# Hard Sayings 3: How to buy friends

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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. 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. If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? 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[[1]](#footnote-1).

Today’s hard saying of Jesus comes from Luke 16:9: “Make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes.” So much depends on goals we set for ourselves. If what we truly want is to make a lot of money, then our attitudes, thoughts and actions will be oriented towards making a lot of money. Wealth, as used in this passage in Luke, is almost used as a name of a god, Mammon. When Mammon declares that “Greed is good,” Mammon’s followers obey, and look for ways to be greedy. Who cares if others are hurt in the meantime, or if we are dishonest in our dealings? We have to obey our sense of self-worth, of looking out for number one. The problem, though, is that my self-seeking and your self-seeking will inevitably come into conflict. If I hire you to be my manager, I expect you to be honest in your dealings with me, even if you are honest with others. If I catch you out, I’ll fire you, and you’ll be potentially homeless, for who wants to hire a manager with a bad reputation? And so, in general, my greed and your greed will be held in check in ways by our mutual greed: in the long run, it will pay for us to have fair dealings with one another, because, on average, we will individually benefit by cooperating. This is a foundation of modern rational economic theory and modern capitalism. It’s clearly rooted in the human psyche and social systems, as we see by how the employer is impressed by the manager’s shrewdness in trying to make a comfortable place for himself. Mammon is a rational god.

Jesus, as he so often does, turns things upside down: helping us contemplate the true good by examining the less good; calling us to act in risky ways in order to be safe; instructing us to be very, very wise as we foolishly spend our wealth. He tells us to make friends with money, as the shrewd manager did. We have seen that, in the world of Mammon, this actually is the rational thing to do. We often compete more successfully when we can find places to cooperate with our competitors. Jesus commends, this, but reminds us that something more is at stake.

These friends we are to cultivate are friends that will welcome us into “eternal homes.” At some point, this world will reach its climax, its goal; the thing that God has in mind for it, and then will start the a fully-realized, never-ending state. One way that Revelation says this is that God has become the temple of the heavenly city. And the word for “home” or “dwelling” (literally, “tents”) here certainly has in its background the sense that God is dwelling among us, perfectly at home with us, and we perfectly at home with God. God will camp out with us.

I think that the more friends we have in “the eternal homes,” the better it will be. Imagine if it were only you and God! That’s a frightening thought; not only could we not bear it, but God, whom we adore, would not receive the honor that God deserves. So Jesus calls us to use the world system, to use wealth to make friends, to welcome new brothers and sisters into the kingdom. In the raw, worldly sense, this is good for us: we all like having friends, so spending money to have friends is a win. But, of course, Jesus really calls us to not love only ourselves, but to love others. It will be better for others to learn to relate well to God (even if they end up with friends like us). And it will be better for God as God receives more of the glory that God deserves.

So, God calls us to use what we have to create families, to make friends, to welcome one another in Christ. And one thing we have is money, so we should use it. Not only money, of course, but time and relationship and acts of kindness. But money, too. Now, money is a dangerous tool, and Jesus warns us to be very careful not to turn it into our God. This is how the author of the letter to Titus puts it:

[There are those] those who are depraved in mind and bereft of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains…As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life[[2]](#footnote-2).

We are warned and admonished:

1. Not to use our religion as a means of getting wealthy. And we could all tell stories about people who have done that.
2. Not to seek money for its own sake, because that is the wrong goal. The kingdom of God is not about Greed, but about Love.
3. That those of us who have obtained wealth (and the poorest among us has wealth), to be careful to pay attention more to God than to our wealth.
4. That those of use who have obtained wealth are to use it for things such as engaging in good works and sharing with others.



This month, a group our church supports, Rebuild Sudan, is starting work on the building of a school. Now, it may be that the US has some strategic interests in the newly emerging South Sudan, but none of us do, especially. Whether the school succeeds or whether the school fails will have a great impact on the lives of students in Jalle, but almost none on us. None of us is even likely to travel to South Sudan to visit the school: it’s a hard long trip, and although I have no doubt that we would be very much welcomed there, we have friends and family closer by who will take us in. Still, I want to show you a picture of a little boy[[3]](#footnote-3). I don’t know his name, and I don’t know how our support for the school in Jalle will effect his life. But don’t you want to welcome him as a friend and brother in “the eternal homes?” I pray that God, in helping us to help the people of Jalle to build an earthly building of no earthly good to us, may help this child, and us, to dwell in the eternal dwellings.

If that is true about a child on the other side of the world, it is also true about children and people closer to us, people who are already our family and friends. It’s a really hard thing to use our money wisely. Jesus calls us to be shrewd managers of our wealth that we might love God and our neighbors better.

1. *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Lk 16:9–13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (1 Ti 6:5-10;17–19). Nashville: Thomas Nelson

   Publishers. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. © 2011 Susan Gerber, of twentytwenty studios. Used by permission. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)