

## **Earn. Save. Give.: 3. Give All You Can**

**Mark 12:41-44**

**November 20, 2022**

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In our heart of hearts, we know that we cannot satisfy the deepest longings simply by increasing our knowledge or our wealth. And so, we turn to Proverbs, to the wisdom passed down to us from the sages of ancient Israel who teach us that wisdom is a gift from God that enables us to know what to do with the knowledge and wealth we gather, so we can live faithfully in our relationships with God and each other. Proverbs 11:25 says, *Those who give generously receive more, but those who are stingy with what is appropriate will grow needy. Generous persons will prosper; those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed.* And Jesus reiterated that wisdom with a rhetorical question: *“Why would people gain the whole world but lose their lives? What will people give in exchange for their lives?”*

And so today, we conclude this message series as we look at John Wesley’s third rule for the use of money, which is to give all you can. This is what Wesley referred to as “the farther end” toward which earning and saving leads us because the goal of Christian discipleship is to lead generous lives. We’ll start by exploring the Biblical perspective, what Jesus said about what it means to give all you can and then hear some real-life examples of joyous, generous, impactful giving here at Messiah Church. Let’s start with today’s scripture. It seems that Jesus was doing some serious people-watching in the Temple that day. Mark says that Jesus, as he watched, observed the way people gave their offerings. Thirteen large, metal, trumpet shaped containers lined the wall of the Temple courtyard. Because there was no paper money, we can just imagine the sound it made when a rich person dropped a large gift into the container. You could hear it clanging all the way to the bottom.

Jesus watched-and heard-the way the rich gave their gifts, “throwing in their money.” Then he noticed a woman. She was nameless, a widow, poor and she dropped two tiny coins into the offering. The original text says the coins were “lepta”, the smallest Greek coins of the day, which were so small you couldn’t hear a sound when they hit the bottom of the container. In the King James translation of the Bible, they are referred to as “mites”, thus this story known to us today as The Widow’s Mite.

Jesus told his disciples, *“I assure you that this poor widow has put in more than everyone who’s been putting money in the treasury. All of them are giving out of their spare change. But she, from her hopeless poverty, has given everything she had, even what she needed to live on.”*

Clearly, Jesus had a different way of counting the offering that day. He counted it:

Based not on its size... but on the impact on the giver

Based not on how much people gave but... on how much they had left over afterwards

Based not on the others’ offerings but... on the giving capacity of the giver

Jesus said that some of the people that day “contributed out of their abundance.” In other words, they never felt it. It never made a dent in the way they lived or used their resources. But this woman gave out of her poverty. It had a direct impact on the way she lived the rest of her life.

I’ve heard more than one pastor preach that “She gave until she felt the pinch. She gave until she felt the hurt.” But I wonder if she gave until it felt right. So that raises the question for us, how much should we give until it feels right? This is a personal conversation between you and God. The only rule is to give more than we can spare, for only when we do, we finally give of ourselves.

Every fall, Jerry and I fill out our estimate of giving card together. I wish I could tell you that we have always fulfilled our pledge, but the truth is, we struggled with that for many years. We often waited to try fulfilling our pledge until the end of the year, giving our leftovers rather than our first fruits. And you know what the end of the year is like, with the holidays and traveling to be with family, there was never enough “left over” for us to give. So, for many years, we were not able to fulfill our pledge and we felt guilty rather than joyful in our giving. But we continued to worship, participate in a faith group, growing in our faith and love of God and God was working on our hearts until finally we took the first step and put a plan in place to give in a regular, disciplined manner. I think we began with \$15 a month. And since then, we have made it our goal to increase the amount of our gift every year. We see this as a tangible way for us to say, “Thank You, God for everything!”

I don't think the point of Jesus' story about the widow's mite is to discourage or diminish the generosity of people who are willing and able to give large gifts. Nor do I think Jesus was not saying that small gifts are more important than large gifts or that small gifts are evidence of someone inherently more spiritual than larger ones. The reality is large gifts are needed to support the ongoing ministries of the church so that the smaller gifts can be maximized in their use. I am thankful for all of you who are able and willing to provide abundantly for the building of God's kingdom in this church and this community. Messiah Church has a long legacy of giving out of abundance.

From the early mission team trips to Jamaica and the Blue Ridge Mountains that provided funds to build roofs and foundations for schools that were in need of basic shelter and expansion.

Our current youth mission teams that serve locally at STORM and Youth Works  
Work teams to Habitat for Humanity

And even today, we commissioned a team to Florida that will assist with cleaning up of the devastation left behind by Hurricane Ian.

In this past year, your gifts have undergirded organizational structures to provide food, clothing, and shelter for the homeless

To help meet some of the most basic of needs for our Native American neighbors

Homes for unwed mothers and their babies in Kenya.

Safe, clean, and reliable water for school children in Africa.

Ongoing support for our refugee families as they start new lives in MN

endowment gifts that enable new initiatives to have a start

Providing scholarships for Bloom children

Continue to reach new people through our online worship experiences.

By the way, Messiah Church is no longer a one campus church. COVID forced us to take all our ministries to our online campus. And since our doors reopened 18 months ago, folks began to return to in person worship, but our online congregation has also continued to grow. Every Sunday we have between 400-500 folks who regularly worship online. Many of you know Dar Whitman and her husband, Bob. They joined Messiah Church over 48 years ago. Bob passed away in 2016 and in 2021, Dar relocated to Rochester, but she remains an active member of Messiah Church and worships online at both services every Sunday and continues to support the ministries of Messiah Church.

Another new online worship experience begins next Sunday, Nov 27 and runs for 4 Sundays of Advent. We call it *Church on the Go*. It is different than our live stream, which will continue. This is a more casual, 30-minute church service designed for a digital audience that you can listen to on your commute, while you're doing dishes, waiting for a dance rehearsal or hockey practice to end, or by finding a few minutes

while your child is napping to enjoy a meaningful message this holiday season. And if you've been thinking about inviting a friend to Messiah, this might be the perfect thing to share.

There's a story of sacrificial giving right here at Messiah Church that is part of our history and bears retelling. You see it every time you walk into this building, but you may not be aware of the story behind it. Right after World War II, Agnes and Stanislaw Ornat, a Roman Catholic couple, moved to Minnesota from Europe. Several years later Stanislaw, died and his widow, Agnes, went to make arrangements with the priest for his funeral. But for reasons that are not fully known today, the priest told her there would be a cost for a mass and a cost for her husband to be buried in the church's cemetery. She did not have that kind of money. So, she walked to the nearby Parker's Lake Methodist Church to ask if the funeral could be held there. Reverend Frederick Kruger, the pastor at the time, and said of course. Agnes admitted that she was not a member, not even a Methodist. But in good Methodist fashion, Reverend Kruger assured her that she could still have her husband's funeral in the church. Then she asked how much it would cost. Nothing was the good pastor's reply. Agnes was so touched by such an offer of Christian hospitality that she later joined Messiah Church. A few years later, in the early 1960's, when she heard that this building was going to be built, she wanted to give a gift of gratitude. People thought a small brass cross for the altar would be nice and so she gave that cross. However, little did the people know that the cross she had in mind was the cross at the entrance of our building. This cross stands over forty feet high and graces the entrance to our building. And how did Agnes, this widow, pay for this large steel cross? She paid for it by ironing shirts for a quarter a piece. That cross, with its arms wide open, welcomes people of this community offering the same Christian hospitality that invited a widow in the name of Christ to this church.

Wesley was clear that earning and saving are not an end in and of themselves. They lead toward what he called "the farther end" of giving. He was clear that simply earning and saving can, in fact, become an impediment to growing as followers of Christ unless these practices become how we move toward a life of Christ-centered generosity in which we find joy in giving all we can, to fulfill God's best purpose for the use of our resources and equip us to participate in God's loving, saving, healing work in this world. There have been many studies on the effects of giving over the years and they all seem to come to the same conclusion. When we give, we experience a "happiness boost/helper's high." There are benefits of giving—not just for the recipients but for the givers' health and happiness, and for the strength of entire communities.

1. Giving makes us feel happy. A study by Harvard Business School found that giving money to someone else lifted participants' happiness more than spending it on themselves. When we give, it activates regions of the brain associated with pleasure, social connection, and trust, creating a "warm glow" effect.
2. Giving is good for our health. A study of elderly couples found that people who provide practical help to friends, relatives, or neighbors, or give emotional support to their spouses, have a lower risk of dying over a five-year period than those who don't. Researchers suggest this is because giving helps decrease stress, which is associated with a variety of health problems.
3. Giving evokes gratitude. Whether you're on the giving or receiving end of a gift, that gift can elicit feelings of gratitude, which is integral to happiness, health, and social bonds.
4. Giving is contagious. When one person behaves generously, it inspires observers to behave generously later, toward different people. Perhaps you've experienced the Drive Through Difference? Recently, Jerry and I drove through our local Caribou Coffee for a warm beverage. When we got to the window, the barista informed us that the person in front of us had paid for our two coffees! We felt

instantly blessed and said, “Well then, we’ll pay for the order of the car behind us.” She smiled really big and said, “You are the 7th car in a row to pay for the next car’s order.” Giving is contagious.

Let’s take just a minute and consider the different ways we give. Eugene Peterson in his translation of the Bible, *The Message*, describes the givers in the Temple that day as Tossers. These are folks who give when they can and when and if there’s leftovers, like Jerry and I used to do. If that’s where you are, I invite you to take the first step and plan to move from where you are today to where you believe God would like you to be. Then, with this reprioritizing your finances, challenge yourself to grow one step at a time towards the goal of tithing. Reaching the “farther end”, that is, moving towards the discipline of Tithing, giving the first 10% of your resources back to God will enable you to live into the command of *“Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the first of your crops.”*

So, take a minute and do a heart check. Where are you on your journey to moving toward the “farther end” of Christ-shaped generosity? As you think about this, remember, it does not matter to God the size of the gift but what does matter is the impact that the act of giving has on you, the giver. Every gift makes a difference in what the ministry of Messiah Church is able to accomplish. And the spiritual impact of our giving becomes a part of God’s work of transformation in our hearts. The promise of the Proverb is clear: *Those who give generously receive more.... Generous persons will prosper; those who*

*refresh others will themselves be refreshed.*

So let me ask the question one more time. If you could ask God for anything with complete assurance that you would receive it, what would it be? Jesus answered that question for us. “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Or as the Hebrew sages might have put it, when we find wisdom, we find everything we need to live a healthy, whole, productive life. May you receive the gift of wisdom to use what Wesley called the “excellent gift of money” in ways that fulfill God’s highest and best purpose for your life and for the world in which we live.

Let’s pray. Lord, you have blessed me with so much. Let this commitment be a small reflection of my love for you, my gratitude for these blessings and my desire to be used by you to bring hope to others. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

## **Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of November 20, 2022**

### **Weekly Prayer**

Thank you, God, for everything. Thank you for life, for relationships, for the resources we have received. Most of all, thank you that you are always faithful and always at work in our lives. Help us to see our lives and everything we have as a trust from you to be your hands and feet in this world. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### **Monday, November 21**

#### **Scripture Ephesians 5:8-9; 2 Corinthians 9:6-11**

You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord, so live your life as children of light. Light produces fruit that consists of every sort of goodness, justice, and truth.

What I mean is this: the one who sows a small number of seeds will also reap a small crop, and the one who sows a generous amount of seeds will also reap a generous crop. Everyone should give whatever they have decided in their heart. They shouldn’t give with hesitation or because of

pressure. God loves a cheerful giver. God has the power to provide you with more than enough of every kind of grace. That way, you will have everything you need always and in everything to provide more than enough for every kind of good work. As it is written, *He scattered everywhere; he gave to the needy; his righteousness remains forever*. The one who supplies seed for planting and bread for eating will supply and multiply your seed and will increase your crop, which is righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous in every way. Such generosity produces thanksgiving to God through us.

### **Observation**

Ephesians 5:8 did not say, as we might expect, something like “You belong to the light.” It used a stronger phrase: “Now you *are* light in the Lord, so live your life as children of light.” And that light produces fruit that consists of every sort of goodness (as well as justice and truth). The Spirit’s good fruit of generosity is not just about money. (Of course, it doesn’t exclude money, either.) Paul was writing in 2 Corinthians about funds he was collecting among the Gentile Christians to support poor Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. But he kept using words like “*everything* you need *always* and *in everything*” and “You will be made rich *in every way* so that you can be generous *in every way*.” He made it clear that God is generous with everything we need. That’s why we can generously share time, talents, energy and caring (as well as money) with others.

### **Application**

Ephesians was sure that, living in Jesus’ grace and power, Christ-followers can live as “children of light,” whose goodness, justice and truth bring Christ’s light to others. What is the source of the light that shines from your life in your best moments? Can you recall one or more times when you recognized that Christ’s light shining through you had brightened another life? What are some resources God’s generous goodness has placed most lavishly in your life? What are some resources others seem to have more of than you? Modern science agrees with the Bible that a grateful spirit is good for us. How does being grateful for what you have, rather than resenting what others have, help you be generous with anything you have an abundance of, so you can bless others as God has blessed you?

### **Prayer**

God, you are the ultimate source of all that is. Any good thing I have or am is a gift from you. Loosen my tight fists and grow the Spirit’s fruit of goodness and generosity in me every day. Amen.

### **Tuesday, November 22**

#### **Scripture: Proverbs 11:24-28**

Those who give generously receive more,  
but those who are stingy with what is appropriate will grow needy.  
Generous persons will prosper;  
those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed.  
People curse those who hoard grain,  
but they bless those who sell it.  
Those who look for good find favor,  
but those who seek evil—it will come to them.  
Those who trust in their wealth will wither,  
but the righteous will thrive like leafy trees.

**Observation:** Proverbs gave varied views on money, which take some work to find. The words ‘wealth,’ ‘wealthy,’ ‘riches,’ and ‘rich’ occur 45 times in the book of Proverbs, and the words ‘poor’ and ‘poverty’

occur the same number of times. We can't just pick one or two favorite proverbs. A single proverb isn't appropriate for every circumstance. According to the book of Proverbs, neither poverty nor wealth is given high status in God's eyes, except as they have to do with one's pursuit of wisdom.

**Application:** In Proverbs 11:25, A liberal man [or "generous persons"] is literally "a soul of blessing".... "Will be enriched" is literally 'will be made fat,' which is an idiom for 'grow rich' or 'become prosperous.' The sense of this line is that the generous person will be rewarded with wealth. Does life always work that way, money-wise, for generous people? When you give generously of yourself (your time, means, love, spiritual gifts), what non-financial rewards have you received?

**Prayer:** Lord God, you care about my money, not so much because of what it says about my bank account as because of what it says about my heart. Keep my heart growing more generous. Amen.

### **Wednesday, November 23**

#### **Scripture: Mark 12:41-44**

Jesus sat across from the collection box for the temple treasury and observed how the crowd gave their money. Many rich people were throwing in lots of money. One poor widow came forward and put in two small copper coins worth a penny. Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I assure you that this poor widow has put in more than everyone who's been putting money in the treasury. All of them are giving out of their spare change. But she from her hopeless poverty has given everything she had, even what she needed to live on."

#### **Observation**

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.

#### **Application**

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.

### **Thursday, November 24, Thanksgiving Day**

#### **Scripture: Psalm 136:1-9**

Give thanks to the LORD because he is good.

God's faithful love lasts forever!

Give thanks to the God of all gods—

God's faithful love lasts forever.

Give thanks to the Lord of all lords—  
God's faithful love lasts forever.  
Give thanks to the only one who makes great wonders—  
God's faithful love lasts forever.  
Give thanks to the one who made the skies with skill—  
God's faithful love lasts forever.  
Give thanks to the one who shaped the earth on the water—  
God's faithful love lasts forever.  
Give thanks to the one who made the great lights—  
God's faithful love lasts forever.  
The sun to rule the day—  
God's faithful love lasts forever.  
The moon and the stars to rule the night—  
God's faithful love lasts forever!

### **Observation**

The psalmist located the center of our gratitude to God in the refrain he repeated over and over in this psalm: "God's faithful love lasts forever!" Above all else, the grand story of the Bible is the story of a God who loves us with a tireless, durable, embracing, never-ending love. What a promise! "Give thanks to the Lord!"

### **Application**

Reflect on the greatness of God and the blessings you have experienced in the past year. Have a joyous Thanksgiving Day! In whatever way you mark the day, and with whomever, consider reading this psalm, or singing a favorite thanksgiving song, as a way of deepening your sense of gratitude on this day.

### **Prayer**

Lord God, in wonder, love and praise I thank you that all you do in my life springs from your unchanging love. Amen.

### **Friday, November 25**

#### **Scripture: Matthew 19:16-26**

A man approached him and said, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to have eternal life?" Jesus said, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There's only one who is good. If you want to enter eternal life, keep the commandments." The man said, "Which ones?" Then Jesus said, "*Don't commit murder. Don't commit adultery. Don't steal. Don't give false testimony. Honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as you love yourself.*" The young man replied, "I've kept all these. What am I still missing?" Jesus said, "If you want to be complete, go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor. Then you will have treasure in heaven. And come follow me." But when the young man heard this, he went away saddened, because he had many possessions. Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I assure you that it will be very hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. In fact, it's easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God's kingdom." When his disciples heard this, they were stunned. "Then who can be saved?" they asked. Jesus looked at them carefully and said, "It's impossible for human beings. But all things are possible for God."

### **Observation**

Jesus called a rich young man to reset his priorities. He couldn't do it. He went away sad. He seemed to want to follow Jesus, but he didn't do it because he wanted all his earthly possessions even more. Like many people then (and now), Jesus' disciples thought earthly riches always meant God had blessed the owner. Jesus shocked them when he said, "It will be very hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven." Very hard, but not impossible: "All things are possible for God" (verse 26).

### **Application**

God did NOT tell many affluent Bible characters (e.g. Abraham in the Old Testament, Lydia the seller of royal purple cloth in the New Testament—see Acts 16:11-15) to sell all they had. What do you believe was the heart issue Jesus knew the wealthy young man needed to address? What was the central obstacle that kept him from responding to Jesus' call?

### **Prayer**

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

### **Saturday, November 26**

#### **Scripture: Matthew 6:19-24**

"Stop collecting treasures for your own benefit on earth, where moth and rust eat them and where thieves break in and steal them. Instead, collect treasures for yourselves in heaven, where moth and rust don't eat them and where thieves don't break in and steal them. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

"The eye is the lamp of the body. Therefore, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how terrible that darkness will be! No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be loyal to the one and have contempt for the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

### **Observation**

In today's reading, Jesus reminds us that there can only be one most important focus, one top priority, in our life. It is not possible to make God and the values of the unseen kingdom of heaven most important if our priorities are ruled by the values of the tangible life and culture around us.

### **Application**

Jesus says you cannot serve two masters. Who or what is the master you are you serving, as measured by where you put the most energy, time and focus? In what ways, if any, have you experienced the power of money to control and direct your life? What forces besides purely financial ones (e.g. social prestige, children) can become your treasure, more important to you than God? How do you find that living in God's kingdom makes you a better parent, citizen, friend, etc., if at all?

### **Prayer**

Thank you, God, for everything. I am grateful for so much. Most of all I am grateful for the One who makes it possible to have so many other "gratitudes" in my life. Let thanksgiving for everyone and everything else find its source in you. Amen.

