



*Written by
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“The Shrewd Manager”

Scripture: Luke 16: 1-12

Dramatic Category: Reader’s Theater

What is “Reader’s Theater”?

Reader's Theater is dramatic literature presented by readers who are seated and who read the script using the techniques of oral interpretation, characterization, and pantomime to create a theatrical effect. The scriptural passages presented in this fashion will breathe new life into what we “think we have heard.”

NOTE:

See the "Ten Commandments for Reader's Theater" after the script. There, you will find helpful hints to maximize this creative art form to communicate the truth of God’s Word.

Topic: Stewardship of Money

Performance Time: 6 minutes

Number of Players: 5 players (*men or women*)

Objective:

To give a warning that one day, we too will be without resources like the Manager in this parable, and we must make wise use of our resources now by helping others.

Synopsis:

This "Reader's Theater" is a re-telling of the "Parable of the Shrewd Manager" placed in a modern context, while the original text is read by a Narrator. In this parable, the manager, who has been fired by his master, engages in social benevolence by cutting the debts of his master's debtors in half so that he will be welcomed into their homes in his next life, which is unemployment. Jesus encourages believers to see their end coming and use their resources wisely in preparation for the next life, because no one can serve both God and money.

Cast:

Narrator: *Stands at stage right and reads the parable between the action and lines of the other players who are seated at center stage.*
Rich man: *Sits center stage, elevated, wearing a 3-piece suit and carrying a brief case*
Manager: *Sits below the rich man, wearing a 3-piece suit and carrying a brief case*
Debtor 1: *Sits right of the rich man, wearing a 3-piece suit and carrying a brief case*
Debtor 2: *Sits left of the rich man, wearing a 3-piece suit and carrying a brief case*

Costumes: Each of the characters wears a 3-piece suit or other business attire

Props:

Briefcases for everyone
Papers
A small black notebook for the Narrator's script
4 music stands (for readers)
4 chairs (for readers)

Lights: General stage lighting

Sound:

A standing mic for the Narrator
4 standing mics for the readers (4 wireless mics for them would be ideal)

Staging Note:

Arrange the center stage like the front seats of a pew at church. Readers are seated with their scripts on music stands in front of them, facing the audience.

Be sure the music stands are not too high, or you will block the audience's view of the actors' pantomime and facial expressions.

The Narrator holds the script in a small black notebook, and uses the free hand for gestures.

Narrator

Rich man

Debtor 1

Manager

Debtor 2

The Script:

(Characters are seated with their heads bowed when the scene opens.)

LIGHTS: LIGHTS UP ON NARRATOR AT STAGE RIGHT

Narrator: Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man
(Rich man's head up as he looks through financial reports.)

whose manager *(Manager's head up)*

was accused of wasting his possessions. So, he called him in

(Rich man pantomimes picking up the phone to call the manager.)

(Manager reacts to an imaginary ringing and picks up the phone.)

(Rich man motions for him to report.)

(Manager looks worried.)

(Both establish focal point #1: Center stage.)

(Manager knocks on a door in mid-air.)

(Rich man calls him into the office.)

(Manager waves shyly.)

and the rich man asked his manager,

Rich Man: *(Rich man leans forward & points his finger)*

"What is this I hear about you?

Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.

(Manager looks shocked, hangs his head.)

(Rich man motions for him to leave the office.)

(Manager reaches for the doorknob and closes the imaginary door behind him.)

(Rich man bows out of the scene.)

(Manager is visibly shaken.)

Narrator: The manager said to himself,

Manager: *(Manager rubs his chin, thinking)*

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.

I know what I'll do so that when I lose my job here,

people will welcome me into their houses.

(Manager looks through an imaginary file and grabs a piece of paper in mime.)

(He puts the paper in his teeth as he looks for the second piece of paper in the file.)

(He holds one piece in each hand, very satisfied.)

(He puts one paper in his pocket.)

Narrator: So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first,

*(Manager shifts body position to focal point #2 at stage left to meet the first debtor.)
(Debtor 1 shifts to focal point #2 and looks up.)*

Manager: *(Manager points to the paper and says,)*
"How much do you owe my master?"

Debtor 1: *(checking his ledger)*
"Eight hundred gallons of olive oil."

Manager: *(Manager hands him the bill, using the "mime pass," and says,)*
"Take your bill,

(Debtor reaches out and takes it)
sit down quickly, and make it four hundred."

*(The debtor scrambles to scratch out a change, then hands it back to the manager.)
(Debtor bows out of the scene.)*

Narrator: Then he asked the second,

*(Manager shifts body position to focal point #3 at stage right to meet the second debtor.)
(Debtor 2 shifts to focal point #3 and looks up.)*

Manager: *(Manager takes the second paper out of his pocket, points to it and says,)*
"And how much do you owe?"

Debtor 2: *(checking his ledger)*
A thousand bushels of wheat.

Manager: *(Manager hands him the bill & says:)*
Take your bill

(Debtor reaches out and takes it)
and make it eight hundred."

*(The debtor scrambles to scratch out a change, then hands it back tot he manager
(Debtor bows out of the scene.)
(Manager returns to focal point #1.)*

Narrator: Now, the master

*(Rich man lifts his head up, entering the scene.)
(Rich man and manager meet at focal point #1.)*

commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly.

*(The rich man shakes hands with the manager in mid-air pantomime.)
(Both men bow out of the scene.)*

“For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.
I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves,
so that when it is gone,
you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”

“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. “

So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth,
who will trust you with true riches?
And, if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?”

“No servant can serve two masters.
Either he will hate the one and love the other,
or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.
You cannot serve both God and money. “

LIGHTS: FADE OUT TO BLACK

The End

The Ten Commandments of Reader's Theater

1. **Formation** is a key visual. Arrange the characters in such a way that relationships between them are clear. Place the main character(s) either downstage, alone, or at a higher level. Make it clear who is driving the scene.
2. **Characterization** is achieved by dressing the readers up in full character costume, including character props (providing they do not pass the props around.) Also use any accents, and peculiar behaviors connected to the character: i.e., nervous, angry, etc.
3. **Pantomime** is the theatrical skill used to create the environment. Readers use pantomime to react to the events in the script or to the environment suggested by the story: i.e., a hot day, setting the table, writing a letter, etc.
4. **Focal points** determine the location of the scene or the person who is speaking. The eyes of the readers shift to different points, just like eyes shift in real life.
 - a. **By location:** All readers who are in a particular scene will focus at one common spot just over the heads of the audience. When all their eyes go there, it means they have all “met” at one location: i.e., the kitchen, or the barn, etc.
 - b. **By speaker:** When the entire scene happens in one location, such as in a courtroom, the focal points change based on who is speaking. Each character has his/her own focal point, and when that character speaks both the character and the others in the scene focus on that point.
5. **Props** are handed off from character to character using a technique called the “**mime pass.**” No actual prop is used. Character “A” extends his/her hand in the direction of the focal point, while Character “B” hands an imaginary object off in mid-air in direction of the same focal point, toward Character “A’s” outstretched hand. Character “A” then appears to receive the object, and Character “B” appears to let it go. NOTE: Whichever character can be seen by the other leads the action. Use “key words” in the dialogue to signal when one “A” grabs the item and “B” lets it go; this is easier for players than merely watching. **No lateral movement or contact is made between the characters. They never look at or touch each other. They meet only with their eyes at focal points.**
6. **Selection of dramatic literature:** Scenes in which 3 or more people engage in some important, witty, interesting exchange of items and ideas make interesting Reader's Theater selections. Usually the turning point of a play, a moment of crisis or comedy, or a key scene is best. Children's stories, parables, Bible stories, fables, folk tales are wonderful.

7. **Narration** is critical when the characters change locations or engage in some activity in the course of the story that cannot be portrayed in mime, such as “They began to build the house,” or “Fern ran across the grassy field.” In that case, the narrator reads the transitional text that moves the story along. Drop all the “He said,” “She said while drying her tears,” etc. out of the text. We can “see” as the character portrays the dialogue.
8. **Line memorization** is not word-for-word essential, since the script is in front of the readers on music stands, leaving hands free for pantomime; however, the lines should be almost memorized so the eyes can lift off the page for focal points. The script is a crutch.
9. **On and Off Stage** is shown by the character bowing his/her head down which means, “I am not in this scene,” and lifting the head up and moving to the focal point to signify participation in the scene.
10. **Practice, practice, practice!** Reader’s theater is an extremely difficult art form. When done correctly, it is one of the most effective tools of communication in theater; when done poorly, it does the dramatic literature a horrible disservice. To coordinate the “mime pass,” the focal points, and to achieve accurate characterization through oral interpretation require tremendous amounts of practice.