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A REFLECTION ON SHREWDNESS IN MANAGEMENT IN LUKE 16:1-8 AS A RESPONSE TO GLOBAL ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

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Abstract

The global economy faces complex challenges impacting growth, development, and stability. Rising inflation, supply chain disruptions, and trade conflicts strain international markets. Technological advancements and automation transform industries while widening income inequality exacerbates social tensions. Moreover, climate change and geopolitical uncertainties pose long-term risks, threatening sustainable economic progress. In an era marked by profound global economic challenges, ranging from inflation and income inequality to climate change and geopolitical uncertainty, the need for innovative and adaptive management practices is more pressing than ever. Invariably, the parable of the shrewd manager in Luke 16:1-8 offers a compelling lens through which modern economic leaders can reflect on resourcefulness and strategic thinking in times of crisis. This biblical narrative highlights the importance of shrewdness, which connotes practical wisdom, foresight, and agility in navigating complex and uncertain economic landscapes. This paper offers an exegesis of Luke 16:1-8 in the parable of the shrewd manager, through a qualitative approach, explores the concept of shrewdness in management in Luke 16:1-8, discusses the Challenges of the Global Economy, thereby reflecting on the intersection of Shrewdness in Lk 16:1-8 and Global Economic Challenges. This paper maintains that strategic foresight and adaptability are crucial to navigating economic challenges; resourcefulness and leveraging networks would provide access to essential resources and markets in a global economy while balancing pragmatism with ethics and future-oriented thinking vital for individuals and organizations in addressing economic uncertainties today.

Keywords: Shrewdness, Management, Luke 16:1-8 and Global Economic

Introduction

In an era marked by profound global economic challenges, ranging from inflation and income inequality to climate change and geopolitical uncertainty, the need for innovative and adaptive management practices is more pressing than ever. The parable of the shrewd manager in Luke 16:1-8 offers a compelling lens through which modern economic leaders can reflect on resourcefulness and strategic thinking in times of crisis. This biblical narrative highlights the importance of shrewdness, which connotes practical wisdom, foresight, and agility in navigating complex and uncertain economic landscapes. The lessons from Luke 16:1-8 will present timeless principles that could respond to contemporary global economic challenges, foster ethical decision-making and sustain management practices in the face of adversity.

Shrewdness in management is a critical skill for navigating complex business environments. However, the parable of the shrewd manager provides timeless wisdom for addressing these modern global economic challenges, emphasizing strategic adaptability, resourcefulness, relationship-building, ethical pragmatism, and future-oriented thinking, the qualities that are crucial for thriving in a turbulent economic landscape. Thus, the paper offers an exegesis of Luke 16:1-8 in the parable of the shrewd manager. Explores the concept of shrewdness in management from Luke 16:1-8, discusses the Challenges of the Global Economy and reflects on the intersection of Shrewdness in Lk 16:1-8 and Global Economic Challenges.

Exegesis of Luke 16:1-8: The Parable of the Dishonest Manager

The parable of the dishonest manager (also known as the shrewd manager or unjust steward) in Luke 16:1-8 is one of the more challenging parables of Jesus. It deals with stewardship, wealth, and the use of resources and has sparked much debate regarding its interpretation. Here is an exegetical exploration of this passage:

Contextual Background

This parable occurs within a broader section of Luke's Gospel that deals with wealth, stewardship, and justice. Immediately preceding this parable is the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15), which also deals with themes of wastefulness and reconciliation. Luke 16 contains other teachings about wealth, such as the warning against serving two masters (God and wealth) and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). The Gospel of Luke emphasizes the dangers of wealth and the importance of using resources wisely, particularly in preparing for the Kingdom of God.

Verse-by-Verse Exegesis

Verse 1: Introduction to the Parable

"There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property."

Verse 2: The Manager Is Called to Account

"So he summoned him and said, 'What do I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management because you cannot be my manager any longer.'"

Verses 3-4: The Manager's Crisis and Plan

"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 ashamed to beg.

I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.'"

Verses 5-7: The Manager's Actions

"So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'

He answered, 'A hundred jugs of olive oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.'

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.'"

Verse 8: The Master's Commendation

"And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly, for the children of this age are shrewder in dealing with their generation than are the children of light."

Themes and Interpretation

1. Shrewdness and Wisdom

The central lesson of the parable seems to revolve around the manager's shrewdness. Jesus highlights the need for his followers to be wise and strategic in using their resources, not for selfish gain but for eternal purposes. The manager's actions demonstrate the importance of using worldly wealth to secure something more valuable—relationships and favor, which Jesus may be paralleling with using wealth to secure "true riches" in the Kingdom of God (Igbakua & Adagba, 2024).

2. Wealth and Stewardship

Jesus frequently addresses the proper use of wealth in Luke's Gospel. The manager, while dishonest, understands the power of wealth and how to use it to his advantage (Inyaregh, 2024). Believers are called to be faithful stewards, using their material resources not for self-serving purposes but to advance God's kingdom and build relationships of love and justice.

3. Ethical Tensions

The ethical dilemma in the parable arises because the manager is commended despite being dishonest. Some interpret the master's commendation as praise for the manager's cleverness, not dishonesty (Inyaregh, 2024). The parable forces readers to consider how they might use their resources wisely and faithfully while navigating the world's complexities.

4. The Kingdom of God and Relationships

Ultimately, Jesus seems to teach about the importance of relationships over material wealth. The manager's reduction of debts mirrors the forgiveness of sins and the idea that using wealth to build lasting and meaningful relationships aligns with the values of the Kingdom of God (Judd, Swinton & Martin, 2024).

The parable of the dishonest manager challenges readers to reflect on how they use the resources entrusted to them. While the manager's methods were unethical, his shrewdness and foresight are presented as qualities that Jesus' followers should emulate—albeit in the service of the Kingdom of God rather than for personal gain. The parable calls for a wise, strategic approach to wealth and relationships, encouraging believers to use worldly resources to foster eternal values like love, justice, and community.

Shrewdness in Management in Luke 16:1-8

Shrewdness is the ability to make astute judgments and practical decisions, often characterized by keen insight, strategic thinking, and the capacity to navigate complex situations effectively, which involves perceiving subtle details and leveraging them to achieve favorable outcomes (Johnson et al. 2024). Shrewdness aligns with

practical wisdom (phronesis), which entails acting appropriately by applying knowledge and discernment in specific circumstances. This trait is often associated with a pragmatic mindset, allowing individuals to weigh risks, anticipate challenges, and make informed choices that align with their goals (Bracco, 2024). In modern contexts, shrewdness is essential for leaders and decision-makers navigating uncertainty and dynamic environments. Shrewdness is crucial in leadership, enabling individuals to discern opportunities and pitfalls that might not be immediately apparent. However, shrewdness must be coupled with ethical considerations to avoid manipulative or self-serving behavior. When applied with integrity, shrewdness becomes a valuable asset, facilitating problem-solving, resource management, and strategic planning in both personal and professional spheres (Hassi & Storti, 2023).

Management is the process of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling human, financial, or material resources to achieve specific goals efficiently and effectively. According to Fayol (1916), the father of modern management theory, management involves five core functions: planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating, and controlling (Yuwono & Rachmawati, 2024). These functions provide a structured approach to achieving organizational objectives, ensuring that resources are optimally utilized while aligning with strategic goals. Management is a dynamic process that requires adaptability, decision-making skills, and the ability to motivate and guide teams toward shared success (Cizmaş et al., 2020). Dai, Thomas & Rawolle, (2024) cite Mintzberg in expanding on the concept by emphasizing the roles of a manager as an interpersonal leader, an informational communicator, and a decision-maker. Effective management is not solely about processes but also interpersonal relationships, where managers inspire trust and foster collaboration among team members.

In modern contexts, management increasingly incorporates technology and innovation, adapting to complex global challenges and diverse workforces. Whether in business, education, or non-profit sectors, management is pivotal in translating vision into actionable strategies, enabling organizations to navigate challenges, seize opportunities, and achieve sustainable growth. Therefore, **shrewdness in management** could refer to the ability to make sharp, astute decisions that effectively address complex situations, particularly in challenging or uncertain environments. It involves practical wisdom, foresight, and strategically using available resources to achieve desired outcomes (Day, 2024). Shrewd managers are often characterized by their ability to think critically, anticipate future challenges, and adapt quickly to changing circumstances, ensuring the sustainability and success of their organizations.

1. Practical Wisdom:

Shrewdness involves making sound, pragmatic decisions based on a deep understanding of the situation. Rather than relying solely on theory or tradition, shrewd managers assess the current environment and choose the most effective action (Hayes, M. B. (2023). It often requires flexibility and creativity, allowing them to navigate unforeseen obstacles or capitalize on emerging opportunities.

2. Foresight and Strategic Planning:

Shrewd managers are forward-thinking. They can anticipate future trends or challenges and develop strategies that position their organization for long-term success. This foresight enables them to mitigate risks, prepare for uncertainties, and respond proactively to

external threats, such as economic downturns or technological disruptions (Singh, 2024).

3. Resourcefulness:

Shrewdness in management is also about being resourceful, which means using limited resources best to achieve maximum impact. It involves identifying untapped opportunities, leveraging relationships, and creatively solving problems, even with constrained budgets or limited personnel (Catani, 2023). Resourceful managers can turn challenges into opportunities by finding innovative solutions.

4. Adaptability and Resilience:

Shrewd managers are highly adaptable and resilient in the face of change. In today's fast-paced and ever-changing global economy, pivoting quickly and adjusting strategies when faced with unexpected developments is essential (Khan, 2023). Shrewdness involves knowing when to take calculated risks and when to be cautious, allowing leaders to guide their organizations through uncertain or volatile periods.

5. Ethical Considerations:

While shrewdness implies smartness and cleverness, it also raises ethical questions. Shrewd managers must balance the need for strategic, self-serving decisions with a commitment to ethical principles. Genuine shrewdness is about making wise decisions that benefit the organization and consider broader social, environmental, and moral impacts (Coppenger, 2024). In this sense, ethical shrewdness emphasizes long-term sustainability and responsibility over short-term gain.

Challenges of the Global Economy

Concept and features of global economy

The global economy refers to interconnected economic activities and markets that transcend national boundaries, creating a complex trade, investment, and financial interaction system. It embodies the exchange of goods, services, capital, and labor across countries, facilitated by technological advancements, transportation, and communication (Wujarso & Sumardi, 2023). The global economy is a product of globalization, which defines the closer integration of countries and peoples of the world brought about by the enormous reduction of costs of transportation and communication and the breaking down of artificial barriers to the flows of goods, services, capital, knowledge, and people across borders ((Samuels, 2023). The global economy has become increasingly integrated due to technology's flattening effects, enabling businesses and individuals to collaborate and compete globally. This interconnectedness fosters economic growth, innovation, and cultural exchange but also presents challenges such as inequality, environmental degradation, and economic interdependence, which can amplify crises (Christie & Tippmann, 2024). The global economy is dynamic and multifaceted, influenced by policies, geopolitics, and market trends. It is a central focus for governments, corporations, and international organizations to achieve sustainable development and prosperity.

Features of the Global Economy

a. Interconnectedness and Integration

The global economy is characterized by the seamless integration of markets across countries, enabling the flow of goods, services, capital, and labor. Stiglitz & Kosenko (2024) note that this interconnectedness results from globalization, driven by reduced transportation costs, technological advances, and the breakdown of trade barriers. The feature fosters interdependence among nations,

where economic changes in one region can have a ripple effect globally.

b. Global Trade and Investment

Cross-border trade and foreign direct investment (FDI) are hallmarks of the global economy. Bustinza & Bustinza (2024) cited Krugman and Obstfeld, who stated that international trade allows countries to specialize in production based on comparative advantage, enhancing efficiency and growth. Similarly, FDI promotes knowledge transfer, innovation, and infrastructure development, connecting local economies to global markets.

c. Technological Advancements

The global economy thrives on rapid technological innovation, facilitating communication, production, and trade. Gupta (2022) emphasizes how the flattening effects of technology, like the internet and digital platforms, enable real-time global collaboration and competition, revolutionizing industries and economic practices.

d. Global Supply Chains

Production processes are increasingly distributed across multiple countries, forming complex global supply chains. Gereffi, Posthuma & Rossi (2021) highlight that multinational corporations often source raw materials and labor from various regions, creating efficiency and exposing vulnerabilities during disruptions such as pandemics or geopolitical tensions.

e. Economic Disparities and Inequalities

While the global economy fosters growth, it also amplifies inequalities between and within countries. Postelnicu (2022), citing Piketty, notes that wealth concentration in developed nations often contrasts with poverty in underdeveloped regions, challenging efforts to ensure equitable benefits of globalization.

f. Environmental Interdependence

The global economy has significant environmental implications, with industries and trade impacting natural resources and ecosystems. Sachs (2020) underscores the need for sustainable economic practices to address global challenges like climate change and biodiversity loss, affecting the long-term viability of international monetary systems.

g. Economic Vulnerabilities and Interdependence

Economic crises in one region can have cascading effects worldwide due to financial interdependence. Arslanalp & Eichengreen (2023) illustrate how global financial markets, though beneficial, also make economies vulnerable to shocks like the 2008 financial crisis, emphasizing the need for robust global regulatory frameworks.

The global economy faces challenges that hinder growth, development, and stability. Persistent inflation, supply chain disruptions, and escalating trade conflicts considerably strain international markets. At the same time, technological advancements and automation are reshaping industries while increasing income inequality fuels social unrest (Ozili & Iorembor, 2024). Moreover, climate change and geopolitical instability present long-term threats, jeopardizing sustainable economic progress. The resultant challenges are briefly discussed below:

1. Global Economic Inequality

Global economic inequality is a significant challenge, with wealth and resources concentrated in a small portion of the population while millions live in poverty. This disparity leads to unequal access to education, healthcare, and opportunities, limiting social mobility and economic development. Inequality also fosters social unrest and weakens the potential for inclusive growth. It is further exacerbated by globalization, automation, and uneven policy responses (Feng et al., 2023). Therefore, strategies could be comprehensive wealth redistribution, education reform, and international cooperation to create more equitable policies.

2. Unemployment and Under-employment

Unemployment and underemployment are significant global economic challenges, reducing productivity and financial inefficiency. High unemployment rates result in lost human capital, diminished consumer spending, and social unrest. Underemployment, where workers are employed below their skill level or work fewer hours than desired, limits income growth and hinders economic progress (Atake, Kolani & Koriko, 2024). These issues exacerbate poverty, inequality, and slow economic development. However, comprehensive policies on job creation, skills training, and fair wages are essential.

3. Debt Crisis and Financial instability

Debt crises and financial instability pose significant global economic challenges by undermining the ability of countries to meet their debt obligations, leading to defaults and economic distress. High levels of public and private debt can trigger a loss of investor confidence, capital flight, and currency devaluation, exacerbating economic downturns. Financial instability, including volatile markets and banking crises, disrupts global supply chains and trade, further straining economies (Fischer & Storm, 2023). These crises often necessitate costly bailouts and austerity measures, leading to social unrest and prolonged recovery periods. The interconnectedness of global financial systems intensifies the impact, spreading instability across borders.

4. Trade War and protectionism

Trade wars and protectionism present significant global economic challenges by disrupting international trade relationships and increasing tariffs on imported goods. Such measures could lead to retaliatory actions from affected countries, escalating tensions and harming global economic stability (Zahoor et al., 2023). Protectionism often results in higher prices for consumers and reduced choices in the market; it could stifle innovation and economic growth by limiting competition.

5. Corruption and Bribery

Corruption and bribery are significant global economic challenges, undermining governance, economic development, and public trust. These illicit practices divert resources from critical sectors like healthcare, education, and infrastructure, stunting growth and perpetuating inequality (Sarjito, 2023). Corruption distorts market competition, discourages foreign investment, and increases business costs. Public funds are often misused in highly corrupt countries, leading to inefficiency and weakened institutions.

6. Inflation and Currency Fluctuation

Inflation and currency fluctuation pose significant global economic challenges by eroding purchasing power, raising costs, and destabilizing markets. High inflation reduces consumer spending and increases the cost of living, while currency fluctuations disrupt international trade, making imports more expensive and exports

less competitive. These dynamics lead to uncertainty for businesses, investors, and policymakers, as they complicate financial planning and economic stability (Alvarez & Médiçi, 2024). Inflation and currency volatility can worsen debt burdens and hinder economic growth for developing nations. Managing inflationary pressures and stabilizing currencies are vital for maintaining global economic resilience.

7. Resource Scarcity and Commodity Price Volatility

Resource scarcity and commodity price volatility are critical global economic challenges driven by population growth, environmental degradation, and geopolitical instability. The scarcity of crucial resources, such as water, energy, and raw materials, disrupts supply chains and limits economic growth. Price volatility in commodities like oil, metals, and food leads to inflation, increased production costs, and market unpredictability (Bordoff & O'Sullivan, 2023). This volatility strains both developed and developing economies, exacerbating poverty and inequality. Effective management of resources and diversification of supply sources are essential to mitigate these challenges.

Shrewdness in Lk 16:1-8 and Global Economic Management

Reflection on the parable of the shrewd manager in Luke 16:1-8 provides profound lessons on navigating global economic management. The parable emphasizes adaptability, resourcefulness, and forward-thinking, which are critical in addressing economic uncertainties today. Here are five reflections based on shrewdness in the passage:

1. Strategic Planning and Adaptability

The shrewd manager in Luke 16:1-8 recognizes an impending crisis—his imminent dismissal. Instead of panicking, he devises a strategic plan to secure his future by renegotiating debts and earning goodwill from others. In the face of global economic challenges, leaders and managers must be adaptable, creating flexible strategies that allow for swift responses to market fluctuations, economic downturns, or disruptions like pandemics (Moşteanu, 2024). Strategic foresight and adaptability are essential for staying afloat in uncertain times.

2. Resourcefulness and Innovation

The manager's actions demonstrate how resourcefulness can help mitigate crises. Utilizes the resources at his disposal (his relationships and authority) to create solutions to his problems. Similarly, in the context of global economic challenges, resourcefulness is critical. Businesses and governments must find innovative solutions to tackle inflation, recession, or supply chain disruptions (Sharma et al., 2024). It may involve using technology, rethinking traditional approaches, or developing new partnerships.

3. Leveraging Relationships and Networks

The shrewd manager leverages relationships with his master's debtors to ensure future support. In today's global economy, leveraging relationships and networks can provide access to critical resources, markets, and information (Reynolds, 2024). Collaborating with other businesses, forging public-private partnerships, and fostering international cooperation can provide the means to navigate economic challenges. Cultivating relationships that foster trust, loyalty, and mutual benefit is a shrewd way to thrive in a volatile global market.

4. Ethical Pragmatism in Decision-Making

While the manager's actions may seem ethically questionable, his pragmatism reflects the need for realistic approaches in challenging situations. In global economic challenges, decisions must balance

pragmatism and ethics. It could mean making tough choices that ensure an organization's or country's survival while considering long-term impacts on stakeholders (McIntire, Calvert & Ashcraft, 2024). Ethical pragmatism involves weighing immediate needs with future responsibilities and maintaining integrity while seeking solutions.

5. Future-Oriented Thinking

The shrewd manager is lauded for thinking about his future security. Future-oriented thinking is crucial for individuals and organizations in a global economic context. It could involve investing in sustainable technologies, preparing for economic downturns through savings and diversification, or planning for workforce disruptions due to technological advancements like AI (Christoph et al., 2013). Even during crises, thinking ahead ensures resilience and long-term sustainability despite ongoing challenges.

Conclusion

In an era marked by profound global economic challenges, ranging from inflation and income inequality to climate change and geopolitical uncertainty, the need for innovative and adaptive management practices is more pressing than ever. Invariably, the parable of the shrewd manager in Luke 16:1-8 offers a compelling lens through which modern economic leaders can reflect on resourcefulness and strategic thinking in times of crisis, highlighting the importance of shrewdness such as practical wisdom, foresight, and agility in navigating complex and uncertain economic landscapes. The paper offered an exegesis of Luke 16:1-8 in the parable of the shrewd manager, explored the concept of shrewdness in management in Luke 16:1-8, discussed the Challenges of the Global Economy, thereby reflecting on the intersection of Shrewdness in Lk 16:1-8 and Global Economic Challenges. This paper maintained that strategic foresight and adaptability are crucial to navigating economic challenges, resourcefulness and leveraging networks would provide access to essential resources and markets in a global economy while balancing pragmatism with ethics, along with future-oriented thinking would be vital for both individuals and organizations in addressing economic uncertainties today.

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