

Finishing Well

A conversation about living for Jesus on the back nine of life

Conversation Seven: Living as a Faithful Steward

– The Challenge of Lifestyle Choices

Romans 12:1-2 (MSG) So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. **2** Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

A few questions to start the conversation...

- When you use the word “steward” what comes to mind?
- The word “lifestyle” is never used in the Bible. So why would this be a topic of discussion for a Sunday School class?
- As Christians, do you think we make many of our lifestyle choices based on the Bible or on the American Dream?
- How do you decide: How much is enough? How much is too much?
- Is it OK for a Christian to buy an expensive car?
- In such lifestyle questions, is there one answer that applies to everyone, or do we each have to make these choices for ourselves based on what we think God wants us to do?
- What does it mean to be “worldly?” James 4:4 says “friendship with the world is hatred toward God...” What do you think that means?

1. Some Key Scriptures

James 4:4 (NIV) You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

1 John 2:15-17 (NIV) Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

Matthew 6:19-21 (NIV) "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:33 (NIV) But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

1 Corinthians 4:2 (NIV) Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

Matthew 6:24 (NIV) "No one 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.

Luke 18:18-24 (NIV) A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁹ "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. ²⁰ You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'" ²¹ "All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said. ²² When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You

still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." ²³ When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. ²⁴ Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

Hebrews 13:5 (NIV) Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

Ephesians 5:15-16 (NIV) Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

1 Peter 4:10 (NIV) Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

2. **Stewardship. What does it mean to be a steward?**

It's mine! The challenge of the issue of ownership. The gift of God's trust.

In the beginning there was the King. He was unlike any other king, for he was a creator-king. Everything in his kingdom had been made by him. He made it all; he owned it all.

Among the King's creations were people. He created these people to be like him in many ways—to bear his image—so that he could enjoy relationship with them. He did not make them kings; there could be only one King. He did not make them owners; there could be only one owner. But his love compelled him to elevate them in some way to give them a calling worthy of their unique place in his heart.

'All that is precious to me I will entrust to them,' the King declared. 'They will become essential to the welfare and expansion of my kingdom. I will honor them by revealing my heart to them: my deepest values, my highest purposes, my innermost character. And they will honor me by using each resource I entrust to them to spread my values and purposes and character to every corner of my kingdom.'

'I will give them the title of Stewards—the highest title one can aspire to in the kingdom of the creator-owner. And great will be the rewards of my faithful stewards. In relinquishing, they will receive. In living for my glory, they will become glorious beyond their imaginations. In forsaking their tiny personal kingdoms, they will receive my kingdom, which, though great now, is destined to become even greater.'

And so, the King, as an expression of his great love for his people, gave them the gift of his trust.

— Sue Kline, "The Rewards of Stewardship", Discipleship Journal (Issue 141, 2004)

Ownership is rooted in the idea of possession, a word formed from two other words that mean 'able to occupy.' Essentially, it means that my possessions are an extension of the kingdom of me. They are things over which I rule—under my dominion, existing for my satisfaction. They are *mine*.

Ownership is introduced in the first pages of Scripture. Genesis tells us God created all that is (Gen 1:1), giving Him rightful claim to everything... He made it. He owns it. It belongs to Him. When God created Adam and Eve, He placed on them a mantle of responsibility for the world He had created. First, in obedience to God's intentions for them, they were to multiply their influence throughout the world... Second, in imitation of God's rule over them, they were to exercise responsible leadership over the rest of the creation... Finally, in honor of God's ownership over them, they were to render service to the created order...

But Adam and Eve's mutiny changed their relationship with the world. Before, they understood themselves to be caretakers of creation. Now they began to think of themselves as owners who—like the God they sought to usurp—had a legitimate claim on everything...

Our desire to possess runs so deeply that we assume it's how God made us. It isn't. God doesn't say to humanity, 'All this is yours.' Instead, He says, 'All this is mine. But I am entrusting it to you. Use it

to honor me and serve Me.' God speaks to Adam and Eve's relationship to their world not in terms of ownership, but stewardship.

— David W. Henderson, "A Matter of Trust", Discipleship Journal (Issue 141, 2004)

A quick look at Joseph, Potiphar's steward

Genesis 39:4-6 (NIV) Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. ⁵ From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. ⁶ So he left in Joseph's care everything he had; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. Now Joseph was well-built and handsome,

From that short description, three essential features of the steward's role become obvious.

- Nothing he puts his hand on belong to him. Yet, while owning nothing, he is entrusted with great wealth. All that belongs to his master has been placed under his control.
- He has no stature or significance, yet he is charged with great responsibility. Every aspect of running the house falls to him.
- As a slave he has no freedom or rights. Yet, as chief steward, he is free to make use of the master's property and to manage his affairs as he sees fit. No one but the master has greater power.

— David W. Henderson, "A Matter of Trust", Discipleship Journal (Issue 141, 2004)

Once I understand my responsibility before God as His steward, it reshapes the way I view the ocean of resources He has placed at my disposal. Here are several areas in which the paradigm of stewardship has rippled out to impact my life.

- **Time.** I ask God to remind me how brief my time on earth is and to help me make wise use of each day. Psalm 90:12 (NIV): Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.
- **Work.** The old paradigm says I got my job because of me, and I keep it because of me. The steward operates from a different worldview. God has put me where I am to serve His purposes in this place at this time. So, the first item on my to-do list each morning is to discern those purposes and align my life with them. 'What, Lord?' is the prayer with which I start many workdays.
- **Possessions.** I am gradually learning to hold what I have loosely. At the same time, I'm trying to make it a practice to ask the Master, 'What do you want me to do with this possession?' When it was time to get rid of our high-mileage car for a lower-mileage one, a friend suggested we donate the older car to charity rather than sell it. I recognized God's voice in that suggestion, and we followed my friend's advice.
- **Insights.** Friends and peers have affirmed wisdom and creativity as some of my stronger gifts. Thus, my ideas constitute another important sphere of stewardly responsibility. When God brings an insight, I make sure I've captured it on paper. Then I ask Him what He wants me to do with that idea—how He might want me to use it in my teaching or writing, or in a particular relationship.
- **Relationships.** For years as a non-Christian, I believed other people existed to meet my needs. Now I look at my interactions with others as an opportunity to serve God and to serve them...
- **"Chance meetings."** I once anticipated parties and potluck dinners with about as much excitement as a trip to the dentist. Now I regard those opportunities to interact with people from a steward's perspective, and I look forward to them. God has a specific purpose for each 'random' encounter.

— David W. Henderson, "A Matter of Trust", Discipleship Journal (Issue 141, 2004)

We cannot reduce stewardship to money matters alone. Anything that could be used for God's purposes—time, relationships, possessions, influence, opportunities, personality, experiences, and money—is a resource in the steward's storehouse...

Now we must consider how our faithfulness as stewards will be assessed. The measure, of course, is the will of the Master. If I do with His resources what He intends, I have proven worthy of the trust I've received. Anything else is mismanagement. How, exactly, does He measure the trustworthy use of our resources?

A study of the various stewardship passages reveals that we are called to two crucial practices, each of which reflects an important aspect of God's heart toward His creation.

Safeguarding. First, those with resources at their disposal are cautioned to safeguard what they have. Proverbs 21:20 says: 'In the house of the wise are stores of choice food and oil, but a foolish man devours all he has.' Wise, God-honoring living will manifest itself in protecting what we have rather than wasting it. We safeguard what has been given to us, rather than squander precious trusts of time, wealth, or opportunity.

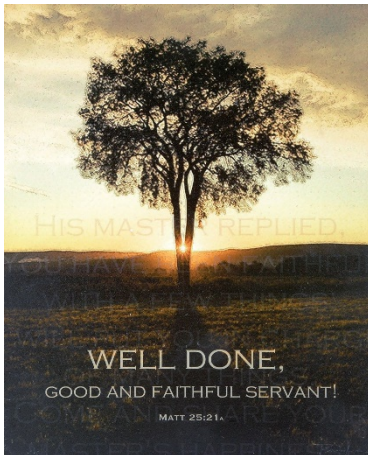
Distributing. A second principle governs biblical stewardship. It's captured in Jesus' parable of the talents, in which the owner of the estate entrusts his wealth to three stewards, giving five talents to one, two to another, and one to the third (Mt 25:14-30). Then the owner goes on a journey. Upon his return, he is delighted to discover that the man given five talents has gained five more. The second steward, who has likewise doubled his share, receives the same praise. The third steward, anxious to protect his talent, buries it in the ground. To his surprise, the master is not pleased. Because the third steward has merely preserved what he was given instead of multiplying it, his talent is taken from him and given to one of the others.

God wants us to use what we've been given. As stewards, our job is to distribute resources. God doesn't want us to shelter what He's entrusted to us but to risk those gifts on His intended ends. He put them in our hands so that we would put them to use.

— David W. Henderson, "A Matter of Trust", Discipleship Journal (Issue 141, 2004)

3. Enter into the joy of your master

Stewardship isn't just a role; it's a *relationship*. Stewardship isn't just about good management; it is about being in a deep relationship with the master.



Matthew 25:21 (NIV) His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

Luke 19:17 (NIV) 'Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'

At the heart of stewardship, as Jesus talked about it, is this relationship between the steward and the master. The steward, by definition, does not own the master's property. He manages it by making decisions in accordance with the owner's wishes. The faithful steward knows his master's desires.

The New Testament paints a fresh picture of stewardship for us by showing who our Master is and what our Master does for us, His stewards. He is so much more than a benevolent slave owner. He is the Lord of grace and love. Because of God's character and grace, stewardship is transformed from a dreary duty to an expression of love for our Father. It becomes more than a role; it becomes a relationship. We're not merely managers, but people who have a rich relational connection to a Master who loves us. From that relationship flow several significant benefits.

— Kent R. Wilson, "Enter into the JOY of Your Master", Discipleship Journal (Issue 141, 2004)

Benefits that come to us as stewards

- **The Master's Guidance.** The first benefit our Master gives us as His stewards is guidance in managing our resources. God hasn't entrusted us with gifts and then left us without direction. Jesus modeled the necessity of submitting our lives to God as stewards...Not only has Jesus modeled dependency on the Father's guidance, but He has also pointed us to the source of that guidance: The Holy Spirit's presence in our lives...
- **Empowered to Serve.** Empowerment is a popular buzzword in business literature today. Yet no corporate seminar can empower us to accomplish God's purposes as he can. We can take risks, overcome obstacles, and persevere against long odds because we have the Father's full support in the work, He calls us to do. God has blessed us in the work He calls us to do. God has 'blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ' (Eph 1:3). Therefore, we never lack the resources to accomplish the tasks He assigns us.
- **Free to Soar.** A final benefit we experience as stewards of the master is incredible freedom. That freedom comes in at least two forms: freedom to use our gifts creatively and freedom from the fear of failure. In Matthew 25, we find the story of a master who entrusts his property to three servants and expects them to put it to work in his absence. Two servants faithfully invest what they've been given, each doubling their master's investment (Mt 25:16-17). The third 'wicked, lazy' servant, however, failed as a good steward; he neither invested his talent nor earned interest on it. The master was not please by his laziness. It's easy to miss how much freedom the master gave these servants. His expectation was clear: Each steward had the responsibility to grow the master's resources. The particulars of how they did so were up to them; he left them with the freedom to invest their talents creatively. In the same way, God give us tremendous freedom to invest the gifts and talents He has entrusted to us.

— Kent Wilson, "Enter into the JOY of Your Master", Discipleship Journal (Issue 141, 2004)

4. The challenge of keeping watch

Good stewards keep watch and are not surprised when the Master comes home.

Matthew 24:44-51 (NIV) So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. ⁴⁵ "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? ⁴⁶ It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. ⁴⁷ I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. ⁴⁸ But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' ⁴⁹ and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. ⁵⁰ The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour, he is not aware of. ⁵¹ He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Three thoughts about stewardship from the Master returning on an unknown day and at an unknown hour:

First, it teaches us that stewardship is about **identity**, namely that we must see ourselves as stewards/servants who belong to the Master. If we get this wrong, then our whole lifestyle of stewardship will not be perfectly square. The Creator/owner of all creation is the Sovereign Lord...

A second aspect of stewardship is about **character** and its impact on the servant's involvement in carrying out his duties. The traits that the Master is looking for in his servants are faithfulness and wisdom. The Lord sees these as two essential characteristics of a servant. When a person understands and accepts his role as a servant of the Lord then he will understand how important these two traits are. Stewardship is about responsibility and accountability. What responsibilities does a servant manage? There are several that come to mind. One is time, another is things...

Stewardship is also about **investing**. This is not about the 'name it, claim it' prosperity gospel that is being preached in some circles. The kind of investing that Jesus is teaching is investing in heaven, which involves giving here on earth to provide for Kingdom work and meeting the needs of others. A

good example is seen in the early church in Acts 2 and 3. The generosity of the believers was a testimony of the power of the gospel. Their theology and lifestyle were square. They preached and they gave, and the Lord added to the church those who were being saved...

— Dick Aeschliman, "Stewardship Squaring Lifestyle with Theology", Christian Education & Publications (Issue 3, 2007)

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 (NIV) By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴ If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. ¹⁵ If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

"If you have ever done a woodworking project you know that getting it square is vitally important. You can have all the measurements right (theology), but if you do not make them square and level they will not fit together perfectly and be as functional as they should be (lifestyle). A Christian/biblical worldview is foundational to building a lifestyle that is a glory to God, and stewardship is what you build upon that foundation, whether it is gold, silver, precious stones, or wood, hay, and straw. Each one's work will be manifest by fire in that Day (1 Cor 3:10-15)."

5. **Generosity and Giving** – living as a generous person

Do you consider yourself to be a generous person?

When learning about giving, 11 Corinthians 8-9 is a good place to start.

A. Give and it will be given unto you. God invariably returns blessing to the giver.

2 Corinthians 9:6 (NIV) Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

Luke 6:38 (NIV) 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."

Acts 20:35 (NIV) ³⁵ In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

B. The primary motive in giving should be because you want to give. The New Testament only knows of "cheerful giving." If you aren't motivated to give cheerfully, then you probably should not give.

2 Corinthians 8:3 (NIV) For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own,

2 Corinthians 9:7 (NIV) Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

2 Corinthians 9:5 (NIV) So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given.

2 Corinthians 9:13 (NIV) Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

C. It is a privilege to give because we're giving to God, not to people or institutions. We have the privilege of participating in the advancement of the Kingdom. God doesn't need our gift to accomplish His purposes. He grants us the privilege to be involved.

2 Corinthians 8:4 (NIV) they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.

2 Corinthians 9:13 (NIV) Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

1 Timothy 6:18-19 (NIV) Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹ 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.

D. We are to give proportionately to what we have. The true size of the gift is not determined by how much is given but by how much is left over after giving.

Luke 21:1-4 (NIV) As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. ² He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. ³ "I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. ⁴ All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

2 Corinthians 8:3 (NIV) For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own,

2 Corinthians 8:12 (NIV) For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

E. All God has given to me is not merely for me. God gives to his saints in various amounts; it is the saint's job to share and participate in advancing God's Kingdom.

2 Corinthians 8:14 (NIV) At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality,

2 Corinthians 9:12 (NIV) This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.

F. The greatest of all God's gift to us is His Son, the offer of the Gospel.

2 Corinthians 9:15 (NIV) Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

2 Corinthians 8:9 (NIV) For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

John 3:16-17 (NIV) "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

G. It's all God's anyway.

1 Chronicles 29:12-14 (NIV) Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. ¹³ Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name. ¹⁴ "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NIV) Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with

your body.

Psalm 24:1 (NIV) The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;

From Becky Brodin, "The Adventure of Creative Giving", Disciple Journal (Issue 88, 1995):

Giving can be a blast. Paul told the people in Corinth that 'God loves a cheerful giver!' (2 Cor 9:7). Regular, planned, and generous giving is the backbone of a responsible giving program but throwing in some creativity multiplies the joy! Here are a few ideas to whet your creative appetite.

Anonymous Giving. Listen for specific needs people have and then figure out a way to meet them undetected.

Taking Someone Shopping. Rather than just handing someone money, take them shopping. I love taking furloughing missionaries to a mall and give them a budget. They get to choose what they want, and it's a great time to build a relationship.

Hiring for Services. I know a talented single mom on a meager income. I 'commission' her to make floral arrangements for me. She earns extra money with dignity, and I get hand-crafted decorations.

Footing the Bill. Pay some of the tuition, or cover for the textbooks, or supply the pens and paper for someone going back to school if you can afford it, pay the rent for a student's apartment for a quarter.

Recycling Things You Don't Need. A friend of mine recently upgraded to a new computer system. Rather than selling her old system, she put more memory in it, added a couple of programs, and gave it to a high-school student with the promise of tutoring her in word processing skills. In return, the student will be equipped to get a summer job.

Giving as a Family. Many families have rediscovered the joy of the holidays by giving each other token gifts, pooling the rest of the money they'd normally spend on each other, and getting gifts for people less fortunate. Why not try this at non-holiday times of the year?

Unless there is within us a yearning for that which is above us, we shall soon yield to that which is about us.

P. T. Forsyth

Just 'Cus Gifts. Giving gifts for no apparent reason is a creative way to express care and love, especially when you give them in unusual ways. Send gifts to your kids or spouse in the mail. Create a scavenger hunt to find the gifts. Give someone blubs to plant or a gallon of paint if he or she is redecorating.

Spontaneous generosity is contagious. Creative ideas generate more ideas. If you look for ways to give hilariously, you will find them. Have fun!

6. Money and Wealth

From R. Dwight Hill, *Facts of the Matter Weekly Letter* (June 2016):

NINE BASIC PRINCIPLES ON MONEY FROM I TIMOTHY 6:6-9, 17-19

1 Timothy 6:6-8 (NIV) But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.

1 Timothy 6:17-19 (NIV) 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. ¹⁸ Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous

and willing to share. ¹⁹ 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.

1. The quality of our life is not defined by what we possess materially

Godliness with contentment is great gain. (I Tim. 6:6)

[Jesus said:] Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. (Lk. 12:15)

2. From an eternal perspective, our material possessions are of little importance

We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. (I Tim. 6:7)

“Money—the lack of it; the abundance of it; or the possibility of it—has a way of getting a hammerlock on our hearts. No one is exempt. Even the best of us can find our perspectives and passions easily diverted by the prospect of just a little more cash. Judas reminds us that even those of us who follow Christ and who have been wonderfully touched by His love and grace have the potential of betraying Christ, His will, and His ways, for the prospect of a bulge in our bank account.”

— Joseph Stowell, Past-President, Moody Bible Institute

[After losing his earthly possessions, Job stated:] Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised. (Job 1:21)

Naked a man comes from his mother's womb, and as he comes, so he departs. He takes nothing from his labor that he can carry in his hand. (Ecclesiastes 5:15)

3. God wired us so we can choose to be content with life's basics

If we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. (I Tim. 6:8)

I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (Phil. 4:11-13; see also Lk. 3:14)

4. Desire for wealth leads to many troubles and our ultimate destruction

They'll self-destruct in no time. Lust for money brings trouble and nothing but trouble. Going down that path, some lose their footing in the faith completely and live to regret it bitterly ever after. (I Tim. 6:9,10 MSG; see also 2 Pet. 2:3; 1 Jn. 2:15-17)

5. If God has blessed us with material wealth, we must guard against pride

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant. (I Tim. 6:17)

You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today. (Deut. 8:17, 18; see also I Cor. 4:7)

6. Wealth has the power to seduce our heart away from our hope in God

Command those who are rich in this present world not to...put their hope in wealth. (I Tim. 6:17)

This is what the Lord says: 'Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,' declares the Lord. (Jer. 9:23, 24; see also Job 31:24-28; Ps. 52:7)

7. God wants us to derive pleasure in life from our material possessions

God...richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. (1 Tim. 6:18)

Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God. He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart. (Ecclesiastes 5:19, 20)

8. God wants us to use our material wealth to enrich the lives of others

Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. (1 Tim. 6:18; see also Gal. 5:10; Heb. 13:16)

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? (Isa. 58:6,7)

A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed. (Prov. 11:25)

9. In blessing others with our resources, the quality of our eternal reward is significantly affected

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. (1 Tim. 6:19; see also Matt. 19:21; 25:35-40)

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matt. 6:19, 20)

Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. (Lk. 12:33)

Our lives as we live them seem like lives that anticipate questions that never will be asked. It seems as if we are getting ourselves ready for the question “How much did you earn during your lifetime?” or “How many friends did you make?” or “How much progress did you make in your career?” or “How much influence did you have on people?” or “How many conversions did you make?”

Were any of these to be the question Christ will ask when he comes again in glory, many of us could approach the judgment day with great confidence. But nobody is going to hear any of these questions. The question we all are going to face is the question we are least prepared for. It is: “What have you done for the least of mine?” As long as there are strangers; hungry, naked, and sick people; prisoners, refugees, and slaves; people who are handicapped physically, mentally, or emotionally; people without work, a home, or a piece of land, there will be that haunting question from the throne of judgment: “What have you done for the least of mine?”

Henri Nouwen, “Seeds of Hope,” *Plough Blog* (7/30/19)

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