

THE STORY OF THE FOOLISH BUSINESSPERSON

By James D. Firnstahl

In trying to communicate critical concepts, one of the most effective ways for doing this is through the use of stories. As someone has described it, this amounts to “painting a verbal picture on which to hang an important principle.” Stories that embody ideas we desire to convey make ideas easier to remember.

Jesus Christ was the master at this. He told parables (poignant, short stories) to reveal our human weaknesses. Hebrews 4:15 says, *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.”*

He also used parables to introduce receptive hearers to secrets of the kingdom of God. As Jesus explained in Luke 8:10, *“The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.”* Those open to learning would grasp the messages of His parables.

On one occasion recounted in Luke 12:13-21, “someone in the crowd” asked Jesus to tell a sibling to give him some of an inheritance to which he felt entitled. However, Jesus seemed to separate Himself from the dispute by saying, *“who made me a judge or arbitrator over you”* (and your brother)? Instead, Jesus drew attention to a deeper root cause of human disputes, urging His listeners to *“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”*

Then Jesus told a parable to amplify His point, one to which many of us even in the 21st century marketplace can relate. It seemed a successful businessman (“rich man”) faced a decision on what to do with an excess “crop.” Lacking enough storage space for it, he decided to build more space so he could keep it all for himself. Then God entered the story, saying: *“Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”*

Why was this rich man called a fool? One might say he had little or no faith because he did not factor God into his decision-making process. However, the Jews of the time would have considered this man to be in God’s favor simply because he had wealth. They regarded riches as a tangible sign of God’s favor. Jesus’ parables had a way of turning thinking like this upside-down. It was not the possession of riches, He was warning, but the use of them that indicated how much faith a person had in God and love for Him. In His “Sermon on the Mount,” Jesus taught things like, *“Do not lay up treasures on earth...but lay up treasures in heaven.... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Matthew 6:19-21).

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The fool is one who places his faith, hope and love in himself and his riches rather than in God, as 1 Corinthians 13:13 admonishes. If the rich man loved God, he should have considered godly options (treasures in heaven) for the use of his excess crops. No doubt this man had hungry neighbors and many others who needed help desperately. Instead, as the parable states, he chose to “lay up treasure for himself” and missed a wonderful opportunity to be “rich toward God.”

If you and I, as Christ-followers, do not pray and inquire regarding the best use of our resources, we lack love for God and the love of God, exposing our foolishness. I am always humbled by this parable. Lord help me – and those reading this – to use our riches always to lay up treasures in Your kingdom.

© 2023. James D. Firnstahl recently retired as President of CBMC International, serving from 2011 to 2022 with a team of business and professional men and women in 85 countries who share a passion to see the global marketplace transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. In his first letter to the Corinthian church, chapter 13, the apostle Paul declares that faith, hope, and love abide (stand out), but that love is the greatest of all! (1 Corinthians 13:13) How could you, as a Christ-follower, demonstrate love by laying up treasures in heaven if you found yourself with an excess of riches like the “rich man”?
2. Next, let’s consider individually those other elements cited in 1 Corinthians 13: faith, hope, and trust. If you were to say, “My faith (trust) in God allows me to...,” how would you complete that sentence?
3. If you were to say, “My hope in God compels me to...,” how would you complete that sentence?
4. If you were to say, “My love of God causes me to...,” how would you complete that sentence?
5. As a final question, from the perspective of your role in the workplace, what are the significance of faith, hope and love as you carry out your everyday responsibilities?

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:
Luke 17:6; John 15:13; Romans 5:2-5, 8:24-25; 1 Corinthians 13:1-7; Hebrews 11:1

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