

CHAPTER 19

Giving My Resources

KEY IDEA

I give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

KEY VERSE

Since you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you – see that you also excel in this grace of giving. –2 Corinthians 8:7

BEGIN BY RECITING THE KEY VERSE AND THE KEY IDEA TOGETHER AS A GROUP.

LESSON

INTRODUCTION:

Mark 12:43-44 --⁴¹*Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. ⁴²But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling His disciples to Him, Jesus said, 'I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on.'*

This passage gives us a wonderful example of faith and how God must be the Lord of our finances – but the real message actually goes much deeper.

> We have all been blessed in so many ways; and we are called to be good stewards, or managers, of all our blessings.

< As a good steward, we must present all we possess back to the Lord as an offering of love.

^ This relates to our financial resources, as well as offering our gifts, abilities, talents, and time back to God through service and ministry to others.

> God created us for a purpose.

<We will need to spend time with God to fully understand our purpose, but we can be certain that God has not blessed us so we can advance our own selfish agenda.

^ All our blessings, no matter how small, are given so we can bless God in return.

} God is never concerned with the magnitude of a gift. He is concerned and blessed by the condition of our heart: *"Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice,"* (1 Samuel 15:22).

} How we give is much more important than what we give.

Jesus was blessed by a widow who gave from her heart, even though the actual gift carried very little earthly value. If we want our service or ministry to have significance in the eyes of God, we must focus on the One to whom we are giving.

> We must give with our heart. If our heart is pure in the giving, God will receive our offering as a true blessing.

Christ never said money or material things were problems. He said that they were symptoms of the real problems. He constantly warned us to guard our hearts against greed, covetousness, ego, and pride because these are the tools that Satan uses to control and manipulate this world.

> Satan has taken the very riches provided by God to enhance our lives and bring others to salvation and has diverted them for his use.

< Today, even Christians evaluate (or value) others on the basis of how much they have and how successful they are in worldly terms.

Do you see this statement as being true or false? Why?

> Christ warned us a great deal more about materialism than he did any other sin. (Luke 12:15)

No matter where you live in the world -- money matters.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE RICH?

Using the context of Matthew 25 we can establish these guidelines:

> Being rich is having enough money to meet all reasonable needs and still have funds left over.

< Many of God's people fall into this category. They will not only be able to meet their needs, but they also will be able to help others who have needs.

1 Timothy 6: 7-14 *Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*

God provides surplus to some Christians to meet the needs of others. (2 Corinthians 8:14-15)

> There is a great temptation to trust in the security that a surplus can provide. We must guard our hearts and minds using Biblical principles.

One sign of worldly values in Christianity is the fear of the future.

> Most Christians would like a steady income to provide for their future needs (e.g. retirement), and their family's future needs (e.g. education), and that **is not** unscriptural, unless it causes us to compromise God's Word for fear of losing it and not speak out against obvious sin.

< Examples of this are numerous in government, medicine, law, sales, and other areas.

Can you think of any example of this happening, where Christians are expected to compromise their principles in order to maintain jobs, positions, and pay scales?

> God's work does not prohibit saving for the future; rather it is encouraged (Proverbs 6:6-11, 21:20), but it cannot become an obsession that causes us not to give.

As I think about our witness before the unsaved, it would appear to be evident that in our most visible area, finances, we don't have much of a witness. -crosswalk.com

GIVING TITHES AND OFFERINGS

Throughout the Old Testament, God's people set aside a tenth of their proceeds of land, herds and flocks for God's purposes. This principle is called tithing. Giving a tithe started as a non-religious, political tradition in the ancient world where giving a tribute or tax of a tenth (tithe) to the king was customary. This offering demonstrated allegiance to the monarch's kingdom. When we give a tenth of our income to God's purposes, we declare our allegiance to God and his kingdom.

Jacob was one of the first followers of God who made a declaration to honor the Lord with a tithe. He was the grandson of Abraham, the son of Isaac and Rebekah, and the twin brother of Esau. Jacob and Esau had a deeply strained relationship. Esau was the firstborn, yet Jacob manipulated him to acquire his birthright and then — with the help of his mother — deceived his father in order to receive the firstborn's special blessing. Although Jacob's decisions weren't always upright, he did choose to honor God with his wealth.

See Genesis 27:41-28:22 (pgs. 296-298 in BELIEVE).

Genesis 28:20-22 --²⁰ Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear ²¹ so that I return safely to my father's household, then the LORD will be my God ²² and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth."

Jacob made a vow to God that if God would be with him and care for him until he returned to Bethel, he would honor the Lord as his God and would give him a tithe of all his material blessings.

FROM ESV STUDY BIBLE

The conditional nature of Jacob's vow reveals that he is still ambivalent regarding his commitment to the Lord. Although God reveals himself to Jacob at Bethel, it will require a further personal encounter before Jacob fully trusts in the Lord. ... Centuries later, Israelite worshipers give a tenth of their income to God as an expression of their commitment to him, this is regularly referred to as a tithe.

Many Christians struggle with the issue of tithing. The financial principles given throughout God's Word are not there to see if we're strong enough to live by them; they're given because God knows that they are the best for us.

> God's principles of finances are not an arbitrary set of rules by which to govern us; they are a loving Father's wisdom to those who will listen and trust Him.

< The problem is that we get so caught up in the material world around us that we follow its "wisdom."

Tithing is an Old Testament concept. The tithe was a requirement of the Law in which the Israelites were to give 10 percent of the crops they grew and the livestock they raised to the tabernacle/temple (See Leviticus 27:30; Numbers 18:26; Deuteronomy 14:24; 2 Chronicles 31:5).

> The Old Testament Law required multiple tithes—one for the Levites, one for the use of the temple and the feasts, and one for the poor of the land—which would have pushed the total to around 23.3%.
 >Some understand the Old Testament tithe as a method of taxation to provide for the needs of the priests and Levites in the sacrificial system.

The New Testament nowhere commands, or even recommends, that Christians submit to a legalistic tithe system. There is no designation of a percentage of income a person should give.

> But what it does say is that gifts should be “in keeping with income” (1 Corinthians 16:2). Some in the Christian church have taken the 10 percent figure from the Old Testament tithe and applied it as a “recommended minimum” for Christians in their giving.

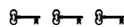
< It also says to give from our abundance. This may indicate giving was much greater than the 10%.

>The New Testament talks about the importance and benefits of giving. Every Christian should diligently pray and seek God’s wisdom in the matter of participating in tithing and/or how much to give. (James 1:5)

< Tithes and offerings should be given with pure motives and an attitude of worship to God and service to the body of Christ. (2 Corinthians 9:7).

FROM CROSSWALK.COM

We have built an affluent society based on a “sand” foundation of future debt. All that we have is in danger of being wiped out by any financial crisis, even a relatively minor one. Not so with those who observe and obey God’s financial wisdom. God’s financial wisdom builds to last, not to impress others.

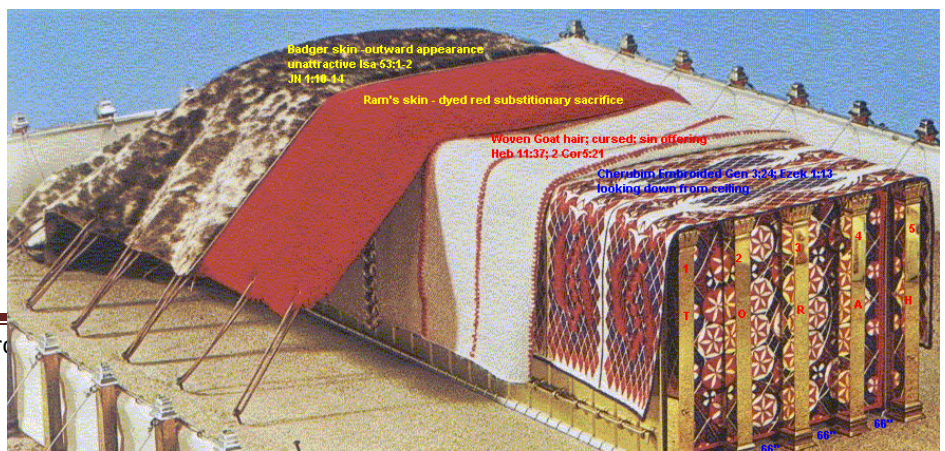


It is evident from many examples in the Bible that our offerings to God need not be confined to our money, but can extend to our possessions, skills, labor, creativity and time. Remarkably, at a point in Israel’s history when the Israelites were at their most vulnerable, wandering in the wilderness as nomads, they demonstrated their greatest generosity. God asked Moses to build a place called the tabernacle for him to dwell with his people. In order for this to happen, God’s people needed to contribute their treasures and talents. Their generous response was so overwhelming that Moses had to tell them to stop bringing their gifts for the tabernacle.

Exodus 35:4-29 (CEV)

⁴ Moses told the people of Israel that the LORD had said:⁵ I would welcome an offering from anyone who wants to give something. You may bring gold, silver, or bronze; ⁶ blue, purple, or red wool; fine linen; goat hair; ⁷ tanned ram skin or fine leather; acacia wood; ⁸ olive oil for the lamp; sweet-smelling spices for the oil of dedication and for the incense; or ⁹ onyx stones or other gems for the sacred vest and breastpiece.

> The list of materials here corresponds to that in 25:3-7 but is expanded with a list of the objects that should be built (35:10-19), as well as a variety of offerings that were

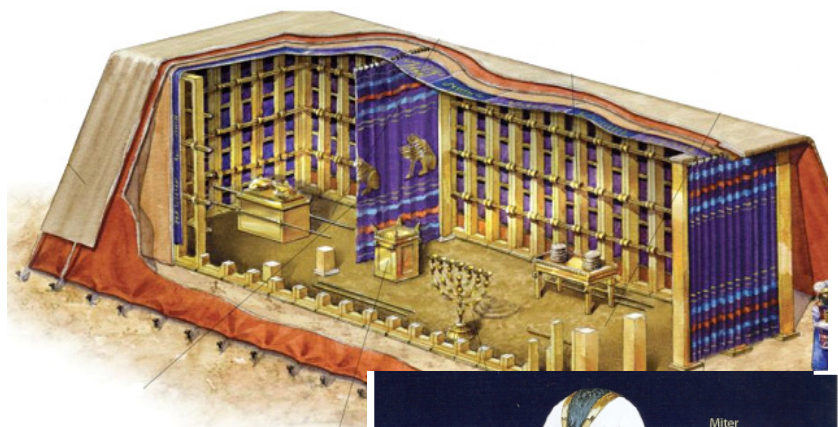


brought for the work (35:20-29).

> With the list of the materials needed and the objects to be constructed, we can presume the people were familiar with the instructions for the tabernacle, which Moses must have relayed to the people at some point.

10 If you have any skills, you should use them to help make what I have commanded: 11 the sacred tent with its covering and hooks, its framework and crossbars, and its post and stands; 12 the sacred chest with its carrying poles, its place of mercy, and the curtain in front of it; 13 the table with all that goes on it, including the sacred bread; 14 the lamp with its equipment and oil; 15 the incense altar with its carrying poles and sweet-smelling incense; the ordination oil; the curtain for the entrance to the sacred tent; 16 the altar for sacrifices with its bronze grating, its carrying poles, and its equipment; the large bronze bowl with its stand; 17 the curtains with the posts and stands that go around the courtyard; 18 the pegs and ropes for the tent and the courtyard; 19 and the finely woven priestly clothes for Aaron and his sons.

> The call for contributions isn't just for materials, but also for people to use their talents and skills.
 > Detailed right down to the tent pegs.



20 Moses finished speaking, and everyone left. 21 Then those who wanted to bring gifts to the LORD, brought them to be used for the sacred tent, the worship services, and the priestly clothes. 22 Men and women came willingly and gave all kinds of gold jewelry such as pins, earrings, rings, and necklaces. 23 Everyone brought their blue, purple, and red wool, their fine linen, and their cloth made of goat hair, as well as their ram skins dyed red and their fine leather. 24 Anyone who had silver or bronze or acacia wood brought it as a gift to the LORD.

25 The women who were good at weaving cloth brought the blue, purple, and red wool and the fine linen they had made. 26 And the women who knew how to make cloth from goat hair were glad to do so.



27 The leaders brought different kinds of jewels to be sewn on the special clothes and the breastpiece for the high priest. 28 They also brought sweet-smelling spices to be mixed with the incense and olive oil that were for the lamps and for ordaining the priests. 29 Moses had told the people what the LORD wanted them to do, and many of them decided to bring their gifts.

>Note that these contributions for the building of the Tabernacle came from willing hearts.

^ This indicates that they were responding to the first call for contributions, but also shows their penitence for making the golden calf.

> Vs. 21 The materials contributed were for the construction of the Tabernacle, not for the worship that would be conducted there afterwards.

> Vs. 21-29 Many of the people responded generously with the treasure they had brought from Egypt.

<NOTE: Those who had given gold for the calf lost it all. Those who invested in the tabernacle had the joy of seeing their wealth used for the God's glory.

> Also remember that back in Ex. 30:11-16 that a small tax (1/5th of an ounce of silver) had been placed on every male Hebrew. So whether they chose to bring a contribution here or not, every Hebrew male had at least a small stake in the tabernacle.

> Vs. 22 The jewelry given by the Egyptians is now used to obey rather than violate God's commands.

> There was no gender specificity in who could contribute their skills in the service of God. Women brought skills and donations.

Exodus 36:2-7 (CEV)

2 Then Moses brought together these workers who were eager to work, 3 and he gave them the money that the people of Israel had donated for building the place of worship. In fact, so much money was being given each morning, 4 that finally everyone stopped working 5 and said, "Moses, there is already more money than we need for what the LORD has assigned us to do." 6 So Moses sent word for the people to stop giving, and they did. 7 But there was already more than enough to do what needed to be done.

> This response of the people to the request for contributions was met so overwhelmingly that they had to be restrained.

< This seems to be a fitting response to the Lord who has been gracious and merciful in renewing his covenant with them.

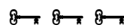
FROM THE CONVERSEONE BIBLICAL COMMENTARY:

"There are ...three themes running through this unit (35:4-36:7), ...

>The first is that this was the Lord's work and no one else's. Four times it is emphasized that this work is what "the Lord has commanded". Furthermore, it was being accomplished through the skills He had given.

>The second theme...The work was done by many different people who had been specifically chosen and gifted by the Lord, who in turn were able to empower other people as well.

>The third theme is that everyone had something to give, not so much to the building project, but to the Lord. They did not give at the command of Aaron in order to get something back from a god they had brought into being. ..They gave because they wanted to express worship for God.



While the Israelites moved from place to place in the wilderness during the time of Moses, they took the tabernacle with them wherever they relocated. Hundreds of years later after Israel had occupied the promised land and become a stable nation, the people once again generously and wholeheartedly gave from their resources, which they acknowledged God had given them in the first place, to build a house worthy of God's presence.



1 Chronicles 29:1-18 (CEV)

29 David told the crowd: God chose my son Solomon to build the temple, but Solomon is young and has no experience. This is not just any building—this is the temple for the LORD God! ² That's why I have done my best to get everything Solomon will need to build it—gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, onyx, turquoise, colored gems, all kinds of precious stones, and marble.

³ Besides doing all that, I have promised to give part of my own gold and silver as a way of showing my love for God's temple. ⁴ Almost one hundred twenty tons of my finest gold and over two hundred fifty tons of my silver will be used to decorate its walls ⁵ and to make the gold and silver objects. Now, who else will show their dedication to the LORD by giving gifts for building his temple?

At this point, David is not only giving materials gathered through successful warfare, but he is opening his own treasury and drawing on his own resources.

> David didn't command the people to give, but he did model the spirit of giving before them and offered them the same opportunity of giving.

God doesn't need our money. It is we who need to give. By nature, we are selfish, but every time we give, we give away part of our selfish tendencies and become a little more like him. -JONCOURSON

⁶ After David finished speaking, the family leaders, the tribal leaders, the army commanders, and the government officials voluntarily gave gifts ⁷ for the temple. These gifts included almost two hundred tons of gold, three hundred eighty tons of silver, almost seven hundred tons of bronze, and three thousand seven hundred fifty tons of iron. ⁸ Everyone who owned precious stones also donated them to the temple treasury, where Jehiel from the Levite clan of Gershon guarded them. ⁹ David and the people were very happy that so much had been given to the LORD, and they all celebrated.

First David gave, then the leaders gave, then the people gave. The result was great joy.

¹⁰ Then, in front of everyone, David sang praises to the LORD: I praise you forever, LORD! You are the God our ancestor Jacob worshiped. ¹¹ Your power is great, and your glory is seen everywhere in heaven and on earth. You are king of the entire world, ¹² and you rule with strength and power. You make people rich and powerful and famous. ¹³ We thank you, our God, and praise you.

¹⁴ But why should we be happy that we have given you these gifts? They belong to you, and we have only given back what is already yours. ¹⁵ We are only foreigners living here on earth for a

while, just as our ancestors were. And we will soon be gone, like a shadow that suddenly disappears.

David understood that all he had was not his, but God's. He was grateful for the privilege to give back to God.

16 Our LORD God, we have brought all these things for building a temple to honor you. They belong to you, and you gave them to us. 17 But we are happy, because everyone has voluntarily given you these things. You know what is in everyone's heart, and you are pleased when people are honest. 18 Always make us eager to give, and help us be faithful to you, just as our ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob faithfully worshiped you.



We need to apply godly discipline to our lifestyle. God doesn't demand the same lifestyle for any two families. Each of us is to witness to those whom God has placed around us.

> We are to look at our spending habits, particularly what we waste, and become the stewards God intended.



KEY QUESTION: HOW DO I BEST USE MY RESOURCES TO SERVE GOD AND OTHERS?

BIBLICAL GUIDELINES FOR GIVING TO GOD

Giving to God is one of the greatest privileges we have as God's children.

> Giving is an act of the heart and should be done with great love and joy.

<If your giving becomes a burden, something is wrong.

> How much you give to God is a private and personal matter between you and Him. Make it a matter of prayer often.

Give proportionally

The amount of money you give to God should be in proportion to your financial status. *(17 Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you. Deut. 16:17)*

> Give as you are able to give, within your current income. *(12 For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have. 2 Cor. 8:12)*

Give systematically

The amount of money you set aside for God should be regular, systematic and carefully planned.

(On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. 1 Cor. 16:2)

> Gifts to God should be a priority and integral part of your budget.

Give of your firstfruits

The amount you give to God should be at the head of your budgeted expenditures. *(Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; Prov. 3:9)*

> What you give to God should not be an afterthought.

> What you give should not be based on what is left over at the end of your paycheck.

Give to God in loving gratitude for what he has given you

Do not give grudgingly, or fearfully, or as a burdensome obligation. That is not how God wants you to give. (*7 Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 2 Cor. 9:7*)

>With God, your heart attitude when you give is everything.

>Giving should be an expression of your love, joy, and gratitude toward God.

Give in order to get

God prospers cheerful givers. (*38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” Luke 6:38*) **OR**, He may or may not make you wealthy in terms of worldly goods, but He definitely will bestow His spiritual riches upon you.

> Think of your heavenly investment and return.(*Jesus said...19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. Matt. 6:19-21*)

Give in secret

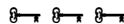
(*Jesus said...But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, Matt. 6:3*)

> Your giving is just between you and God. Being boastful about our giving puts the focus on us, not God.

Gifts to the needy are gifts to God

Church members/regular attenders are expected to contribute to the support of their local church -- in labor, and spirit, and prayer, and money. But it is very Biblical to go beyond in your giving.

> Not all gifts must be given through the church. (*Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward them for what they have done. Prov. 19:17*)



FROM THYME: ACE, BELIEVE LIKE JESUS by Randy Frazee

Of the thirty-eight parables of Jesus in the Bible, sixteen of them deal with how to handle possessions; all told, 288 verses in the Gospels – one out of every ten – refer to money. Over two thousand Bible verses talk about our personal resources, compared with approximately five hundred on prayer and fewer than five hundred on faith. We can't conclude from these statistics that Jesus' heart was focused on money, but rather that he knew ours would be. His teaching continually directs us toward using all we have – including our money and our possessions – to love him and love others.



KEY IDEA: I GIVE MY RESOURCES TO FULFILL GOD’S PURPOSES.

As followers of Christ our daily prayer becomes, *Lord, how do you want me to use the resources you have entrusted to me?*

>This practice is directly tied to the belief of stewardship: I BELIEVE EVERYTHING I AM AND EVERYTHING I OWN BELONG TO GOD. Do we perceive our money, our resources, to be God's or ours?

> What seems to keep many Christians from giving isn't really their lack of desire, but rather an abundance of personal debt.

<All too often, debt comes not so much from medical bills from unforeseen illnesses or unavoidable tragedies as from intentional choices to accumulate stuff, which then places an almost unbearable burden for many years and prevents true freedom and blessing in giving to God and his kingdom.

>Jesus teaches, "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." Matthew 6:24

<Sadly, while many Christians today would say they love God and desire to serve him, their devotion must go to "serving" the payments demanded each month. Jesus' words are as accurate today as the day he first said them.

As we have stated with other key ideas, we give our resources with an eternal reason at the forefront — to fulfill God's purposes.

>Money will never save anyone's soul, but funds are needed to support ministries that reach people all over the world with the gospel of Christ.

>If we believe the only thing that will matter in heaven will be what we have done for Christ here on earth, then the vast majority of the money to go through our hands will not count for much — except what has been given to build Christ's kingdom.

WHY WE GIVE

Giving away our money and resources is beneficial not only for the recipients but also for us. When we make giving to God's purposes part of our regular spending habits, we honor God and keep our greed at bay. The writers of the Proverbs offered the following words of wisdom.

Proverbs 3:9-10

⁹Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops;¹⁰ then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.

Proverbs 11:24-25

²⁴One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty.²⁵A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.

Proverbs 11:28

²⁸Those who trust in their riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf.

Solomon, one of the writers of Proverbs and the son of King David, experienced immense wealth during his lifetime. In the book of Ecclesiastes, traditionally considered to be written by Solomon, he reflects on his life and shares his words of wisdom with us regarding the dangers of wealth. Money itself is not evil,

but the love of money can lead to sin. More wealth does not mean more satisfaction in life. To avoid falling victim to money's seductive lure, we are to use what we have for the Lord.

Ecclesiastes 5:10-20

¹⁰ Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless.

FROM THE TRANSFORMATION STUDY BIBLE

Some people treat money as though it were a god. They love it, make sacrifices for it, and think that it can do anything. Their minds are filled with thoughts about money; their lives are controlled by getting it and guarding it. But the person who loves money cannot be satisfied no matter how much is in the bank account, because the human heart was made to be satisfied only by God.

¹¹ As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owners except to feast their eyes on them? ¹² The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether they eat little or much, but as for the rich, their abundance permits them no sleep.

¹³ I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owners,¹⁴ or wealth lost through some misfortune, so that when they have children there is nothing left for them to inherit.¹⁵ Everyone comes naked from their mother's womb, and as everyone comes, so they depart. They take nothing from their toil that they can carry in their hands.¹⁶ This too is a grievous evil: As everyone comes, so they depart, and what do they gain, since they toil for the wind?¹⁷ All their days they eat in darkness, with great frustration, affliction and anger.

¹⁸ This is what I have observed to be good: that it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given them—for this is their lot.¹⁹ Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil—this is a gift of God.²⁰ They seldom reflect on the days of their life, because God keeps them occupied with gladness of heart.

Solomon was not advocating either poverty or riches; both have their problems.

> He is warning his readers about the love of money and the delusions that wealth can bring.

< We must enjoy the blessing that God gives to us through our labor and be satisfied that he has given us what we need and can handle.

> The ability to enjoy life's blessings is also a gift from God.

CONTENTMENT IS FOUND IN GOD, NOT MONEY

Jesus said more about money than the topics of heaven and hell combined. Our attitude toward money and personal resources says so much about our lives. Giving should flow from a pure heart desiring to meet a need. It should not be a way to draw attention to ourselves. We should also strive to think beyond our earthly life and share what we've been given in order to build God's kingdom.

(See Matthew 6:1-4, 19-24; Luke 12:13-21 pgs. 303-304 in BELIEVE.)

It's easy to give when we know we will receive something in return. Jesus challenges us to remember that true giving has no strings attached.

Luke 6:32-36

³² "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them.³³ And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that.³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full.³⁵ But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

After Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension to heaven, his followers committed to give their money generously to help the needy among them and fulfill God's purposes.

Jesus expects his disciples to demonstrate qualities that exceed everything that is considered human conduct.

- > This conduct must be visible of the Christian and must be done without expecting beneficial returns.
- > It is to be extended to all people.

FROM A NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY

If we love only those who give us love, what is so great about that kind of love? It is like the love sinners give. If we do good only to those who do good to us, what is so special about that? It is like the love sinners give. If we lend money only to those who will respond in kind, what is so honorable about that? It is the ethics sinners have. The clear implication is that the disciples are not to live and love like sinners. The love of believers is to be different from the love displayed by the culture. As children of God, believers have been transformed to live in contrast to the way of sinners, modeling the sacrifice of radical love.

Acts 4:32-37

³² All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all³⁴ that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

³⁶ Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"),³⁷ sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

When our mindset is on unity we will view our economic resources as available to meet others' needs.

- > We will voluntarily give to those in need.

Some questions to think about from BIBLEVERSESTUDY.COM:

- > How realistic is it for us to declare today that our possession aren't our own?

< It is the reality. Everything in the world, even our next breath, is God's possession.

- > Are Christians really meant to share "all things in common"?

< Jesus commanded, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

^ Loving someone as yourself includes meeting their needs with what you have.

- > What is the result of disobeying this commandment?
 - < Millions of Christians continue to live in poverty today, particularly in the developing world, and those who hold onto their wealth, particularly in the developed world, disqualify themselves as "**disciples**" of Jesus as He defined it above.
- > When the people laid their offerings at the feet of the apostles, did they use it to enrich themselves?
 - < No, "*They distributed to each as anyone had need*", and this is an example to be understood and done today by anyone who wishes to qualify himself as a "disciple" of Jesus, let alone a Christian.



KEY APPLICATION: WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES THIS MAKE IN THE WAY I LIVE?

FROM *THINK, ACT, BELIEVE LIKE JESUS* by Randy Frazee

- We intentionally give a percentage of our financial resources to fuel the purposes of God and his kingdom.
- We intentionally make available the material resources God has entrusted to me (home, car, clothes, tools, food) to fulfill God’s purposes in the lives of others.

Here is a valuable exercise. Take out your checkbook register and last month’s credit card bill. Walk through the past thirty days and categorize your expenses. While potentially painful, I can promise it will benefit you in the days ahead. Ask yourself these questions:

1. What patterns or tendencies do I see?
2. What priorities are evident in my spending?
3. Where am I pleased with regard to my money management?
4. Where am I disappointed with my findings?
5. What changes should I consider making?

As you lay your finances before the Lord, ask, “Am I using the resources you’ve given me to accomplish your purposes?” If the answer is yes, thank God for his wisdom and provision for you, and continue to grow in giving. If the answer is no, then self-condemnation and regret are not the proper responses. The very good news is that God, who is faithful and just, will forgive you, and he is ready to help you direct your energy to the transformation of how you use your money.

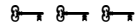
So where do we start?

We go back to the heart. There’s a decision to make. Whom will we serve? Ponder again these words of Jesus: “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” (Matthew 6:24)

One man stated it well in his financial testimony: “I used to think I couldn’t afford to give to God, but once I started, God blessed me so much I could no longer afford not to!”

If you don’t already know this key kingdom principle, now is the perfect time to receive this truth: God has his own economy. He doesn’t have to rely on the current condition of any nation to bless his people, and he isn’t limited by anyone’s actions. He can produce what he needs to provide, exactly when he desires to bring it forth. The people who have read the Scriptures on

giving and decided to take God at his word also testify to the miracles he has shown when they put their trust in him and placed all their resources into the center of his economy. Remember, we are *in* the world, but not *of* it! Whether it takes us a few months or a few years of faithful obedience to get our financial house in order, God has the unique ability to multiply what his people offer him and bless what he is given access to.



FROM CROSSWALK.COM

We have built an affluent society based on a "sand" foundation of future debt. All that we have is in danger of being wiped out by any financial crisis, even a relatively minor one. Not so with those who observe and obey God's financial wisdom. God's financial wisdom builds to last, not to impress others.