

5 THE BOUNTIFUL WEALTH OF GIVING

IN THIS LESSON YOU WILL STUDY THE FOLLOWING:

- *You Seek What You Serve*
 - *The Inner Heart of the Joyful Giver*
 - *God—The Most Cheerful Giver*
 - *We Have the Cake—Can We Eat It Too?*
 - *Our Giving Will Not Fix Everything*
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YOU SEEK WHAT YOU SERVE

God blesses the giving heart, while the greedy heart is often left destitute. The god we serve is ultimately the god we try to please. If we serve wealth, we seek more of it. The same is true of serving God. Would it not be better to look for assurance from the Creator of wealth rather than from wealth itself? If it all comes from God, will it not eventually return to Him? One way or another, wealth is His, not ours. When we willingly tithe and give to others, we focus on Him rather than on the vicious cycle of money problems, and our lives are blessed.

CAN WE TRUST HIS PROVISION?

The Lord knows how difficult it is for us to trust Him with our wealth, so He orchestrated Scripture written to encourage us: “Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine” (Proverbs 3:9–10). Although trusting God to meet our material needs seems counterintuitive to the ungodly worldview, God’s eye is continually on us. When we obey and honor Him, we are blessed abundantly. God is perfectly good. He never lies or breaks a promise. He always honors the Scripture He authored.

IS THERE A FIXED AMOUNT WE SHOULD BE WILLING TO GIVE?

When it comes to giving to the poor and those in need, there is no fixed amount we are expected to provide. Perhaps the greatest example of right giving in Scripture can be found in Luke 21:1–4:

As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. “I tell you the truth,” he said, “this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”

A poor, humble lady put the contemporary equivalent of maybe a penny into the offering, and Jesus called her sacrifice the greatest. Others who put in great quantities, walked away still rich. They had not sacrificed, but she had given all she had. She gave without knowing whether or not she would be able to pay for her next meal. She trusted God to bless her offering and use it far better than she could.

Love and obedience should guide our giving, not ostentation. Thinking we can *buy* God’s love is ludicrous. In Acts 8:20, Peter admonishes, “Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!” Harsh words, but is it not a relief to know God hates grand designs to purchase a gift money cannot buy?

THE INNER HEART OF THE JOYFUL GIVER

GIVING IS NEVER ABOUT APPEARANCES

Any attempt to show off our piety is fruitless:

Be careful not to do your “acts of righteousness” before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matthew 6:1–4)

If more Christians took this passage to heart, there would be fewer noisy, flamboyant televangelists on the air, and charities and missions would be blessed to overflowing with anonymous donations.

PROACTIVE GIVING

The Lord does not expect us to quietly wait for a charity to arise to which we would like to donate. He commands us to fill the needs immediately around us. The story of the Good Samaritan has made its way into secular culture as a popular example of seeing a need and filling it. We may have said to ourselves, “I will give money to charity; that is how I will help the poor.” Good intentions; have we followed through on them? When the poor knock at our doors, do we send them to a homeless shelter and then donate to the shelter? Would it not be a more profound act of charity to take them into our homes, feed them, perhaps let them use our showers, and then drive them to the shelter ourselves so we are sure they find the provision they need from then on?

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

Our intentions are good, but they rarely go far enough. Jesus emphasized the greatest commandments—the ones we are to honor above all others:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ (Matthew 22:37–39)

We would do well to step inside the shoes of the less fortunate to try to feel the suffering and anguish they experience, to imagine how we would feel in their place.

GOD—THE MOST CHEERFUL GIVER

God places such great emphasis on right giving because He is such a cheerful, sacrificial giver himself. His admonishments are strong on the matter:

He who despises his neighbor sins, but blessed is he who is kind to the needy. . . . He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God. (Proverbs 14:21, 31)

He who gives to the poor will lack nothing, but he who closes his eyes to them receives many curse. (Proverbs 28:27)

Sacrificial giving is one of the ultimate forms of obedience. Jesus taught that when we clothe the naked, visit the sick, and feed the hungry, we do it for Him (Matthew 25:40). Acts of kindness toward the poor are as pure as Christian love can get. Jesus' eyes are on the most downtrodden and persecuted among us, and the truly humble and contrite will be first to enter heaven (Mark 10:29–31). When we become Christians, our selfishness begins to die. We are compelled to follow in His footsteps and leave behind the well-worn path of worldly values.

WE HAVE THE CAKE—CAN WE EAT IT TOO?

Giving sounds like hard work. Many who read passages on giving, such as those we have discussed, become despondent. Are we to have *any* enjoyment in the present, or has God called us to suffer so others may prosper while we wait to be blessed in heaven? The life of the believer sounds like New England puritanism: all work and no play.

A common misconception among Christians is that all our money should go directly to the poor and the church, and if we prosper, we are to feel guilty and ashamed. Nothing could be further from the truth. Solomon, for example, was the wealthiest man in the Bible, and yet his heart's desire was to be wise. His abundant material wealth was God's gift to him, but his true love was for the Lord and the wisdom he received from Him. The book of Proverbs and the Song of Solomon attest to this. Solomon repeatedly states that a man is truly blessed in perfect fellowship with the Lord and with the wisdom a life in the Lord provides. Ecclesiastes also admonishes us to enjoy what we have in the present. Wealth is not bad. Devotion to it is what gets us into trouble.

OUR GIVING WILL NOT FIX EVERYTHING

We should also remember that although we are blessed by giving to others, we cannot completely solve the problem of poverty and hunger in the world through right giving. We live in a fallen world of sin and hardship. Satan rules this world. He works to keep people from knowing Christ's love and to bring despair to believers and nonbelievers alike. Until our Lord returns, poverty of spirit and of material belongings will

always exist. Thus, we are to give joyfully and sacrificially of God's money and blessings.

In God's presence we experience abundant grace, and as it overflows, we are to pour out His grace to others. Our nearness to Him produces a giving and sacrificial heart; we give joyfully so others may be brought nearer to Him. Cheerful giving reveals the true nature of God's love to the poor and broken. Fellowship with God, not complacency in our wealth, gives true meaning and definition to our lives.

Right giving is not quantifiable. One person may give a million dollars and experience no strain on personal long-term finances while another may give only a few dollars and go hungry for a day. God looks more favorably on the second gift, for a person's sacrifice is a matter not only of money, but of the heart. We have given nothing if it came at no personal cost, for our gifts should demonstrate that we do not value money above people. Rather, our gifts should show our desire to bless others more than we are blessed. In turn, God further blesses us. He does leave us destitute.

We cannot be the kind of giver God wants us to be if we do not trust Him. Sacrificial giving requires faith. When we give more than we can comfortably afford, we demonstrate trust that God will take care of us.

The materialist cannot give cheerfully because he wants to keep enough to live in luxury and prosperity. When you take away his wealth, you remove the ground from under his feet. Without his wealth, he has no foundation. Many materialists will not give their lives to Christ because they are afraid to lose all they have. Their experience is much like that of the rich, young ruler Jesus told to sell all he had and follow Him (Mark 10:21). Life in Christ compels us to forsake worldly pleasures in pursuit of things of eternal value. Materialists are afraid to leave what they know behind and step into the unknown adventure of following Christ to eternal treasure.

TO HELP YOU LEARN

Please complete the following statements in Part A. Then Answer the questions in Part B. You may write in your book or on separate paper. After you complete this assignment you may compare your answers with the correct answers provided in the section titled “To Help You Learn—Answers” in the back of this book. Completing this part of Lesson 5 will help you remember the important truths of this lesson.

A. COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING

1. The god we serve is ultimately the god we will try to _____.
2. The giving heart is truly a _____ heart.
3. Love and _____ should guide our giving, not ostentation.
4. _____ giving is one of the ultimate forms of obedience.
5. Sacrificial giving requires _____.

B. ANSWER BRIEFLY

1. What blessings await those who trust the Lord with their wealth? _____

2. Does the value of our gift depend on how much we give? Why or why not? _____

3. Can you think of examples of sacrificial giving that honor the second greatest commandment?

4. Why will our giving not solve all the world's problems?

5. How can we become the cheerful givers God wants us to be?
