACTS PROPERLY TO ACCOUNTABILITY NEEDS TO UNDERSTAND THE RARE APPROVAL IN THIS PASSAGE. vs. 8-9**

Sometimes it would be easy for us to excuse our wrong behavior based upon the principles that God is trying to show us from this passage. Why is this true? Because if we see God putting His approval upon bad and sinful behavior, we might get the idea that it is quite okay for us to continue to do evil. But no, this is not what Jesus is trying to teach us. Instead He is trying to teach us that the preparation that this unjust steward made was wise because he looked to the future and was concerned about what would happen on his day of accountability.

What about you? Have you stopped to realize that God is going to hold all of us accountable for our ministries and our service? Do you understand that accountability to the one over us is just a small thing in light of our future and impending judgment by the One Who saved us? Therefore, we must develop the attitude of a servant and respond with gracious acceptance to those who try to hold us accountable for our behavior. Great leaders become great leaders by learning to be great followers! Let us take a look at these two verses and see what God is trying to teach us about this rare approval that the master gave his unjust steward.

A. First, we need to see that this man was approved for his prudence. v. 8

As long as I live, I will never be able to understand why Jesus put His approval upon this poor steward's actions, but I do accept the lesson that he is trying to teach us. He wants us to realize that there is always a day of accounting for all of our actions and deeds, and when we have squandered our opportunities and the substance which has been placed within our care, we need to do something to prepare us for the ultimate day of accounting. So, the man was foolish because he was a deceiver, but he was wise because he at least saw the probability that he might lose his position as a steward, and so he prepared for the future with this decision.

Could I please ask you about your reaction to accountability? When you are held accountable for your service, your management, and your responsibilities, do you get angry, or do you come up with a good plan to help you face the uncertainty of the future? I pray that you have learned that it is far better to accept accountability here and now, rather than take the chance of losing everything in the future when you stand before Jesus!

B. Secondly, we need to see that this man was approved for his preparation. v. 9

In this verse Jesus told His disciples that we better use the money and possessions which He has given to our care in such a way that we will be taken care of in the future. Have you ever thought about how much money is wasted in this world as people use God's gifts only for themselves? We need to remember that everything here is so temporary, and will only last for a short while. And, if we are blessed even to live until we are one hundred, a hundred years is a short time in view of eternity. Therefore, we should be wise and use what God entrusts to us to bring men to Christ and lay up treasure in heaven. And, please remember that we are not laying up treasure in heaven unless we are investing in the only thing that is going there, and that is the souls of men. Do you have much treasure on the other side?

#### **V. THE GREAT LEADER WHO REACTS PROPERLY TO ACCOUNTABILITY NEEDS TO BE AWARE THAT THE DAY OF ACCOUNTING BRINGS FORTH A REALISTIC ANALYSIS. VS. 10-12**

What am I saying in this fifth point? I am saying that if we really live our lives the way we should, we will live in view of the fact at the day of accounting, everything will be revealed just as it is with no sham or pretense. In other words, we will live each day knowing fully well that truth will always prevail and all hypocrisy will be exposed. This should keep us on our guard to make sure that we are genuine and authentic. In verses 10-12, we are going to study briefly a great principle by which we should operate our lives. Let's look at these verses and see what God is trying to teach us.

- A. We should live with the understanding that on the day of accounting, truth will be revealed.  
v. 10

What Jesus is saying in this verse is if we can't be trusted with small things, we will never receive larger things. This is true about money, about our positions, our jobs, and almost every area of our lives. In fact, this goes all the way to our first session when we talked about integrity. If we can't be leaders of integrity when we are in small positions, God will not give us greater opportunities. And, it is only people of integrity that welcome scrutiny and accountability from superiors. Those who have failed to be honest are the ones that have something to hide. Just remember, the truth will always come out regardless of the situation.

- B. We should live with the understanding that on the day of accounting, it will disclose what we really trust. vs. 11-12

These are two great verses. They tell us that if we can't be trusted with another man's items or money, God will not give us our own because we will probably squander that as well. The knowledge that we shall always be held accountable for what we do with that which God gives us should help us to use whatever He has given to us wisely. And, may I say that if we have done a good job of using and caring for that which has been given to us by others, we will not have to react angrily in the presence of those who hold us accountable. Only guilt ridden people who have not done what they should with that which they have been entrusted will be embarrassed on the day of accounting. Great leaders must learn to react to accountability properly. And actually, leaders who have been faithful and done well will not dread accountability!

#### **VI. A GREAT LEADER WHO REACTS PROPERLY TO ACCOUNTABILITY WILL REVEAL THE OBJECT OF HIS AFFECTION AND RESPECT. vs. 13-15**

Now we come to the last point in this great study. And these last few verses are great verses teaching us some valuable truth. Let's take a look at these final three verses and see what God is trying to show us about the proper reaction to accountability.

- A. In verse 13, we are told that where we place our affection and respect is our personal choice.  
v. 13

In this verse Jesus tells His disciples that it is up to them to choose whom they will serve and what they will do with what God loans them. He states that they cannot serve two masters, but that they have to choose to whom they will give their allegiance. And so it is with us today. If you are working with someone that you can't give your allegiance and loyalty to, you need to resign and find you another master. Because you will never be a great leader until you can whole heartedly support, respect, trust, and accept his or her accountability gladly. Everyone must have accountability, but it is up to the individual how he or she will respond to this accountability. People who are never held accountable for their behavior and actions, will just go on making the same mistakes and committing the same errors that they have been making and committing for a long time. Therefore, today would be a good day for us to make a resolution that we will change our attitude toward accountability and start welcoming it, rather than defying or rejecting it.

- B. In verses 14-15, we are told that where we place our affection and respect is the proof of whom we are trusting. vs. 14-15

Whom do you trust more than any person in the universe? To whom are you really loyal and respectful? If you are going to be a great leader, you must define and redefine who it is that you are going to trust, to be loyal to, and to follow his or her leadership. So, let me ask you today, "Do you respect the people over you in authority?" Are you loyal to them even when they do hold you accountable for your responsibilities? Do you view them with love and respect, even though you might not agree with every decision they make? Are you sincerely committed to becoming a great leader, even to the point of accepting some stinging criticism when it doesn't feel good? If you can truly handle accountability,

you are on your way to becoming a great leader! Please don't try to excuse your behavior or blame others like the Pharisees did when they were held accountable? You should never have a conceited and condescending attitude toward your masters, even if you disagree with their choices and decisions. To do so, will ultimately cause you to be totally disrespected by others, and I assure you that no one will want to follow you.