



grow. pray. study.

SUNDAY November 1, 2020

“Living Generously: Where Your Treasure Is...”

Five Essential Practices for Living the Christian Life

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:21

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.

Luke 6:38

Tell people who are rich at this time... to do good, to be rich in the good things they do, to be generous, and to share with others. When they do these things, they will save a treasure for themselves that is a good foundation for the future. That way they can take hold of what is truly life.

1 Timothy 6:17-19

MONDAY 11.2.20

Jesus noticed a small gift from a big heart

Mark 12:41-44

The Jerusalem Temple was a huge religious, social and even business center, bustling and noisy. Sustaining the institution took many large gifts—and many people gave such gifts. (Matthew 6:2 even hinted that some people hired a bugler to attract notice as they gave large gifts to good causes.) But Jesus noticed, and honored, a different kind of giver. He praised a generous, trusting widow who gave her “fortune”—two tiny copper coins—to the Temple.

- How much equipment or staff would the widow’s offering, which Jesus praised, have made possible for the Temple? Sometimes we think we give just to boost the church or other worthy institutions. In honoring the widow’s trusting generosity, what spiritual impact of generosity did Jesus recognize? How does giving, of any amount, enrich you spiritually?

- Scholar Craig Keener noted, “The temple sported ostentatious wealth, and its officials would probably waste this widow’s money; but this powerless woman, ignorant of that likelihood, acts in good faith and is the greatest giver in God’s sight.” * In her mind, she wasn’t giving to people; she was giving to God. As you consider your resources, and ask God to guide your giving, to what or whom are you most focused on giving?

* Craig S. Keener, comment on Mark 12:41-44 in *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

Respond: Sacrifice

The woman gave all she had. Most of us are not in a position to sacrifice our entire paycheck, but we could have a taste of what this might feel like. Look at the line items in your budget for the week, how much do you plan to spend on food? Could you eat the food that you have already in your home – in the pantry, fridge and freezer – and donate the money you would have spent? If a week is not possible, could you do so for one meal?

Prayer: Lord of heaven and earth, teach me how to love you as much as the widow Jesus noticed. Teach me how to offer my time, my talents, my treasures, and myself for your glory. Amen.

TUESDAY 11.3.20**Who do you serve: God or wealth?****Matthew 6:19-24**

We must choose what we value most even in our hobbies (e.g. if a band you love has a concert on the same night your favorite team has a big game, which do you attend?). Jesus focused on the biggest choice all of us are called to make in life—the choice of our ultimate, governing loyalty. Wealth in and of itself is value neutral, but Jesus said putting it at the emotional center of your life is not. He taught that “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also,” and added, “You cannot serve God and wealth.”

- Scholar Craig Keener wrote that “Mammon” (the word translated “wealth” in verse 24) was “an Aramaic word for possessions or money, and Jesus seems to be personifying it as an idol.” * Few of us would ever think of physically bowing down before our bank account or a valued possession. Given that, what do you think making wealth an idol looks like today? What does it mean, tangibly, for you to choose to serve God rather than wealth?
- We can spend money on many things—vacations, various collectibles, prized belongings, tickets to special events, houses, retirement savings. Have you ever put money into something touted as “secure” that proved to be insecure? What do you think Jesus meant by collecting “treasures in heaven”? Where is your heart—do you put as much time and energy into “investing” in heaven as into earthly investments and spending choices?

* Craig S. Keener, comment on Matthew 6:24 in *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

Respond: Simplify

We all have things stored up that we do not need. Take some time to go through one closet, drawer or cabinet. Ask yourself this question – what in there have you not used that someone else could benefit from? Gather these things up and take them to a local charity.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you are Lord of my life, and I want to “collect treasures” in heaven. As I make concrete, everyday choices of how to spend my time, energy and money, increase my capacity to live out your values. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 11.4.20

“Desire first and foremost God’s kingdom”

Matthew 6:25-34

Using exaggeration to make a point (as in “That bag weighs a ton”), Jesus warned against worry, not against planning. So today’s passage may feel radical at first, against all common sense. That may have been even more true for Jesus’ first hearers. “Jesus’ audience would have been ordinary peasant people who had to worry about their next meal all the time, yet Jesus tells them not to worry about anything. He asks them instead to view the world with new eyes, in order to see all around them evidence of God’s care and provision.” *

- Jesus didn’t condemn planning, if we do it with our values straight. How easy or hard do you find it to live out Jesus’ wisdom to “desire first and foremost God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness”? What wishes or dreams matter so much to you that (if you’re honest) you might want them more than God’s kingdom and righteousness? What choices have you made (or do you want to make) to keep those wishes and dreams in proper perspective?
- Jesus seemed to anticipate modern research, saying, “Who among you by worrying can add a single moment to your life?” (verse 27) In fact, worry shortens our life! What inner arguments, if any, do you make about why it “makes sense” for you to worry, or why it would be “irresponsible” not to worry? How can you distinguish needs from wants, and make plans without worrying?

* Eugene Eung-Chun Park and Joel B. Green, study note on Matthew 6:25-34 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 17 NT.

Respond: Connect

Jesus calls us to live into today, rather than worry about the past or the future, as a way to remain grounded in what is happening here and now. Make a conscious effort to connect with every person you see today. By doing so, you will be giving of your full attention. Before every interaction you have today – pray this prayer: God, may this interaction be full of love and grace, may I feel deeply connected to them and in turn, be more deeply connected to you.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you modeled a life of peace and trust. Help me to keep learning how to live a life in which my energy can focus on your purposes rather than my fears. Amen.

THURSDAY 11.5.20

“Guard yourself against all kinds of greed”

Luke 12:13-21

Jesus’ sad parable underscored a basic kingdom principle: “One’s life isn’t determined by one’s possessions” (verse 15). The day comes for all when the only question is, “Who will get all the ‘stuff’ I’ve accumulated?” Both [Colossians 3:5](#) and [Ephesians 5:5](#) called greed a type of “idolatry,” of loving something more than God. This life, and any material possessions we enjoy in it, will end. Only God can (and does) offer us eternity.

- The man in Jesus’ story never asked the question, “How much do I need?” He never said, “Maybe I’ll give away some of this huge harvest.” How easy or hard is it for you to be generous with the money, time or “stuff” you have? What wishes or fears get in the way of living generously?

- How do you understand Jesus' challenging phrase about being "rich toward God"? What steps can you take, in your day-to-day life, to become "rich toward God"? What kinds of choices help you focus on the riches that last for eternity? How can you share that approach to life with your children, grandchildren or other people with whom you have influence?

Respond: Release

We have a tendency to over-plan, over-prepare, over-schedule our lives and we have left no room for margin. What would it look like to release some of the "obligations" that we have which no longer serve us.

What is one thing that no longer brings you joy but you feel obligated to do? What would it look like to release that? Rather than fill it with something else, keep that space and time open to connect with God.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, whenever my life ends, I want my greatest treasure to be stored up with you, not left behind for an auctioneer to dispose of. Guide me into the kind of life that is rich toward you. Amen.

FRIDAY 11.6.20

What would make you saddest?

Mark 10:17-22

A devout, apparently earnest young man asked Jesus what he needed to do to obtain eternal life. Jesus "looked at him carefully and loved him," and identified the man's fixation on wealth as his main spiritual obstacle. Unwilling and unable to reset his priorities, the man went away sad. It didn't seem to take him long to decide that he didn't want eternal life THAT much.

- Jesus' words in verse 21 were personal for that particular young man, not a command he meant to apply to all Christians. (Remember that God did NOT tell every affluent person in the Bible to sell all they had—e.g. Abraham in the Old Testament, Zacchaeus in Luke 19.) What was the inner spiritual issue Jesus tried to get the young man to face up to?
- Jesus' startling question to the young man wasn't a general command. But the young man's response confronts each of us with the hard question, "Which possessions, if any, do I value so much that I'd choose them over following Jesus?" We know the young man turned away from the "treasure in heaven" Jesus offered. If Jesus asked you to give up, not everything, but maybe your biggest treasure, how would you answer?

Respond: Consider

We own lots of possessions, but many times the things that might have value to us, are valuable because of the memories associated with them. Consider the things that remind you of a person or an experience that points to a deeper connection beyond the physical item.

- What is something of value to you?
- What emotions does it elicit when you see it?
- If it relates to an experience, how might you recreate it?

If there is something that belonged to a loved one, could you take time to spend with them? If they are no longer living, share a story about them with someone else

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you offer me heaven's riches. Give me a heart that can accurately assess the treasure of your kingdom, valuing it properly against any other claims. Amen.

SATURDAY 11.7.20

Practical guidelines for giving

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Paul was gathering a gift for Christians in Jerusalem. He was more concerned with the spirit in which people gave, though, than with the amount raised. "God loves a cheerful giver" was not just an upbeat slogan. It was a serious call to check why they gave—"They shouldn't give with hesitation or because of pressure," he said. Paul didn't invent that idea. In Exodus 25:2, the word about offerings to build the desert tabernacle was "Receive my gift offerings from everyone who freely wants to give." Then Paul wrote, "God has the power to provide you with more than enough of every kind of grace" (verse 8), and "You will be made rich in every way" (verse 11). Paul, a traveling Christian preacher who owned, as far as we know, no real estate, no life insurance policy and no retirement plan, wrote about having more than enough!

- Have you ever given reluctantly or under compulsion? What was that experience like? For what reasons would God want us to give from free, grateful hearts without coercion or pressure? Have you ever given that way? If so, how was that different from giving under pressure? In verse 15, Paul exclaimed, "Thank God for his gift that words can't describe!" What gift was he talking about? When (if ever) have you received a gift from someone that "left you speechless," that words couldn't fully describe? How would you compare that kind of experience with God's freely-given gift which Paul described?

Respond: Support

At some point we are all in need of support from those around us. Even if we have a hard time receiving help, the support that we receive can fill us with a deep sense of gratitude and bring joy to those who are able to offer it.

Think of someone that you know who could use some support – that could be emotional support, financial support, support in getting something done. What might you be uniquely gifted to be able to share with them? Make a commitment to give back to them in some way and talk about the experience here.

Family Activity: Adults, gather several pennies and hide them throughout your home. Place a bowl in the center of the room. Ask your children to hunt for the pennies. (Pennies can be a choking hazard, so very young children should be supervised.) Let each child place the pennies he or she collected in the bowl. Ask, "If this was all the money our family had, what would you do with it?" Read aloud Luke 18:9-14. Ask, "What is more important—God or money? Why do you think Jesus wants us to share? How does God want us to feel when we give?" Decide where you will give the pennies. Pray for the people who will receive them and thank God for your blessings.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, open my eyes to the abundance you provide around me. May my heart sing as, out of your abundance, I seek to be your physical presence to the people in my world. Amen.