

There is an old story told long ago that seems fitting for what we've been discussing these last few weeks. The story goes something like this: There was a businessman who, while already pretty wealthy, had a banner year, his business set records. He experienced enormous production and profits and found himself with abundant wealth. As he surveyed all he had amassed, two feelings washed over him. He found deep satisfaction in all he had and found tremendous security in it as well. After giving it some thought, he became very impressed with all he had and made the decision to store it away, kick back, and live off it for the rest of his life. The problem was that the rest of his life amounted to only a few hours. That night, he died, and all this stuff that he had gathered for himself was left sitting there, having never made the impact this man thought it would have, and never making the impact it could have had on others. Many of you recognize the story. It was told by Jesus, one of his parables recorded in the book of Luke, and at the end of the story, you know what Jesus called this man? A fool.

This morning we wrap up our series called *Human Resources*. We've been talking about how to view and what to do with all God has given us, and today we end by looking at money and possessions. It's a topic any series on stewardship would get to because it's a topic about which God's Word has a lot to say.

You may have heard the stats before, but they bear repeating. While the Bible has around 500 verses on prayer and around 500 on faith, it contains over 2,000 verses on money. Sixteen of Jesus' thirty-eight parables deal with money and possessions, as does one out of every ten verses in the New Testament. Why? Because money is a big deal.

It's been said our bank statements are theological documents because how we handle our money says a lot about what think of God. Money tests our character and directs our heart. And just like the guy in the story, we too can struggle with finding satisfaction in what we have and placing our security in it. It's two sides of the same coin. One is based on fear that we won't have our wants met. The other is based on the fear we won't have our needs met. The result is what we own begins to own us, so we respond by, as Jesus says, storing up treasure for ourselves instead of being rich towards God.

But our inclination to store up actually comes at a great cost. When we hold onto our stuff because we find security or satisfaction in it, we rob God of the hope, trust, and devotion only he is due, we stifle the flourishing life God has created us for, and we prevent the resources God has given from having the impact God intended. The solution, at the risk of sounding like a character from an animated movie soundtrack, is to let it go. It's to give it away and discover **God gives to givers**. In the often counterintuitive economy of God, those who are most generous experience peace and fulfillment that simply cannot occur when we hold on tightly. So as we close this series talking about the stewardship of money, I want you to see what happens when we live a generous life.

**God gives abundantly to givers.** Generous believers have experienced we worship a generous God who will provide everything we need when we need it.

**[2 Corinthians 9:6-11a] <sup>6</sup> The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. <sup>7</sup> Each one must give as he has**

**decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. <sup>8</sup> And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. <sup>9</sup> As it is written, “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” <sup>10</sup> He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. <sup>11</sup> You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way.**

Paul begins by giving a very simple farming analogy to show us the impact our resources can have. The more seed you scatter, the larger crop you can expect. The same is true of our giving. The more we give, the greater impact we can expect to see.

But because our money is a heart issue, our attitude around giving is essential. You see, you can still give but not be free of the issue of security or significance. Let me tell you how the first few years of our marriage went. I grew up in some pretty lean years, so my struggle has always been around finding security in my stuff. When Martha and I were first married, she would say we need to give to church, and my attitude and response were anything but cheerful. I would physically contort my body and bemoan the fact that we just didn't have enough to give. Ultimately, I would relent. Dollars may have gone out of our bank account, but my security in them didn't leave as well. I was, what Paul called, a reluctant giver. I missed out on the freedom found in putting my security in God. You may be able to relate.

God doesn't want reluctant givers, and he doesn't want people giving out of guilt or obligation. He wants cheerful givers. It's not the size of the gift that God is concerned about. It's the size of the heart towards him that gives it. Cheerful givers give because of the joy they experience when they do. They are full of delight to give to God and his purposes because they get to witness the impact their generosity has. They are also cheerful because they aren't burdened with the bondage of security or satisfaction in their stuff. You see, in their giving, they have discovered two magnificent truths about God.

The cheerful giver recognizes that **God gives provision to live and provision to give.** There is, perhaps, no verse that better describes the abundance of grace God pours out than 9:8. **<sup>8</sup> And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.** It is a verse full of promise.

The first thing we're told is that God is able to take care of those who are generous. All sufficiency in all things at all times means our needs will be met. We don't have to hold tightly to what we have because we fear we may not have enough if we let it go. God pours out his grace to fulfill the needs of our life. That means our security is misplaced if it's in our possessions. You know what I realized one day after reluctantly giving for a period of time? That we never ran out. We were never left wanting. We gave, and we were still ok. He provided, and my security began to shift away from my stuff and towards him.

Now, a quick word on how this verse has been abused, particularly in the world of the prosperity gospel. This passage is often taught by saying if you give, God will make you rich. That you give a dollar out of one pocket and two dollars miraculously appears in the other. And for this to

happen all you have to do is send a seed offering to this guy on TV. Don't believe it. Don't do it. God will provide. But he enriches you not to make you rich but so that you can be generous in every way.

The second thing we're told is that God will pour out his grace on us so we can pour it out on others. Everything we have to give away was first given to us by God. That goes back to the first week of our series. God owns everything, and God has given everything. We are his managers. God gives to us in abundance so that we may abound in every good work. His gracious provision is the fuel of our generosity. If we believe that, it should change our outlook on our stuff. Satisfaction no longer comes from storing it away. Satisfaction comes from giving it away. Satisfaction come from knowing you met someone's needs; that your life isn't about what you have but about what you do with what you have.

Here's the beauty of what this passage and Jesus' parable are saying. You can't take any of this stuff with you, but your stuff can outlast you. If your possessions are meant only to satisfy you, their impact ends when you end. But if your stuff is given away to bless others for the cause of Christ, the impact will go on for eternity. That's why God loves generous, cheerful people eager to receive the grace of his provision and give it away.

**God gives himself to givers.** The satisfaction experienced through generosity goes beyond seeing how our resources impact others. Generosity allows us to encounter and know God in a way we wouldn't be able to otherwise. Paul says that giving will increase the harvest of your righteousness. Giving impacts our relationship with God. While Scripture tells us we will receive rewards in eternity for our generosity, there is also something that happens now when we give. Generosity is a declaration that our security is in God. Our faith is expanded, and as we depend on him, we know and love him more.

Additionally, giving is transformational. The God who made us in his image also gives us the grace to be conformed to his image and character. When we give, we grow in that character.

John 3:16 - For God so loved the world that he GAVE his only Son.

John 6:63 – It is the Spirit who GIVES life.

John 14:27 – Peace I leave with you; my peace I GIVE to you.

Mark 10:45 - The Son of Man came to GIVE his life as a ransom for many.

James 1:5 - If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who GIVES to all generously.

James 1:17 – Every good and perfect GIFT is from above.

You see, I think there are so many Bible passages about money because there are so few things that allow us to know God intimately and transform us deeply into the image of his Son. Giving is godly, and when we give our stuff to him, he gives his character to us.

**God gets when we give.** The God who gives and gives and gives also receives something when we are generous.

**[2 Corinthians 9:11b-13] <sup>11</sup> You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. <sup>12</sup> For the ministry of this service is not**

**only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.<sup>13</sup> By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others.**

Another satisfaction that comes from a life of generosity is that we get to show off our God to each other. When we give to those in need, their right response is to thank the God who made it all possible.

I have a friend who comes from a wealthy family and, once a year, he and his siblings take distributions from the family trust and hand out scholarships at the local high schools. My friend and his siblings were not responsible for creating that wealth. Their father is the cause of that. But their dad gives them checks each year and lets them deliver it to these students in need. And while they get the joy of giving those checks out, it's their dad who deserves and gets the credit.

That's the way it is with our Heavenly Father. He's set up a family trust and he gives you and me distributions from it. We get the privilege of passing that on, but he's the one who deserves and gets the credit. When we are generous, we show the world our generous God.

**Get your heart checked.** Ask God if you are a reluctant, compulsive, or cheerful giver...or if you are the guy from the story I told in the beginning! It's a bold and courageous prayer to pray, but it's a necessary one, and it will be fruitful, if you let it. If you are wrestling with security and satisfaction in your possessions instead of finding that in God, you are not flourishing in the way God made you to flourish. You are missing out. So, to that end...

**Take the next step in your generosity journey.** As God gives you clarity on where your heart is, perhaps the place to start is confessing your security and satisfaction in your possessions. He already knows, but there is freedom to be found when you tell him and ask for his help. If you've not given to God, maybe your next step is to give just a little and try it on. Maybe 1%, and let God meet you there. If you look at your finances and realize they are a mess, perhaps getting those in order is the place to start. And, if God has poured out his grace upon you in great abundance, consider the possibility he has equipped you give in the same way.

Something else I would ask to be part of your generosity journey is to give generously to Fellowship. As I make the ask, I also want to thank you again for your generosity this year. I told you a few months ago we cut some of our expenses and we are positioned to end the year in a good financial position. But we need to finish strong in June, which is the final month of our fiscal year. If you have been a regular giver, please continue to do so. If you have not been giving, would you prayerfully consider doing so? I hope you know, after this message, that it's not about keeping the lights on in this building. It's about you encountering God in a new way and about us continuing the good and necessary work of the Gospel he has called us to.

If you struggle with giving cheerfully, I want to encourage you to begin by giving faithfully. "I'm willing to give because I trust you and you say it's a good thing to do." When you give faithfully, I'm confident cheerfully will follow. I'm confident because that's how God gives. I'm also confident because I've never met an unhappy generous person.

I want to close with a wonderful story of generosity and a picture of what this passage says...and it doesn't even involve money. Hagan McPhail is part of our Fellowship family and a leader in our Life Groups and Student Ministry. Hagan recently made a donation, but it wasn't money, it was bone marrow. Doctors drilled into his pelvic bone and took out 1.5 liters of marrow all to be given to a very sick young lady in need. As far as I know, Hagan had nothing to do with his body producing bone marrow. That was all God's doing. But here's the wonderful thing about God's grace. God gave Hagan enough bone marrow that he could give a good amount away and still be healthy himself. God also designed Hagan's body to replenish that bone marrow so that he could give again.

And it's the same way with our treasure. Everything we have has been given by God, and he gives enough to take care of us and enable us to take care of others. There's no reason to hold on tightly. Let it go, and watch the impact it has on those you give it to and on your relationship with God.