



God Supplies

**The Biblical Perspective of
Dependence upon God**

**A Biblical Response to
The Prosperity Gospel**

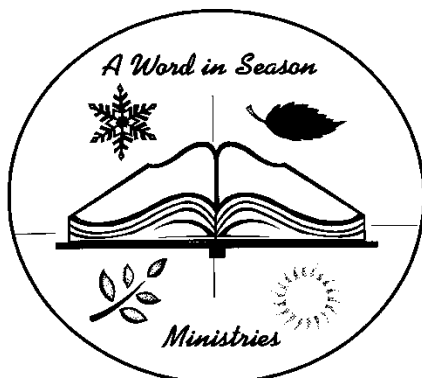
Earl Cooper, Ph.D.

God Supplies: A Biblical Perspective of Dependence upon God

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A Biblical Perspective of Dependence upon
God,
A Response to the Prosperity Gospel

By: **Earl Cooper, Ph. D**
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Published by:
A Word in Season Ministries
1248 Healey Lake Road
Bracebridge, Ontario, Canada

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Contents

PREFACE	6
INTRODUCTION	7
FINDING THE WILL OF GOD	8
THE PLACE FOR FINDING THE DISCLOSED WILL OF GOD.....	9
THE PROCEDURE FOR FINDING THE UNDISCLOSED WILL OF GOD	11
SUMMARY	12
GOD SUPPLIES – TO HIM BE THE GLORY	17
PART 1	19
GOD OR MONEY	19
PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY	19
DISCOVERING GOD’S “DIVINE ECONOMICS”	19
WEEK 1, DAY 1	19
WEEK 1, DAY 2	24
WEEK 1, DAY 3	25
WEEK 1, DAY 4	28
WEEK 1, DAY 5	30
COMMENTARY	39
FOUNDATIONAL DIVINE ECONOMICS	39
GOD SUPPLIES – TO HIM BE THE GLORY!	49
PART 2: WHO HOLDS THE TITLE DEED?	50
PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY	50
DISCOVERING THE BEAUTY OF BELONGING TO GOD.	50
WEEK 2, DAY 1	50
WEEK 2, DAY 2	52
WEEK 2, DAY 3	54
WEEK 2, DAY 4	57
WEEK 2, DAY 5	60
GOD SUPPLIES – TO HIM BE ALL GLORY!	65
COMMENTARY	66
BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP: OWNERSHIP	66

God Supplies: A Biblical Perspective of Dependence upon God

GOD SUPPLIES – TO HIM BE THE GLORY!	75
PART 3: MY FIRST IS MY FAITH	77
PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY	77
DISCOVERING THE REAL MEANING AND VALUE OF DEPENDENCE	77
WEEK 3, DAY 1	77
WEEK 3, DAY 2	81
WEEK 3, DAY 3	83
WEEK 3, DAY 4	86
WEEK 3, DAY 5	90
GOD SUPPLIES – TO HIM BE THE GLORY!	97
COMMENTARY	98
BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP: FIRST-FRUIT GIVING.....	98
GOD SUPPLIES – TO HIM BE THE GLORY!	108
PART 4: FINDING THE NEW TESTAMENT ALTAR	110
PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY	110
FINDING THE NEW TESTAMENT ALTAR	110
SUMMARY OF DISCOVERED TRUTH	110
WEEK 4, DAY 1	110
WEEK 4, DAY 2	115
WEEK 4, DAY 3	118
WEEK 4, DAY 4	128
WEEK 4, DAY 5	130
REVIEW	141
NOTES	142
GOD SUPPLIES – TO GOD BE THE GLORY	143
COMMENTARY	145
BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP: SACRIFICE.....	145
REVIEW	153
CONCLUSION	154
WHERE THE BEST OF LIFE BEGINS	155
APPENDIX A	158
THE MIRACLE OF MIZORAM MISSIONS.....	158
APPENDIX B	162
FIRST FRUITS AND TITHING	162

God Supplies: A Biblical Perspective of Dependence upon God

OLD TESTAMENT FIRST-FRUITS	162
NEW TESTAMENT APPLICATION	167
CONCLUSION	174
APPENDIX C	177
BIBLE STUDY ANSWER GUIDE	177
PART 1: GOD OR MONEY	177
WEEK 1, DAY 1	177
WEEK 1, DAY 2	178
WEEK 1, DAY 3	178
WEEK 1, DAY 4	179
WEEK 1, DAY 5	180
PART 2: WHO HOLDS THE TITLE DEED?.....	180
WEEK 2, DAY 1	180
WEEK 2, DAY 2	181
WEEK 2, DAY 3	182
WEEK 2, DAY 4	182
WEEK 2, DAY 5	183
PART 3: MY FIRST IS MY FAITH'	184
WEEK 3, DAY 1	184
WEEK 3, DAY 2	185
WEEK 3, DAY 3	186
WEEK 3, DAY 4	186
WEEK 3, DAY 5	187
PART 4: FINDING THE NEW TESTAMENT ALTAR	188
Week 4, Day 1	188
Week 4, Day 2	189
Week 4, Day 3	190
Week 4, Day 4	192
Week 4, Day 5	193

PREFACE

There have been many books written from a Biblical perspective concerning financial management. This is not one of them. There have been many Christians promoting the 'Prosperity Gospel'; I am not one of them. This study, as the title suggests, is about living in dependence upon God. This is a book about discovering the wonder of God's provision, not necessarily in its abundance, but in its deep satisfaction, meaningful peace, and unique security, as He promises to meet every need.

This is a testimony about living a simple Bible truth that my father taught his children: "Put God first and live within your means." My wife and I sought to live by this principle throughout her teaching career and home-making years and my years as an electronic engineering technician, during seminary training, ministry as senior pastor of two separate churches, and presently, as a missionary Bible College and Seminary teacher. As a result, the Lord met every temporal need of our family and, more significantly, blessed us with the riches of His abundant life. In every way our lives have been full and running over!

I freely admit that I was reluctant to publish this work for fear that it would come across as one big boast. However, after many years of missionary service among the poorest of God's people in the world, and seeing their complete dependence upon God with its consequence Spiritual impact, I was determined to proceed. Our personal experience was nothing more than the designed 'norm' for God's own, of which many in western society have sadly missed out. The purpose of this book is to share the challenge and unique blessings of living in dependence upon God among the more material-minded people of God in a prosperous society.

My true and sincere motive is to have no boast in any prosperity by which I have been blessed, but simply to rejoice and praise God in His promised provision throughout my life, for I have discovered that true fullness of life is not in possessions, but in being possessed of God. May this become every reader's experience.

INTRODUCTION

Most of the 'Body of Christ' today do not live in prosperous North America or Europe but rather live within the poorest regions of the world. After fifteen years of teaching in some of these regions, I have come to discover that God's people in such circumstances grow accustomed to depend solely upon the Lord's daily provision. They experience the truth of God's Word, which states: "*my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*" (Php. 4:19).

Nevertheless, among such believers there is still much misunderstanding about God's supply. My travels, as a missionary professor of theological education, have afforded me the privilege to fellowship with God's people in many such parts of the world. It is evident through the travels that the body of Christ counts this promise as precious, but generally interprets it more often upon circumstances than upon proper understanding of God's principles of stewardship. With this stated promise of God's provision, God's people in these circumstances have claimed everything from the obligation of God to protect them from any danger to the obligation of God to guarantee personal prosperity.

Among the minority of God's people who live in the prosperous countries of Europe, the Americas, and some areas of Asia, dependence upon God has succumbed to materialism. This in turn only leads to frustration and disillusionment. Here, present societies have become less tolerant towards the true church. Such intolerance toward Christians has become justifiable rejection toward 'narrow-minded conservatism.' Here humanity appears less generous toward the needy. In this environment, God's people should anticipate increasing hardship and persecution. Scripture affirms this: *Mt 5:11-12 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Mt 10:22 "And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.*

Genuine Christians, whether in the ‘poor’ majority, or the ‘disillusioned’ minority, require a true understanding of God’s promise to supply. An understanding of the basic Christian principle of dependence upon God is necessary. However, an old axiom states: “You cannot take anything for granted.” Therefore, before we begin to look at dependence upon God, we need to be reminded of how God leads His people.

Finding the Will of God

This reminder must begin with an understanding of the place of the will of God in a Christian’s life. Romans 12:2 states, “*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that **good and acceptable and perfect will of God.***” The word ‘best’ in an English dictionary has three aspects: quality of workmanship, suitability to function, and satisfaction of performance. The three Bible terms translated ‘good’, ‘acceptable’ and ‘perfect’ in this text equal these qualities and therefore, define the ‘will of God’ as ‘best’. In other words, the will of God is the very best thing humanity can pursue.

Our study of stewardship begins with this premise: God’s will is the absolute best thing for His children. This truth begs the question: “How do God’s people come to understand God’s will?” or, “How can God’s people live God’s way?”

In Romans 12:2, Paul informs us that we can know the will of God by being “*transformed by the renewing of your mind.*” The answer to knowing God’s will or living God’s way, according to Paul, is by the renewing of the mind.

The Greek verb translated “transformed” (*metamorphousthe*) is evident in the English word “metamorphosis,” meaning a total change from inside out (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18). The key to this change is the “mind” (*noos*), the control center of one’s attitudes, thoughts, feelings, and actions (cf. Eph. 4:22–23). As one’s mind keeps on being made new by the Spiritual input of God’s Word, prayer, and Christian fellowship, his lifestyle keeps on being transformed.¹

We understand the will of God by the application of God’s word to our lives. Therefore, the Bible, the very ‘Word of God’ is the foundation for

¹ Witmer, J. A. (1985). Romans. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Ed.) (Ro 12:1–2). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

our faith. Sometimes, especially if we have grown up in the church, we assume every attendee understands this fundamental truth. This is not necessarily so. It is good to be reminded that God's Word reveals God's way.

The Place for Finding the Disclosed Will of God

Through the Word of God, the Lord indicates His disclosed will (revealed in Scripture) in three ways: simple statements, specific commands, and by Spiritual principles. First, the Word directs us to the disclosed will of God by simple statements of truth. These are universal truths which apply to all people. For instance, the Bible states: "...*whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.*" (Ga 6:7). This is a truth for all people regardless of whether they know the Word of God or not. "*But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart.*" (Matt. 15:18) This is a reality of life. Much of God's Word declares such universal truths, which give direction for careful and cautious living in tune with God's nature and will for all men.

Second, the Lord also reveals His will in Scripture through specific commands. An example of this, repeated five times in the Bible is "*You shall not steal.*" (Ex. 20:15, Lev. 19:11, Deut. 5:19, Mat. 19:18, Ro. 13:9). Given specifically to Israel as part of God's Ten Commandments, these state the moral standard of God. Joined with the civil laws and ceremonial laws for Israel, comprising 613 commands, these are God's revealed 'Laws for Israel'. Although the Scripture teaches that the church is not under these laws, which define Israel's worship and justice conduct, the Ten Commandments cannot be ignored as they set forth a standard of moral responsibility for humankind. This moral standard is based upon the nature of God who made man in His own image and who does not change. By using our God-given ability to study and understand the Word of God, believers note the difference between God's moral standard for all men and God's specific decrees for Israel's national practices.

The Bible record of all God's commands, 613 Old Testament and 1050 New Testament² were given as direction for life. However, labour is involved in defining their specific application. By understanding the principles of interpretation so evident in Scripture, we know the difference be-

² Christian Assemblies International, <https://www.cai.org/bible-studies/1050-new-testament-commands>

tween the command ‘You shall not steal’ applicable to all men, and God’s specific command to Old Testament Israel not to marry outside the nation:

When the Israelites settled in Canaan, many of them married Canaanite women, much to the consternation of those who desired to maintain the purity of the Hebrew religion (1 Kgs 11:4). Such intermarriage was prohibited under Mosaic law (Ex 34:15, 16; Dt 7:3, 4).³

Christians can know the difference between “*thou shalt not lie*”, a moral standard for all people, and the specific demand for Old Testament Israel to regard a pig as unclean. There are proper ways to apply the Scripture as exemplified by the chosen Bible writers as well as Christ’s teachings, in order to determine distinctive ways of applying God’s commands. The critics of the Bible that accuse it of inconsistency have disregarded this simple fact. Critics declare that Christians ‘according to the Bible’ should not handle a football because it is made out of the pigskin and should stone their children for disobedience as Israel was directed. Their ignorance of proper Scripture application is apparent.

It is important for the New Testament church to recognize that God has some specific command for itself. For example, God commands His people of the New Testament to “*remember the Lord’s death*” through celebrating the Lord’s Table and to “*be kind to one another*”. These commands are as binding to our lives as ‘*thou shalt not steal*’ is binding to our lives. Therefore, by specific, properly applied commands, God shows His people His way.

The third way in which God uses His Word to direct His people is more subjective. It is by principles. By seeing the patterns in Scripture that God’s people have followed and by recognizing how those patterns apply to us, God reveals His will. For example, from Old Testament law the nation Israel was commanded to keep the Sabbath. This does not mean that the church should abandon its Sunday worship for Sabbath (Saturday) worship, but that the pattern of corporate worship one day in seven be observed. The principle is to keep corporate worship. The law or form for Israel was Sabbath keeping; the pattern or form for the early church was to celebrate worship on ‘resurrection day’, the first day of the week.

³ Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (1407). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

This was also a practical time for the church to gather at the synagogues because it was less encumbered on Sunday. When the Jewish leaders saw the threat of the church to their own customs and livelihood, they refused to permit the early church to meet in the synagogues. Therefore, the church had no choice but to observe its worship on Sunday. Church history demonstrates that some local churches, in cultures where Sunday is a working day, or where persecution dictates, hold to the principle of weekly worship but have chosen another day more suitable or safe for corporate gathering.

These three basic ways of God leading His people through the word, by universal truths, by specific commands, and by repeated principles have been evident throughout human history. Nevertheless, someone might ask "What about the undisclosed will of God?" or "How can I know the will of God not directly stated in Scripture? For example, "How does God show us whom to marry, or what our job should be, or where we should live?"

In such matters, God promises to lead His people through His Spirit: *But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. (John 14:26)* *But the anointing which ye have received of Him abides in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teaches you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him. (1John 2:27)*

In the book of Proverbs the Lord provides a simple procedure for His people to find God's undisclosed will.

The Procedure for Finding the Undisclosed Will of God

From the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, God provides five important steps to determine His undisclosed will.

Prov. 16:3a *Commit your works to the LORD.*

1. Commit to God's will

Example: Lu 22:42 *Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.*

God calls His people to commit to His will in each day, in every circumstance.

Prov. 16:3b ... *And your thoughts will be established.*

2. Saturate your mind with God's word and He directs the thoughts

Example: Col. 3:16 *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom,*

Ps 119:105 *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*

God desires His people to fill their minds with His Word through daily, meaningful Bible study and memorization. As we ask God to direct us into His will, He instills thoughts, ideas, and direction into our minds.

Prov 16:9a *A man's heart plans his way,*

3. Make appropriate plans as your thoughts are established

Example: Ps 16:7 *I will bless the LORD who has given me counsel; My heart also instructs me in the night seasons.*

Prov 16:9b ...*But the LORD directs his steps.*

4. Act upon God's leading with sensitivity to His Spirit

Example: Is. 30:21 *Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," Whenever you turn to the right hand Or whenever you turn to the left.*

As God directs our thoughts He bids us act accordingly by prayerfully pursuing the direction indicated- obeying His word, making a decision, changing a direction, testing a door, seeking Godly counsel...

**Proverbs 16:20 *He who heeds the word wisely will find good,
And whoever trusts in the LORD, happy is he.***

5. Keep close to God and Trust Him

Example: Proverbs 3:5 *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths.*

Rom. 1:17 *The just shall live by faith.*

With the leading of the Spirit and the Peace of God, trust God to guide you and trust His direction.

Summary

When the undisclosed will of God and the disclosed will of God are weighed in the balance, it is very evident that the proportion of God's *dis-*

closed will greatly outweighs the portion of His *undisclosed* will, although the latter often seems more pressing. Nevertheless, what God specifically says in Scripture about our lives and how we should live is by far the greatest proportion of His direction in our lives.

In pastoral counselling, I maintained that for God's people committed to following the *disclosed* will of God, He provides clear and confident leading for a perfect understanding of His *undisclosed* will, on a daily basis, through the leading of His Spirit. It is for this reason that a daily walk with God through personal Bible devotions and prayer is so important.

God's devoted followers know the Will of God by the Word of God through the ministry of the Spirit of God. Nevertheless, God's people have a measure of responsibility as well. God has recorded His Word for all mankind. Further, God gives specific instructions to His own people. These instructions require proper study and application. God also gives principles and patterns to live by according to His nature and will. These truths, whether specific instructions, patterns or commands and whether to all mankind or specific to His own people, compose universal truths which are binding. Obedience to God's commands is binding and compliance to God's principles is binding.

However, the basic disciplines of Bible study involving sound hermeneutics (the manner of interpreting Scripture) are required in order to recognize, understand, and apply truths. God designed that His people depend upon Him. This dependence comes from discovering and following God's will. To understand His will comes through regular, sound Bible study. His will is the best thing for their lives. Knowing God's will, day by day, always requires a consistent study of God's Word.

Although dependence upon God through compliance to His will involves all facets of life, the focus of this study is to point out that God's will for His people's dependence upon Him is clearly an exercise in Biblical stewardship of financial resources. When completing this study it will become clear that the conclusions are based upon stated Biblical truths as well as principles or patterns found in Scripture. By the study of God's Word, Christians throughout the church era, despite changing times and circumstances, can be confident in God's guidance of financial stewardship that secures dependence upon Him.

I was privileged to have a father who was the most spiritually influential person in my life. Dad came to realize early in his married life that he had great responsibilities before God in raising his children. Dad began to

attend a small Baptist Church in close proximity to our home. He faithfully took his four children to Sunday school and church and, more importantly, truly became a man of God. Dad loved God. Although he had only a grade eight education, he lived the Scriptures to the best of his ability.

Dad taught all four of his children the importance of putting God first financially. One of the ways he taught this was through an allowance. All four of us received 25¢ allowance each week. When Dad gave us the two dimes and a nickel each, he also gave us a small pink Sunday School envelope. He would remind us of our responsibility to give God what He deserved first. We learned very early in life that the nickel always went to God before we bought anything.

By example Dad taught the importance of putting God first in worship – we never missed a Sunday at church even on vacation. By Dad's example he taught us the importance of putting God first in service – he served the Lord as a Sunday School teacher and superintendent, a deacon, helping build a new church facility, church maintenance, and even a summer camp counsellor during vacation time. Dad was an example of putting God first in helping the needy – we gave much of the produce of our 2-acre vegetable garden to needy neighbours, delivering bags of potatoes and other produce. He purchased a station wagon and made special child seats for the back, allowing him to take as many as six additional neighbourhood children to Sunday school and church with us each week. His example of putting God first became engrained in our lives.

Dad was an auto mechanic and not a wealthy man by any means, but we all knew he put God first, not only with His finances but in his time priorities, family leadership, and his evident generosity to the needy. Dad taught us God's principle by example. We learned that his principles of stewardship were founded upon Bible teaching. We also saw the evidence of God's provision for our family and the blessings of following God's instructions.

Dad's principles of stewardship can be summarized in these simple yet profound words: "Put God first and live within your means, and God will always provide." This is an accurate summary of the principles of the Biblical stewardship. It has been the experience of my life that, as I held to this truth, whether in the world of business or later in pastoral and missionary ministry, this truth has never failed. God has always provided.

It is important to realize that this study is not comprehensive regarding the blessings of Biblical Stewardship. There is more truth for God's people to understand and follow; truths such as personal purity and morality, honesty and integrity, work ethics, and parenting principles are examples. All of these have great impact on a personal relationship between God and man. All of these are foundational for the blessings of sound Biblical Stewardship. Also, there are many more areas of stewardship for God's people to practice-- the stewardship of abilities and Spiritual gifts, of time, of responsibilities. All of these are also foundational for the blessings of sound Biblical stewardship. As I taught these principles through pastoral and missionary ministry, I continually evidenced God's unique provision toward obedient believers.

This became practically apparent to me when one of my African Bible College students, after committing to the principles in this study, did not experience God's promised provision in a critical matter. A further study advised for the student revealed a matter of unresolved dishonesty in his life. The student had sought 'good financial stewardship' for personal gain rather than a personal surrender to and daily walk with God, which is the heartbeat of Biblical Financial Stewardship. He confessed his sin and made appropriate reparation to ensure forgiveness and reconciliation.

God's promised provision was supplied, as well as unanticipated blessings. The Lord has blessed his pastoral ministry greatly by expanding the church ministry with two additional churches in neighbouring villages and by calling his son into pastoral ministry. It is the riches of Spiritual blessings that are the unique promise of God to those who truly follow God's will and pursue His call to stewardship.

The remainder of this book will lead the reader through four five-day weeks, Personal Bible studies addressing the *Biblical Perspective of Financial Stewardship*. The studies begin with discovering six foundational *Divine Economics for God's People*. This is followed by an examination of the *Biblical Principles of Financial Stewardship* leading to God's promised peace, provision, and true prosperity. Each area of study will provide a response challenge as well as commentary explanation. Bible texts are italicized for distinction. The Personal Bible Study texts are followed by text-related questions. Space is provided to record your own answers. I encourage the reader to take the time to do each Personal Bible Study before reading the concluding commentaries. Examples of how God keeps His promises relating to *Biblical Principles of Financial Steward-*

ship are throughout this book under the headings "***God Supplies – To Him be the Glory***".

My prayer is that the Holy Spirit will lead you into God's truth regarding His will for financial stewardship and His will for your life.

But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; (1 John 2:27)

NOTES

GOD SUPPLIES – TO HIM BE THE GLORY

My first memorable experience of total dependence upon God came as a teenager. When I turned eighteen years, I joined a canoe trip adventure down the Mackenzie River in the North West Territory of Canada. The trip was a Christian Service Brigade celebration of Canada's Centennial Year Celebration and I had the privilege to be accepted. This was an eight-week, twelve hundred mile canoe trip to the Arctic Ocean.

Half way through the trip we got caught in a storm that blew down the river valley directly from the Arctic. The storm lasted three days, and we found ourselves, after waiting out the storm, short of food. I was the cook and under a lot of pressure to get meals for five famished guys. With our skimpy food resources remaining, we had a quick, rather small meal and proceeded down river. We took time to ask God to provide good speed for us to get to the next settlement where our supplies could be replenished.

The settlements averaged about one hundred and fifty miles apart, taking about five days to reach. With the storm, we were already eight days out, but the Lord gave us a good day of travel. However, when we reached the site of the next settlement, we found the entire village evacuated because of a fire threat. There were no people and no supplies available.

There we were, with another one hundred and fifty miles to go and barely enough food for one day. We were in trouble, and if another storm blew up, we were in very serious trouble! We prayed for God's supply – thinking that successful fishing would be His means to get us through the next week. We set off, with empty stomachs and anxious hearts. Admittedly, we could have lived for four days by just drinking water; however, our strength to successfully carry on the trip would have been seriously jeopardized.

The important lesson for us was that we needed God to provide because our resources were insufficient. In our prayers we claimed the promise of Matthew 6:33, believing that to the best of our ability we had put God first on this trip. We sought to witness to villagers on the way, and faithfully kept a purposeful devotion time as a time of reflection on God's Word daily. We really were trying to live for the Lord and God answered our prayer in an amazing way.

We had been on the river for many weeks and apart from the settlements, we rarely saw another soul. Nevertheless, after only a short forty minutes out from the abandoned settlement, some activity on the other

side of the river caught our eye, (the Mackenzie river averages greater than two miles in width). We paddled across the river to find an oil exploration camp set up by a large oil company.

The workers were as surprised to see us as we were to see them! After explaining our situation, the cook, with a unique smirk on his face, led us back into the bush to a huge canvas tent. In this tent, buried in the permafrost as a natural refrigerator, was a vast supply of food! The cook told us to help ourselves to whatever we fancied and as much as we wanted. We were given, free of charge, food supply enough for a month, all packed and ready to go. God marvelously provided a better quality of food than we could ever have purchased in any settlement, and for no cost at all. God supplies! To Him be all the glory!

PART 1

GOD OR MONEY

PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS: The path of doing the will of God lies in an understanding of God's view and purpose for possessions.

*Discovering God's "Divine Economics"*⁴

WEEK 1, DAY 1

Matt. 19:16 *Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"* 17 *So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."* 18 *He said to Him, "Which ones?"* Jesus said, "*You shall not murder,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,'* 19 *'Honour your father and your mother,' and, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"* 20 *The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?"* 21 *Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."* 22 *But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.* 23 *Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 "And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God*

1. What was the young man's understanding of his own spiritual condition?

⁴ Expanded study from a seminar by Dr. Gerry Benn, former president of London Baptist Bible College, London, ON., Canada.

2. Although this man considered himself a religious person, he refused to follow Jesus. What was the obstacle in this man's way?

Jesus saw a major flaw in this man's heart condition. He considered himself obedient to the law, but his heart was captured by wealth.

3. What comment did Jesus make about the wealthy entering heaven?

4. What does that say about the possibilities of the people in any country who pursue money as a life goal?

5. State, in your own words, the main point of each following texts:

Matthew 6:24 *No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and money.*

Luke 12: 34 *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

Rom. 6:18 *And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.*

Mark 12:30 *And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and*

with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

6. The Christian must recognize the ever-present dangers of any measure of prosperity. What warnings are presented in each of the following texts?

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (Matt. 6:24).

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Luke 12:34).

These texts present very real dangers to believers. There is the danger of the *Bondage of Labour*- being a slave of money rather than a slave of righteousness as urged by Paul (re-read Romans 6:18). There is the danger of the *Bondage of Love*- a heart captured by wealth rather than a heart captured by God (re-read Mark 12:30).

7. How did the following people fall into these dangers?

Ahab: So Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." And he lay down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no food. (1 Kings 21:4).

Achan : But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things, for Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed things; so the anger of the LORD burned against the children of Israel. (Joshua 7:1)

Gehazi : *Then he said to him, "Did not my heart go with you when the man turned back from his chariot to meet you? Is it time to receive money and to receive clothing, olive groves and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male and female servants?"* (2 Kings 5:26)

Judas: *3 Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, 4 saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." And they said, "What is that to us? You see to it!" 5 Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself.* (Matt. 27:3-5)

All these men sold their souls for material gain. Ahab sold himself for a vineyard, Achan for a wedge of silver and a garment, Gehazi for silver and raiment, and Judas for a bag of silver.

8. Have you seen evidence of these dangers in people you know? If so explain:

9. How has God spoken to you about the danger of possessions?

RESPONSE:

There is no doubt that Africa has not seen the social prosperity that other continents have, where even the poorest in society have more than Africans only dream of. K.P. Yohanna, in *Revolution in World Missions*, cites economist Robert Heilbroner, who describes the one billion hungry people in the Third World in comparison to the American family:

“We begin by invading the house of our imaginary American family to strip it of its furniture. Everything goes: beds, chairs, tables, television

sets, lamps. We will leave the family with a few old blankets, a kitchen table, a wooden chair. Along with the bureaus go the clothes. Each member of the family may keep in his 'wardrobe' his oldest suit or dress, a shirt or blouse. We will permit a pair of shoes for the head of the family, but none for the wife or children.

We move to the kitchen. The appliances have already been taken out, so we turn to the cupboards ... the box of matches may stay, a small bag of flour, some sugar and salt. A few moldy potatoes, already in the garbage can, must be rescued, for they will provide much of tonight's meal. We will leave a handful of onions and a dish of dried beans. All the rest we take away: the meat, the fresh vegetables, the canned goods, the crackers, the candy

Now we have stripped the house: the bathroom has been dismantled, the running water shutoff, the electric wires taken out. Next we take away the house. The family can move to the tool shed Communications must go next. No more newspapers, magazines, books—not that they are missed, since we must take away our family's literacy as well. Instead, in our shantytown we will allow one radio

Now government services must go next. No more postmen, no more firemen. There is a school, but it is three miles away and consists of two classrooms. There are, of course, no hospitals or doctors nearby. The nearest clinic is ten miles away and is tended by a midwife. It can be reached by bicycle, provided the family has a bicycle, which is unlikely....

Finally money. We will allow our family a cash hoard of five dollars. This will prevent our breadwinner from experiencing the tragedy of an Iranian who went blind because he could not raise the \$3.94 which he mistakenly thought he needed to receive admission to a hospital where he could have been cured.”

Has reading this comparison moved your heart in any way?

Explain: _____

WEEK 1, DAY 2

1 Tim 6: 6 *Now godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. 8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*

1. Jesus made it clear, either man would serve Him or serve money. Is it evident in North American society, who the majority serve? Explain your answer.

2. The Christian must recognize the ever-present dangers of prosperity. The Christian must also recognize the destructive power of prosperity. Re-read 1 Timothy 6:6-10 and list each statement identifying the destructive power of prosperity.

3. In your own words, explain from the above exercise what is at risk for the believer in a prosperous society.

4. The destructive power of prosperity is evident. List where each of the

risks cited above could lead a believer and those people he/she could influence:

Helen Steiner Rice wrote this poem as a warning against the dangers and destruction of possessions:

Gold is cold and lifeless and can't see or hear,
And in the time of trouble it is powerless to cheer.
It has no ears to listen, no heart to understand,
It cannot bring you comfort or reach out a helping hand.

What has God said to you in this study?

Having studied the perils of prosperity, write out a prayer of commitment to serving the Lord rather than money and commit this to the Lord.

WEEK 1, DAY 3

TEXTS:

Romans 12: 1 *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

God made life a matter of choice: God or money. The Christian continues

to face the issue of money verses God, especially living in the desired prosperity that Africa seeks. To be a useful, committed Christian in such a society, a believer must have a complete change of mind. The influences and values of the world must be kept in check and the values and purposes of God must be cultivated.

God has a radically different perspective on prosperity and possessions, but in order to incorporate this perspective into the believer's life, a transformation must take place.

Re-read Romans 12:1-2. Here God presents the process necessary for Christian transformation of mind. Identify the phrases in the text that answer each of the following questions, AND, write out an explanation for what each of the phrases mean.

1. What is the foundational motive for a believer's desire for transformation?

Phrase _____

Meaning _____

2. What first step is required for this transformation to take place?

Phrase _____

Meaning _____

3. How is the sacrifice of our person described?

Phrase _____

Meaning _____

4. The sacrifice of person is called 'a service'. What word describes this service?

Phrase _____

Meaning _____

5. What conscious decision must continually be made for transformation?

Phrase _____

Meaning _____

6. What is the result of this transformation of mind?

Phrase _____

Meaning _____

The transformation of the mind of the believer results in an ability to know the will of God. This passage describes God's will as 'good'. This means something that brings about the best results. God's will is described as 'acceptable'. This means that it is pleasurable, bringing satisfaction and joy. God's will is described as 'perfect'. This means lacking nothing in quality or completeness. Doing God's will is the very best thing a believer can do.

Read Philippians 3:7-14.

Philippians 3: 7 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ. 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

7. Identify all the phrases that reflect Paul's life as a "living sacrifice" for

Christ.

Write out, in your own words, the one phrase in the text reflecting ‘life as a living sacrifice for Christ’ that is most meaningful to you.

How has God spoken to you in this study about offering yourself as a living sacrifice?

WEEK 1, DAY 4

TEXTS:

Colossians 3:10 *And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:*

To be a useful, committed Christian in a prosperity-desiring society, a believer must have a total commitment to Christ. In order to fully grasp the significance of Divine Economics, the Christian must also have a complete change of mind.

1. According to Colossians 3:10, how is the mind of a Christian renewed?

The Christian is transformed by the renewing of the mind through the knowledge of God. **The knowledge of God comes from that special revelation of God known as Holy Scripture.**

Read Psm. 19:7-11

Psm. 19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. 8 The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. 9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. 10 More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. 11 Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.

2. Identify all the synonyms for Scripture (the different names of the Bible), and all the words that describe the nature of the Scriptures such as *perfect*.

3. Finally, make a list of all the benefits of the Scriptures to the Believer.

Read 2 Tim. 3:16-17

16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

4. According to 2 Timothy 3:16-17 what other benefits are derived from the Word of God?

2 Tim. 2:15 *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

God renews the mind of the Christian through the ministry of the Spirit as the Word of God is studied. This is a cooperative effort between God's indwelling Spirit and a believer's disciplined labour.

5. According to 2 Tim. 2:15, how is the disciplined student described?

The Christian worker who takes seriously the importance of God's word will discover the Bible to be invaluable for finding wisdom, experiencing joy, giving light, and bringing warning. The study of the Word of God will provide 'doctrine' - what to believe, 'reproof' - a ground for tested convictions, 'correction' - improvement of life and character, and 'instruction' - sound practical teaching.

Indicate the measure of commitment you have to the serious study of God's Word.

Little Effort 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Much Effort



What has God said to you about renewing your mind by studying the Word of God, and what will you do about it?

WEEK 1, DAY 5

God's view of possessions and finances is radically different from the world's view. Today's study will introduce the student to some of the

unique perspectives that God gives toward possessions as a foundation for understanding the three major principles of possessions that will be studied in the weeks to come.

1. Carefully read the following texts and write out the central idea of each passage in your own words.

2 Cor. 9: 6 *But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.*

7 *So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.*

Central Idea:

Ecc. 5:19 *As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labour--this is the gift of God.*

Central Idea:

Mark 12:42 *Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. 43 He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; 44 "for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."*

Central Idea:

1 Tim. 6:17 *Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. 18 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, 19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.*

Central Idea:

Eph. 4:28 *Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labour, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.*

Central Idea:

Luke 12:34 *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

Central Idea:

An Introduction to Divine Economics

2. Match the verse references from the section above to each of the following statements of central ideas:

_____ Health to earn and wealth to have are a gift from God (wealth is given is by God's grace, it is not something that I earn or deserve by myself; therefore, my response should be gratitude.)

_____ God gives us the gift of earnings and wealth in order for us to give to others.

_____ God measures our giving on the basis of what we keep, not on what we give.

- _____ When we are generous with our gift of resources, God promises to provide in order for us to continue to be generous.

- _____ The greatest investment anyone can make is to give the gift of wealth toward eternity.

- _____ What we enjoy doing with our gift of wealth will indicate the direction of our heart.

These matching statements of #2 are the foundational ‘Divine Economic’ truths in Scripture. These truths are, by God’s own Word, *profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.* (2 Tim. 3:16b-17). As with all of God’s Word, it is trustworthy in every age, society, and people and defines how God’s people should live.

3. Re-read each statement and write brief statements about what is new to your understanding (what you never realized before).

In *Run with the Horses*, Eugene Peterson writes about seeing a family of birds teaching the young to fly and how this illustrates the nature of giving among God’s people:

Three young swallows were perched on a dead branch that stretched out over a lake.

"One adult swallow got alongside the chicks and started shoving them out toward the end of the branch--pushing, pushing, pushing. The end one fell off. Somewhere between the branch and the water four

feet below, the wings started working, and the fledgling was off on his own. Then the second one.

"The third was not to be bullied. At the last possible moment his grip on the branch loosened just enough so that he swung downward, then tightened again, bulldog tenacious. The parent was without sentiment. He pecked at the desperately clinging talons until it was more painful for the poor chick to hang on than risk the insecurities of flying. The grip was released, and the inexperienced wings began pumping. The mature swallow knew what the chick did not--that it would fly--that there was no danger in making it do what it was perfectly designed to do.

"Birds have feet and can walk. Birds have talons and can grasp a branch securely. They can walk; they can cling. But flying is their characteristic action, and not until they fly are they living at their best, gracefully and beautifully.

"Giving is what we do best. It is the air into which we were born. It is the action that was designed into us before our birth. ... Some of us try desperately to hold on to ourselves, to live for ourselves. We look so bedraggled and pathetic doing it, hanging on to the dead branch of a bank account for dear life, afraid to risk ourselves on the untried wings of giving. We don't think we can live generously because we have never tried. But the sooner we start, the better, for we are going to have to give up our lives finally, and the longer we wait, the less time we have for the soaring and swooping life of grace."

It is evident that the focus of Divine Economics is giving, not getting. This is radically different thinking from what the world embraces, yet it is the avenue for blessings and security in Christ as the Christian seeks to serve Him in a prosperous society.

4. What has God taught you about Divine Economics that you determine, by His power, to change?

God Supplies: A Biblical Perspective of Dependence upon God

As you complete this study, you will be challenged to think differently and act differently toward possessions than what the world is accustomed to. Spend time in prayer asking God to give you a teachable Spirit and a firm conviction to practice His own Principles of Possessions. For additional daily studies, read a proverb each day for a month and identify all the verses that address finances, possessions, giving, and money. Write out each verse in a separate book with room beside each verse for your own comments regarding the meaning of each text. Although not every chapter has reference to God's Divine Economics, you will be surprised how many do.

NOTES

GOD SUPPLIES – TO HIM BE ALL GLORY!

My second memorable experience of total dependence upon God also came by way of a Mackenzie River storm. We were approaching one of the most dangerous sections of the river, a 180-mile stretch of rapids with sheer cliffs on each side and no safe place to set up camp. Our plan was to tie the two canoes together, adding float logs for support and stability, and ‘raft’ our way through the turbulent waters. We expected the speed of the water to carry us through the distance in shorter time as we took turns to manage the raft’s ‘rudder.’ God had a better plan!

About a day’s travel before entering the rapids, another storm blew up, leaving us stranded on a sand bar in the river. We quickly built a sand wall barrier to protect us from the strong wind, gathered driftwood for a campfire to cook and provide some warmth. We also set up our tent for sleeping comfort until the storm past, taking turns outside to keep the fire going. During a ‘campfire shift’ change, a strong gust of wind shifted one of our aluminum canoes over the fire, melting a one-foot diameter hole in the bow. The canoe was rendered useless. We were again in a perilous situation. We had one canoe, five passengers, all our supplies and faced 180 miles of rapids called the Ramparts. Needless to say, we were again totally dependent upon God to deliver us. As the storm continued to buffet our tent, we knelt together in prayer, asking the Lord to intervene for us. He did so in a miraculous way!

Our map indicated a small native settlement at the door of the ramparts, twenty-five miles downriver. It was decided that our adult leader and I would make a rush to this settlement to seek a replacement canoe. Our mad dash got us there in late afternoon, and although there were no canoes available, one of the two Ministry of Transport vessels, maintaining the twelve hundred miles of river lane buoys, was docked at this very site.

The captain of the vessel, upon hearing of our plight, volunteered to take us back to our sandbar campsite, rescue the team and all supplies and return us to the native settlement. Upon returning us with all our gear, including the damaged canoe, we were invited to stay on the vessel through the night. During the night we were awakened by a bump that shook the vessel. The second MNR vessel, maintaining lane buoys for the last half of the river, had arrived totally unexpected, even by the crew of the first.

When this vessel’s captain heard our story, he committed to taking us through the Ramparts to the next settlement which had a Hudson Bay Post

and a possible replacement canoe. The captain explained that if a canoe were not available, this settlement was the only one on the river that had an airport, so we could at least have a way to return home, although it would mean cancelling the remainder of the trip. God had marvelously provided safety through the Ramparts and a way out! The settlement was called Fort Good Hope, a name giving testimony to the Lord's further plans for us.

Upon arriving at Fort Good Hope, we discovered that no canoes were available. Before the vessel had departed, the engineer gave us a large piece of heavy canvas, suggesting we might be able to repair the damaged canoe with it. Other river travelers from National Geographic saw our situation and donated a fiberglass repair kit to assist in repairs. With glue from the Hudson Bay Company to seal between the canvas, folded and overlapping the bow hole, and with fiberglass reinforcing to strengthen the canvas, the canoe was repaired and passed a trial run without a single leak. With black waterproof paint we christened our repaired canoe 'Lazarus' and completed the last half of our journey, praising God for His care. *God Supplies – To Him be the Glory!*

COMMENTARY

Foundational Divine Economics

Jesus' interaction with the rich young ruler points out man's dilemma with the challenge to make either God or money a priority. *Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.* (Matthew 19:21-22)

Jesus, knowing the heart of this man, led him in a unique direction. If someone came and asked a Christian this man's question: "What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" the reply would be something in the order of "The Bible teaches that none are saved by good deeds or obeying the Ten Commandments" followed by a quote of John 3:16. That was far from Christ's response.

Christ, knowing what was in man, (John 2:25) knew this man's heart. Jesus knew exactly what He had to do to challenge this man to faith. This young man was full of pride and self-confidence. Jesus got right to the heart of the matter with the challenge: give up your possessions for treasure in heaven and follow me. The man's response indicated his heart condition- he turned and walked away.

Although without full awareness that he was talking to the Author of life, the man acknowledged the reputation and wisdom of Jesus by calling Him a distinguished or excellent teacher indicating a mastery and authority of the Scriptures. Jesus gives him the answer addressing his true need, and he rejects it. What was his problem? What was the barrier, the obstacle between his heart and heaven? The answer is a universal problem. The answer is his great wealth, his accumulated possessions. In essence, the answer was greed. Undoubtedly his possessions were the obstacle because, like so many, his confidence and security was in his material wealth.

When considering the economic situation of the average person in the whole world it has to be acknowledged that North Americans are rich by comparison. The average income in the countries of West Africa where I regularly teach is about \$2 a day even though the food in the villages cost about the same as it does here in Canada. Canadians, indeed North Americans, are very well-to-do people compared to the rest of the world. As such, the danger of possessions to Spiritual prosperity is ever-present,

even among the Body of Christ. Far too many believers in North America see their confidence, their security, their sense of well-being not in God but in possessions. The Scriptures contain many warnings about this real, evident, binding danger.

Possessions can be an obstacle to the relationship and dependence upon God. In Matthew 6 Jesus said that man cannot serve two masters; either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. The message is clear: mankind cannot love God and money or possessions at the same time.

Scripture identifies the bondage of labour for possessions. Those who believe their security lies in possessions or in their bank account, become slaves to the labour of securing these things. In Barrie, Ontario, a local television station interviewed students graduating from high school. The students were asked where they were going and what their goal was. Of the six or eight students interviewed, all said practically the same thing. They were looking for a career that would make them rich. This is the world's mentality. It is too often embraced by believers, especially in North America, despite Paul's warning not to be conformed to the world (Romans 12:2). God's people are to be transformed by the renewing of their minds.

Scripture also identifies the bondage of the love of possessions when the heart is captured by the pleasures of wealth. Paul's letter to Timothy states that the love of money is a root of all evil (1Tim. 6:10). It is not the money but the love of money that brings the soul into bondage. Consider Ahab who sold himself for a vineyard and Judas who sold out Christ for thirty pieces of silver. Achan destroyed his family for some clothes and silver, Gehezia cursed himself and his family with leprosy for some fancy clothing.

Christians must recognize the ever-present danger of possessions. The danger of the bondage to labour for possessions and the danger of the bondage of love of possessions has shipwrecked many. For believers in North America the danger is real. Nevertheless, although North American believers reportedly have 75% of the Body of Christ's wealth (the believers that have) and the remainder of the Body of Christ around the world share the remaining 25% (the believers that have not), it has been my observation that the danger of possessions is the same throughout the church. This is so because both the 'haves' and the 'have nots' want more!

When teaching in West Africa where the average income is \$2 a day and the absence of prosperity constantly glares in my face, I discovered

that most of the students think American “Christianity” is to be envied for its wealth. A student once asked me why I did not pray for their prosperity when committing them to the Lord’s work. My response was that I would not wish American prosperity on any African believer because it destroys dependency upon God. Yet it became evident in following the ministries of students that many used ministry to pursue gain. Sadly, they wanted more, just like the Christians in America.

Wanting is a real issue, wanting is a danger. Timothy declares: *Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.* (1Tim. 6:6-10).

Paul’s warning to Timothy began with sharing the means by which danger could be avoided: *Now godliness with contentment is great gain.* Jesus addressed the issue of godliness and contentment with the promise of God’s provision:

*Therefore, take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?
(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.
But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.* (Matt. 6:31-33)

Here God promises to provide the necessities of life to those who put Him first. The context indicates those necessities to be housing, clothing, and food. The question begs to be asked- How many of God’s people would really be content with just food and clothing and housing? In truth, wanting has gripped the heart of many, if not most of God’s people despite God’s example in David- *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.* (Psm. 23:1)

The Body of Christ must learn to think differently. God’s people must learn to think Biblically. Paul’s words to us are important as this study of stewardship commences. His appeal is straightforward.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is

your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Rom.12:1-2).

As Biblical financial stewardship is examined, God's related truths for His people will become evident. These are God's directions for the lives of all believers.

There are six foundational 'Financial Stewardship' Biblical truths to consider. These truths are virtually opposite of the common attitudes of North American society. Confronting these truths brings the typical American response "Does the Bible really say that?" Although these truths will be completely new to most believers, it must be remembered that these are God's Words, God's truths and the Body of Christ must allow Him to transform incorrect, secular thinking.

The first mind-renewing truth is found in Ecclesiastes 5:18-19:
Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage. As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor — this is the gift of God."

In summary, the first 'Divine Economics' truth is: **Earned wealth, and health to enjoy it, are gifts from God.** This is not North America's, nor most of the world's attitude. The way the world thinks is that salary and wealth are mine because they are personally earned. "I worked for this, I earned this, I deserve this." However, God says differently. He says that all abilities, all health and strength possessed to gain wealth is a gift directly from Him. This is clearly not the world's thinking, nevertheless, this is Bible truth. The application of this truth is to recognize that the proper response in acknowledging our wealth is gratitude to God. Particularly for God's people the response should not be pride or arrogance, but humble gratitude for the graciousness of God.

Renewing of the mind begins by acknowledging that our place in society, our knowledge, our wealth, our success, is all of God. God's people must acknowledge with gratitude that whatever they have in terms of health or wealth, whatever ability they have for employment, whatever income is gained because of these abilities, this is their gift from God Almighty. This realized truth certainly changes the perspective of the believer.

The second transforming truth is found in Ephesians 4:28:

Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.

The second 'Divine Economics' truth is: **God provides wealth to His own so they can give it away.** God's renewing of the mind regarding finances continues by letting His people know that He gives them wealth so that they can pass it on. The world does not think this way. The world's way, which is accepted so much by God's people, suggests that financial security is found in keeping, not giving. God teaches the opposite: you *have* in order to *give*. This is a pattern for life, which stretches the believer's faith. Although this concept may be unpopular, even considered foolish, it is God's truth.

God does teach that wisdom condemns the lazy person and prudence calls for setting aside some provision for future need, "*Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise. Which, having no captain, Overseer or ruler, Provides her supplies in the summer, And gathers her food in the harvest.*" (Prov. 6:6-8)

Yet, because everything the believer has is a gift, and because God's people are called to live by faith, the priority of receiving from God is to give to others in need. The first reason that God gives these gifts is that they can be given to others. Both Old and New Testaments bear the truth that those who make this a priority, by trusting in God rather than wealth, are uniquely blessed.

Deut. 15:10-11 *"You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand. For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.'*"

Prov. 19:17 *He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, And He will pay back what he has given.*

Lu 14:13-14 *"But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."*

2Cor. 9:8-9 *And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written: "He has dispersed*

abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever."

The third foundational truth to renew the believer's thinking is evident from Mark 12:42-44.

42 Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans.

43 So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury;

44 "for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."

In this passage, the Lord is with His disciples in the temple. Jesus makes note of the Pharisees who give to please men. He compares their giving to that of a poor widow who gave a 'quadrans,' a coin, 1/64th day's wage of an agricultural or common worker⁵. Because the woman gave 'all that she had' the Lord Jesus states that she had given more than all the others together had given.

The difference was that the Pharisees gave out of their abundance, while the widow gave out of her poverty. She gave all that she had to the Lord. The Jewish nation had a self-righteous pride in the glory of the Temple. It was a point of pride for the Jewish people. The Jewish nation, along with the Pharisees and the religious leaders boasted not only of the glorious temple, but also of their own righteousness. The Pharisees would enter the temple with their large bags of gold, ensuring that the common populace noticed their great sacrificial giving. In contrast, the poor widow enters. Probably self-conscious of her poor clothing and humbled by her poverty, she quietly approaches the offering box and drops in her two cents. Although she hoped to be unnoticed by the people, God noticed her sacrifice. In God's estimation, the widow put in more than all the others together.

In this God indicates a third 'Divine Economics' truth: **God measures giving on the basis of what people keep, not what they give.** God thinks so differently than the world. As we dig deeper into this study the reasons for the disparity between man's thinking and God's thinking will become apparent. This third principle should provoke all God's people to examine their motives and their practices in giving to the Lord. The story of the

⁵ Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (electronic ed.). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

widow's mite stands out as a testimony of what God sees. To know that God sees our bank account, as well as our offering envelope is a sobering realization.

Jesus calls His own to take note of this widow, she is worthy of remembering. The Pharisees apparently gave just as they prayed - to be noticed by men. God states that they received their 'reward'. This word indicates their due from men, 'nothing more than a pat on the back.' However, the widow's gift, given privately and sacrificially, was acknowledged by God and 'rewarded', a word indicating personal recompense by God Himself. This is the manner in which God calls His people to give. (Matt. 6:2-4).

The fourth 'Divine Economics' truth to renewing the mind of believers is found in 2 Corinthians 9:6-8:

"So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver." A summary of this truth is: **When God's people are generous with their God-supplied resources; God provides more so that they can continue to be generous.** God promises continued resources to generous givers within His family in order that they may continue with their generous giving. The key to this passage is the word 'generous' or 'gracious.' The Lord is a God of grace, and He desires His children to be gracious in like manner.

As noted earlier, this principle is clear in other parts of Scripture as well. Proverbs especially repeats this principle.

Prov. 11:25 *The generous soul will be made rich: and he who waters will also be watered himself.*

Prov. 14:21 *He that despises his neighbour sins: but he that has mercy on the poor, happy is he.*

Prov. 14:31 *He that oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker: but he that honours Him hath mercy on the poor.*

Prov. 19:17 *He that hath pity upon the poor lends to the LORD; and that which he hath given will He pay him again.*

Prov. 21:13 *Whoso shuts his ears at the cry of the poor, will also cry himself and not be heard.*

Prov. 22:9 *He that has a generous eye will be blessed; for he gives of his bread to the poor.*

Prov. 28:27 *He that gives to the poor will not lack: but he who hides his eyes will have many curses.*

Prov. 29:7 *The righteous considers the cause of the poor: but the*

wicked does not understand such knowledge.

Prov. 31:9 Open your mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.

Prov. 31:20 She extends her hand to the poor; yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy.

In Paul's first epistle to Timothy, a fifth mind-renewing truth for God's people is found.

Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. (1 Tim. 6: 17)

This fifth 'Divine Economics' truth expresses a life principle that can be stated in this manner: **The greatest investment anyone can make is toward eternal dividends.** This is the best we can do with the earthly treasures. Many books on financial management use almost these identical words for storing up a foundation for the future. However, these books don't mean eternity, they mean a future time on earth. The greater emphasis of Scripture is to invest in eternity. The ants, as in our earlier example, only store for the season ahead. As much as it is wise to plan for the future, and there is nothing wrong with setting aside a measure of savings, the believer's primary goal is not to hoard for security but to give for eternity.

The best investment that any believer can choose is to give toward that which has eternal dividends. It is good to plan wisely. It is good to love your neighbour, and if need is evident, to address that need. My father taught us the Spirit of giving by graciously providing needy neighbours with potatoes from our farm. Yet in doing so, my father's motive was to reach them with the gospel of Christ. His generosity was an investment in eternity. The greatest use of wealth and possessions is to turn them into eternal investments. To give to the church, to give toward what God is doing to build His kingdom, is the greatest investment. God states that giving toward eternity is the giving that brings the greatest reward of an everlasting investment.

The sixth and final mind renewing 'Divine Economics' truth is found in Matthew 6: 21, "*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*" This truth is summarized: **What believers enjoy doing with God's**

gift of wealth will indicate the direction and goal of their heart. Is joy and delight found in giving toward God's work? This is a self-test for where the heart of God's people lies. It was evident in the lives of Israel, God's people in Old Testament days.

Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation. (Mal. 3:8-9).

It was evident in Jesus' day and it is evident in the same way today. A preacher once shared: "Show me your bankbook, and I'll show you your heart!" Whether giving weekly or monthly or whatever the practice of the family is, the question must be asked, "Is there joy found in the opportunity of giving to the Lord's work?"

God intended giving to be a part of joyful worship to Him. "*So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver*" 2 Cor. 9:7. If regular giving to the Lord's work is viewed as duty which incites worry of whether there's going to be enough money at the end of the month, then giving to the Lord is not done cheerfully. God loves a cheerful giver, the joy found in giving to Him will indicate the state of our heart toward God.

The earlier example of the swallow also illustrates this: when mother starts to peck the claws of the little ones so that they can no longer hang on to safety. At the point of pecking where discomfort is too great, the chicks drop into the air. As the air rushes past them in their fall, they open their wings and begin to soar. Flapping their wings in freefall for the first time, they rise up above the trees above the earthbound dangers, and become what their creator intended them to be. This is a picture of every Christian, especially in regard to finances. It's natural, with the world's focus on possessions, to grab hold tightly to what is thought to be security. Nevertheless, with the prodding of the Spirit of God who calls every believer to let go, the believer who does so is free to soar and become what God intended. God, our great designer pleads "Don't hang onto possessions, trust in Me. Let go and be what I intend you to be, soaring in the heights of My sufficiency and seeing the world from an entirely new perspective."

God intends with these six mind-transforming 'Divine Economics' truths, to change the thinking of His people. The world has no understanding of the true reality of the world of possessions, which are a gift from God, to be used for God in the freedom of dependence upon Him. Chris-

tians are not to be conformed to the world but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds. God's desire for His people is to think as He thinks, see as He sees, and rise above common attitudes and thinking of humanity. Upon these six 'Divine Economics' truths the Biblical Principles of Financial Stewardship stand.

GOD SUPPLIES – TO HIM BE THE GLORY!

The second church God called me to pastoral leadership was located in a relatively low-income area. The church offered the best salary they could but it did not, at first, include a car allowance. We had an old automobile that was sufficient for awhile. However, as God blessed the church my travels for discipleship and visitation expanded.

Although the church was located in a beautiful district of Ontario, the beauty did little for road conditions, especially in the spring thawing months. As a result, my car took a beating and began to disintegrate. The muffler went, the radiator went, and the struts went. Repair after repair became the pattern. We could not afford any funds for a new vehicle, or the funds to keep this car going, yet my pastoral responsibilities required a means of transportation.

Rather than concern the church, which was doing its best to fulfill its salary commitments, we took the matter of transportation to the Lord, committing to tell no one else of our failing car and limited funds. Only a short while after this particular prayer vigil began, I was visiting a dear saint in a nursing home. She had no idea of our car crisis. Yet, as we shared family stories and enjoyed remembrances together, she broke the direction of conversation with this surprising question, “Do you need a car?”

Although taken by surprise with her question, I asked (attempting to reply without revealing any emotion) “Why do you ask?” Her answer was simple and innocent. “I have a perfectly good car in the parking lot that I never use. It has the same tank of gas in it that I bought at Christmas time last year. The car is just wasting away and I want to get rid of it. You can have it if you want it!”

When I explained our situation, this dear soul was deeply touched with the knowledge that the Lord had suddenly put this idea into her mind as a means of meeting our ‘prayed for’ need. We received a very suitable automobile, free with the cost of a safely inspection, and our benefactor received the greater blessing of a deep sense of being used of God, even in her old age. God supplies, to Him be the Glory!

PART 2: WHO HOLDS THE TITLE DEED?

PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS: The path to peace of mind about possessions lies in our own attitude toward ownership.

Discovering the Beauty of Belonging to God.

WEEK 2, DAY 1

Read the text and answer the related question.

Luke 12:15 *And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."*
16 *Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. 17 "And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' 18 "So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. 19 `And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.'" 20 "But God said to him, `Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' 21 "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*

1. In Lu.12:15, those who measure life by possessions are guilty of what sin?

In a world that craves for material possessions, legalizes ownership, registers possessions, and goes to war over real estate, the matter of ownership has taken on great proportions. Practically the first words a child says are “mine, mine, mine.”

2. Re-read Lu. 12:15-21 and list all the implied dangers that abundance can lead to.

3. How would you rate your present attitude toward possessions? Draw a circle around the number that best describes you.

A Worldly Attitude 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 A Spiritual Attitude



In which direction are you going?

The Christian can get caught up too easily with a worldly attitude toward possessions. God settles the matter clearly. There are over twenty references in Scripture to indicate that as a believer ***I belong to God and all that I have belongs to God.***

Carefully read each following text.

Psm. 100: 3 *Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that has made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*

Romans 14:7-8 *For none of us lives to himself, and no man dies to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.*

1 Cor. 6:19-20a *What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which you have of God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price;*

4. Re-read the texts and write a summary in your own words what each text states about the reason or implication of our ownership by God.

Psm. 100:3

Romans 14:7-8

1 Cor. 6:19

WEEK 2, DAY 2

Read the following texts and answer the related questions.

Romans 6:13 *And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.*

God clearly states that a believer's life belongs to God. By the blood of Christ, God purchased the believer and, although setting one free, He calls each believer to a unique slavery.

1. To what is the believer called to be an instrument? (Romans 6:13)

2. What do you think it means to be an instrument of righteousness?

No one is free. Even after salvation, a person can be a slave of sin or a slave of righteousness. God makes life a matter of ownership. The believer's call to be a slave of righteousness means to acknowledge God's ownership of our lives and to yield to His will in every area. The acknowledgement of God's ownership of oneself has unique implications in the things we possess.

Ecc. 5:18 *Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and*

drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage. 19 As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labour-- this is the gift of God.

3. What four things does God say are a gift from Him in Ecc.5:19?

1 Sam. 2:7 The LORD makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up. 8 He raises the poor from the dust And lifts the beggar from the ash heap, To set them among princes And make them inherit the throne of glory.

4. According to 1 Samuel 2:7, who sets the measure of our individual wealth in this world?

5. Identify the words in verse 8 above, that indicate what the promised inheritance is for those who accept the ownership of God, even to the extent of world poverty.

As God's purchased possession, we not only are owned by Him but all that we have is owned by Him. God sets the level of our individual wealth in this world.

Read Phil 4:11-12

11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

6. Identify the words that indicate what Paul learned, through his experi-

ences of being with and without.

7. Record the words that indicate Paul's attitude throughout these times and define that attitude.

Paul is a great example of what it means to yield all ownership to Christ. Are you willing to accept worldly poverty for the cause of Christ? Have you yielded the "title deed" of your life and all your possessions to Him? YES_____ NO_____

8. What did God say to you about the ownership of your life?

9. What changes will you make?

WEEK 2, DAY 3

TEXTS:

Read the following texts and answer the related questions.

Matt. 25:14 *"For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them.15 "And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. 16 "Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents.17 "And likewise he who had received two gained two more also.18 "But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money. 19 "After a long time the lord of*

those servants came and settled accounts with them. 20 "So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' 21 "His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' 22 "He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' 23 "His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' 24 "Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. 25 And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.' 26 "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. 27 So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. 28 'Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. 29 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. 30 'And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

The Christian relationship of servant to master is expressed in Jesus' parable of the talents (Matt. 25).

1. Match the terms with whom or what they represent:

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| ___ The Christians | a. the travelling man |
| ___ Our possessions | b. the servants |
| ___ The Lord | c. the talents |

Re-read the parable (Matt. 25:14-30). The point of this parable is to understand a basic principle of Christian living: ***God holds His children responsible for all that He gives them (money, abilities, time) and they will give an account one day.***

This is called the Principle of Stewardship. In the Old Testament God

called Israel to care for their flocks, their land, and their material resources as a matter of stewardship. He gave them specific instructions regarding the care of fields (giving the land its Sabbath rests), the care of slaves, and the importance of giving to God the tithe of the harvest. Because Israel had poor stewards, they lost what was given and forfeited many blessings. It is significant to remember that Israel's captivity by the Babylonians and Persians lasted 70 years, one year for every sabbatical rest they denied the land in the 490 years of occupation.

The New Testament outlines the many areas of stewardship in which believers are held accountable.

1 Corinthians 4:1 *Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.*

1 Peter 4:10 *As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*

Titus 1:7 *For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;*

Romans 14:12 *So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.*

Hebrews 13:17 *Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.*

Colossians 4:5 *Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.*

2. Match the areas listed with the previous texts by looking each verse up in your own Bible and reviewing the context of each passage:

Pastoral ministry	_____
Spiritual gifts	_____
Time	_____
Exercised liberty	_____

Message of Christ _____
Exercised leadership _____

1 Corinthians 4:2 *Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.*

3. Identify the word in 1 Cor. 4:2 that defines the relationship of believers being accountable to Christ for all God has given.

4. According to this verse, this Christian practice of accountability is based upon the Principle of

5. Identify the word in the text that indicates the responsibility of the believer as a steward of God's gifts.

The parable of the talents and the text of 1 Cor. 4:2 affirm that God is not concerned in how much we have, this is a matter of His will. He is concerned about how faithful we will be with what He has given us.

6. What did God say to you about the Stewardship of your life?

7. What will you do about it?

WEEK 2, DAY 4

TEXTS:

Read the following texts and answer the related questions.

Matt. 25:21 *His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.*

23 *His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.*

Faithful stewardship has its own reward; this is a promise of God. The faithful stewards in Matt. 25 received several rewards.

1. Identify each reward and write them out in your own words.

2 Chr. 31:20 *Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah, and he did what was good and right and true before the LORD his God. 21 And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, in the law and in the commandment, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart. So he prospered.*

King Hezekiah was a faithful leader in Judah.

2. Record the words that describe his faithful ministry in 2 Chr. 31:20.

These words in the original Hebrew language have unique meaning:

Hezekiah's ministry was *good* – meaning *excellent and valuable*

Hezekiah's ministry was *right* – meaning *upright or righteous*

Hezekiah's ministry was *true* – meaning *reliable and faithful*

Notice that the King did this “before the Lord” and “with all his heart.” A faithful steward is only interested in pleasing his master. The good stewards were rewarded with the “well done” of their master; Hezekiah received the commendation of the Lord.

3. On the number scale provided, circle your estimation of your own stew-

ardship.

Poor and invaluable - 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10 - excellent and valuable

Wrong motives - 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10 - upright or righteous

Unreliable - 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10 - reliable and faithful



Ask God to help you be honest. Thank Him for your strengths and ask Him to strengthen your weaknesses.

The first and the greatest reward of the faithful steward is God's own praise, found when we meet Him face to face. As Christians, God assures us that we will never stand before Him in judgement of our sins. This Jesus did in our place. Romans 8:1 makes this truth abundantly clear.

Rom. 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

4. Identify the words of Rom. 8:1, 2 that testify of the believer's escape from the judgement of sin.

1 Peter 1:7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

1 Corinthians 4:5 Therefore, judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

For the believer there is no condemnation; there is in its place freedom. Yet, God does speak of an assessment of faithfulness in which His praise will be forthcoming or denied.

5. Record the words in 1 Peter 1:7 and 1 Cor. 4:5 that describe the possible assessment of faithfulness for the believer.

The faithful steward looks toward the praise of his master more than anything else. Even as Jesus was privileged to hear from heaven the voice of the Father saying “This is My beloved son in whom I am well pleased”, so every faithful steward of Christ will be rewarded.

6. What did God say to you about the ambition of your life?

7. What will you do about it?

WEEK 2, DAY 5

Read the following texts and answer the related questions.

Job 1:1 There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil. 2 And seven sons and three daughters were born to him. 3 Also, his possessions were seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred female donkeys, and a very large household, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East.

Job 1:21 And he said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked

shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD." 22 In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.

Job 23:10 *But He knows the way that I take: when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.*

1. Job is an example of a faithful steward. What commendation did He receive from the Lord?

The first and greatest reward of the faithful steward is God's own praise, found when we meet Him face to face. Faithful stewardship has a very practical reward for the present as well. For all who acknowledge the ownership of person and possessions to God, there is a deep sense of peace when that ownership is handled faithfully.

As a faithful steward, God had chosen to bless Job with great material wealth. This wealth obviously did not detract from Job's commitment to being a servant of righteousness. God's description of Job indicates that he took seriously his stewardship and that he cared for all God gave him with diligence and reliability. Nevertheless, God allowed Satan to reduce Job to poverty, all his children died, and all his possessions were destroyed.

2. Record the words of Job 1:21 that express Job's response toward loss. What was God's perspective of Job's response?

Although Job grieved for the loss and had to bear the misdirected judgment of his "friends", ***he had peace about the loss.***

Acknowledging God's ownership of our person and our possessions with resolve to be a faithful stewardship is a walk in faith. It is expressing trust in God to do what He wills to do, believing that the face-to-face meeting will be the place of reward. Job evidenced this in his own life. Read Job

23:10.

3. How did Job express His faith in God?

4. How did Job describe the outcome of His trust?

Isaiah 26:3 You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.

Phil. 4: 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

5. According to Isaiah 26:3, what does God promise to provide for the faithful steward who trusts in God?

For the believer today who has put complete trust in God, peace can prevail.

6. Re-read Phil. 4:6-7 and list the conditions for that peace.

There have been times in my life when our vehicle broke down, requiring the use of savings to repair it, when plans had to be forfeited because of adverse circumstances, when illness threatened life itself. In all these, the Principle of Ownership secured a peace of mind.

Turning over all ownership to God privileges the believer to a confidence in knowing by experience: "I am God's, all that I have is God's; all that I desire is to please Him. If He chooses to add to or take away His blessings, I can find peace in trusting His judgement. As His child I can share

in prayer my concerns and even my desires, but ultimate peace will come as I affirm His ownership and my trust in His judgment.”

Personal Assessment.

Have you ever got past the "This is mine and that is God's" stage in your Christian growth? If not, you are a candidate for emotional insecurity. Worry and heartache over material things can take a heavy toll on the Christian.

If you want access to peace of mind, then accept the Principle of Ownership and practice the Principle of Stewardship. Yield yourself and all you have to God. Transfer all the title deeds of your life to Jesus Christ for His keeping and purposes.

7. On the number scale provided, circle your estimation of your own level of transferred ownership of all:

Transferred nothing -1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10 – Transferred all



Take time to assess what God has taught you in this session.

8. In order for you to get the larger picture of what God is saying to you personally, look back and record what God said to you as you completed each day's study.

As with finding God's undisclosed will, God has a procedure from Prov-

verbs 16 to follow when seeking to make necessary life changes.

Prov.16:3a Commit your works to the LORD, And your thoughts will be established.

In prayer, commit your God-directed thoughts and desires to Him,

Prov.16:3b And your thoughts will be established.

Ask Him to clarify your thinking and help you formulate a plan of action to embrace the Principle of Ownership.

Prov.16:9 A man's heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.

Trust God that as you work out the plan He has formulated in your mind, He will open the doors, close the doors, and direct your steps.

9. What steps is God leading you to take?

10. Identify any especially meaningful verses that you have studied in this session and memorize them. Try writing them out in your own words or writing a prayer relating to the point of each verse.

NOTES

GOD SUPPLIES – TO HIM BE ALL GLORY!

Midway through our second pastoral ministry, my wife began experiencing increasing pain in her joints. Medical examination revealed a severe case of osteoarthritis that would require corrective surgery. The Canadian government considered this surgery to be optional so a considerable waiting period stood between Kathi and comfort. Our doctor suggested that regular use of a hot tub might relieve some of the pain. This was before the advent of “soft tubs” and therefore, the possibility of installing a hot tub in our home at the going cost of thousands of dollars was out of the question.

One day, a short time later, a building contractor church member dropped in to have a chat. In the course of our conversation he asked the thousand dollar question: “Do you know anyone looking for a hot tub?”

Again, with determined non-emotional response, I inquired as to why he asked. He said that a very wealthy cottage owner on Muskoka Lake had hired him to replace their new hot tub. Apparently there was some issue with his wife’s discontent-- the colour of the hot tub did not match the room or something like that. So our contractor had a new hot tub on his hands, available to anyone who could pay for the delivery.

I explained our situation and he was more than thrilled to pass this blessing on to us. Having an electrical/electronic background, I was able to install the hot tub. We were blessed with a hot tub at much less than the typical cost. During the wait for my wife’s surgery, this was a means of finding relief from pain. We have enjoyed this relaxing hot tub in our home ever since. *God supplies – to Him be the glory.*

COMMENTARY

Biblical Principles of Financial Stewardship: Ownership

There was once a dear little lady who had gone to the grocery store to do her shopping. She came out of the store pushing the cart bearing her groceries. As she approached her car, she saw four strange men climbing into it. The dear little lady was very alarmed, but being also very bold, she let go of her cart, reached into her purse grabbed her handgun and with the gun raised and pointing at the men she demanded that they remove themselves from her car. Needless to say, the men ran for their lives. Being proud of herself, she delivered her groceries into the back seat and prepared to drive away. However, she found that her ignition key would not fit into the ignition. As she looked more closely around the interior, she realized it was not her car, but a similar model with a similar color. In a state of embarrassment, she transferred her groceries to her own car and immediately drove to the police station to make a confession. When she approached the sergeant at the desk with her story, he almost fell over laughing. He opened the door to the interrogation room, where there were four men in terror reporting a carjacking by a dear little lady. Needless to say, they dropped all charges and had a good laugh.

North Americans are obsessed with possession. Think about this: Americans have a title deed for their homes to prove they own it, an ownership card for automobiles to prove they own it, firearms registration certificates to prove the owner, and all manner of registration cards for anything from appliances to electronic components. In our world, wars have been started to prove who owns what. The world is obsessed with possessions!

It seems that humanity (particularly in America) likes to have its personal name clearly marked on every possession. In the process of thinking through our foundational stewardship statements, it is evident that God is moving His children to think differently. Having examined these preliminary truths, attention is now focused on reaching an understanding of the very basic principles of stewardship.

The first of these principles is the principle of ownership. Stated simply, this principle defines ‘who owns the title deed?’ Who is it that really owns what the believer possesses? Christians must come to terms with the

principle of ownership, that it is **God Who owns all**, and accept this principle with its implications of personal stewardship. In so doing, believers will also come to discover the unique blessings of living-out this principle in daily life. They will find that living out the principle of ownership carries with it the responsibility of good stewardship and brings with it the blessings of peace of mind.

The truth that God owns all our possessions is evident in Scripture. This is seen in Ecclesiastes 5:19, "*As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor — this is the gift of God.*" This text was examined earlier, acknowledging that our possessions are a gift from God. However, it is important to realize that God's gifts are different from man's gifts. When God gives gifts, He never relinquishes ownership. Because God is the Master of the universe, the Creator of all that exists, His ownership of all never ceases.

Another text supporting this truth is 1 Chron. 29:10- 13.

Wherefore David blessed the LORD before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed be thou, LORD God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name.

David acknowledged to the glory of God, that even in the generosity of the people toward building the temple, the gifts all belonged to God. The Lord never ceased to own what He had provided for His people. The bottom line is this: all that God's people possess, as a gift from God, still belongs to God. Possessions begin with Him, come from Him, and continue to be owned by Him. God is the distributor of all, and God continues as the owner of all. God's people are called to one response – gratitude for His gifts. God's people are called to one responsibility – stewardship of those gifts.

For believers, there is no room for pride or arrogance. There is no place for the pride of self-accomplishment, there is no honour in having more than others, there is no self-success in the achievement of position. All that believers are, have, achieve, and succeed in is from God as a gift.

Another text dealing with this principle is 1 Cor. 6:19-20.

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; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honour God with your body.

All mankind receives the health to gain possessions as a gift from God, yet God continues to own it all. However, there is a higher calling of ownership among God's people. They are blessed with a special relationship; they are purchased by the blood of Christ, are God's family, intimately as His children, and uniquely are His ambassadors in the world.

Paul defines this relationship by his repeated phrase "I am a bond servant of Christ." Paul used the common word for 'slave' to describe his relationship with Jesus. A slave in the Roman Empire was owned by someone else, controlled by someone else, and worked for the purposes of someone else. This is the significance of God's people as *purchased* by the blood of Christ (Acts. 20:28). As slaves have no self-determination, no self-will, no self-pride, and no personal possessions, all that a slave is and has, belongs to his master. The truth is apparent, as the Roman slave is, so is the child of God, God alone holds the title deed! Considering the grace, mercy, and love of God, no better owner could be found!

When these ownership truths are tied together, the conclusion becomes apparent: God's people belong to God and all they possess is a gift from God! Therefore, all the life of the believer is of God. This means that the believer does as God wills, as indicated in Romans 14:8 "*If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.*" Therefore, in belonging to God, all that believers own also belongs to God. This truth then makes every believer a *steward* before God.

This is why the parable of the talents (Matt. 25) is so significant. The travelling man is Christ, the servants are God's people, the talents are the possessions that God gives to His people, and the call to every believer is stewardship. Every believer has been given gifts by His Lord, and He has departed (physically) for a short time. Every believer is responsible to be a good steward of those gifts because accountability is pending.

The Body of Christ today is the representation and symbol of the kingdom of God yet to come on earth. Whatever gifts God has given His people, whether Spiritual gifts for service in the church, or gifts of possessions and wealth for distribution toward the work of the church, a day of accountability is coming. The apostle Paul stated these truths to the Corin-

thians:

1 Cor. 4:2 *“Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.”*

2 Cor. 5:10 *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*

Scriptures indicate that the role of the believer during the millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ will also be based upon the faithful stewardship of God’s gifts.

I borrowed a book from one of the members of the church that I pastored. When I opened to the first page, this note was written: "This book is the property of Jesus Christ and is on loan to Alan." The insert was a simple statement with a profound truth that Alan had come to appreciate, that believers are called to acknowledge the ownership of God in all things. The believer is called to acknowledge the responsibility of stewardship in all things (hence the reminder to return the book to Alan). The job of a steward is to take good care of his master's possessions. The servant is not to hide, hoard, or in any way abused God’s gifts, but is to use them wisely, as a faithful steward awaiting his Lord's return.

Finally, the believer is reminded that there will be an accountability required. God will hold His children accountable for the care of His possessions. In accountability, as the parable indicates, the rewards are not based upon the amount that each servant began with, but rather on the servant’s faithfulness with what was entrusted to them.

As a pastor, this final principle became very apparent. I soon realized that the nursery worker and the faithful janitor were just as critical to the work as the church leaders and teachers. In every church ministry there will be those like King David who slay the great Goliaths, and there will be the Jeremiah's that end up in the pit. It matters not whether the ministry embraces thousands, or simply addresses the needs of one or two. God measures the faithfulness of stewardship, not the size of the ministry. In the parable of the talents the first two stewards got the same rewards, double blessing. However, it was the steward with the single talent, who was judged severely. This was not because he only began with one talent but because he was not faithful with that which was entrusted to him. It did not matter with what they began; the only thing that mattered was being a good steward.

Believers must allow God's thinking to become their thinking. The size of ministry, the wealth of possessions, the prominence of position, is all a matter of God's will. God's call in Christian lives to acknowledge *all* is to faithfully care as an entrusted steward. Unfortunately, God's people regularly think 'biggest' is best, whether it's the biggest church or the biggest audience, the biggest car or the biggest house, the biggest ministry or the biggest budget. This is not God's thinking. Having ministered among God's people in West Africa, I've come to realize in a deeper way, the wonderful opportunity that these folks have to be good stewards of God's gifts, despite their poverty. I'm inclined to think that their expression of faithfulness in stewardship, by virtue of complete dependence upon God coupled with extraordinary generosity, far exceeds that of God's people of wealthy North America. God holds His people responsible for all that He has given them, whether much or little, whether money, our ability, or even time.

As a pastor, I would share the principles of stewardship regularly. The principle of ownership, which calls for good stewardship, applies to all that God has given. I would regularly challenge our people to think about the hours of week that God grants us. Is the first of our time given to the Lord? Is at least a tithe of our time given toward God's ministry? For most American believers, the time given to study God's Word and to serve the Lord is a far distant commitment from the time spent watching television or pursuing sports.

A Christian survey in America among Bible students regarding the time spent each week studying or serving God was rather revealing. According to the survey, the average student spent four hours a week committed to what is termed 'God time,' being defined as any amount of time spent in worship, Bible study, Sunday school, or prayer. This was very different from the six hours per day spent watching television.

Understanding the principle of ownership is important first, because God says so, and second, because of the rich blessing that the practice of the principle of ownership brings. Regarding Job, God said "*there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil*" (Job 1:8). To be blameless meant that he was morally upright and a man of integrity. This was evident in the fact that to ensure his family maintained their relationship with the Lord, he provided sacrifices for them.

Job was a righteous man, a man of integrity. Therefore, by inference,

he was also a good steward of whatever God had blessed him. In one single day, God took all that Job had from him, his wealth, his family, and later even his health. In the sorrow of his loss, Job cursed the day that he was born; however, he never cursed God! Job never challenged what God did, although he had deep remorse and sorrow.

Job came to a place in his life where he declared: *"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."* When his wife urged him to *"Curse God, and die"* his response was *"Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?"* In this trial God again said of Job *"In all this Job did not sin with his lips"* (Job 2). Despite the inner conflict due to his friends' counsel, Job never cursed God. In the end, Job prays for his friends and is further blessed by God: *And the LORD restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends. Indeed the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.* (Job 42:10).

As a good steward before God, Job learned something unique-- God owns all and God had the right to take all. Although Job felt deep sorrow for the loss, especially of his family, he had peace enough to declare God as Lord, and to desire him to be glorified. Job had a sense of acceptance within his heart. He did not go off the deep end of sorrow and emotional collapse. In Job 23:10, we find this testimony from Job: *"But he [God] knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold."*

A member of the church that I pastored was a living testimony of this principle of peace. This dear saint came to me one day with a broken heart. Her husband, who was in bondage to alcohol, had stated that he would not allow her to attend church anymore. He held her in hostage to this by stating that if she attended he would commit suicide. In the months of counseling her that followed, it became apparent that her husband's issue was one of jealousy. Believe it or not, her husband suspected that she loved Jesus more than him. I encouraged her to recognize that she belonged to God and was called upon to be a steward of God's provisions, including her husband. She came to understand that bowing to her husband's ungodly wishes was not being a good steward. She also recognized that conducting her life for the purpose of preventing his suicide was pointless, because ultimately she could not control his manipulative decisions. With a tender heart that God had given her, she sat her husband down and explained that she loved him dearly, but she also loved the

Lord. She affirmed her commitment to him, yet lovingly said that she would return to church to please her Lord. In following her determined plan, God gave her a sense of freedom in Him. Her husband grew to accept her decision as not a threat to their relationship. Actually, their relationship improved.

Several years later, a call came to my church office to inform me that the husband had taken his own life. I rushed to her side, prayerfully asking God to give me the words of God's comfort and counsel, only to find that God had secured this comfort and counsel already in her heart. The first thing that she said to me when I entered her presence was this: "Pastor, thank you for helping me make the decision to put Jesus first in my life. Although I grieve for my husband's choice, I cannot tell you how deep the peace of God is within my heart."

She went on to explain that she knew that if she had not made the decision to follow Jesus, but rather followed her husband, she would be beside herself with guilt and despair. This believer ended up becoming one of the key people in our church who ministered to the brokenhearted. She opened up her home to abused wives and runaway teenagers. God used her as a model of His grace and peace. This child of God chose to be a good steward; as a result, in crisis God gave her abiding peace. This is the rich blessing of practicing the principle of ownership.

A couple in the church I pastored had two children. Their second child, a daughter, stopped walking when she was two years old. Medical examinations discovered that she had cancer. This family had the resources to take their daughter to the Mayo Clinic. The diagnosis was the same: incurable cancer. The child had somewhere between six months and a year to live.

These folks were about the same age as my wife and I and we had become close friends. I spent much time ministering to them and answering their many questions. In time these parents resolved the ownership issue of their daughter-- she belonged to God. They had many questions about heaven and God worked in their lives to prepare them for her death. This became a growing experience for our whole church.

The day after the child's third birthday God laid upon my heart the urgency of visiting the family in the hospital. I arrived to find mom and dad beside the bed of their daughter. I asked how they were doing, and they responded by saying they were trusting in the Lord. We joined hands, and while I was leading in a word of prayer, their daughter breathed her last

breath. The nurse called for the doctor. He arrived shortly and confirmed that their daughter had passed away.

I will never forget the conversation that followed. This couple, whose three-year-old daughter had just died, had only one thing on their mind. They turned to me and with a genuine peace that “passes understanding” requested that I present a clear and simple message of the Gospel at the funeral of their daughter. They wanted my assurance that all those who would attend, especially the relatives, would come to realize the hope and peace that they had in Christ. I kept my promise, and God richly blessed the ministry of the word at the funeral service. The world knows nothing of this peace, but those who understand the principle of ownership have that great blessing, even in the sorrow of loss.

In a much less important matter, God provided me with the same peace. We had purchased a previously owned car, a very nice car, and in practically new condition. With regularly scheduled maintenance, I faithfully looked after that car as a good steward. Just one month after paying for new tires, our son was in a serious car accident and the car was totally destroyed.

Fortunately, no one was seriously injured. Although I was sorry for the loss of the car (especially after just buying the new tires), I continued to praise God for his care of all the passengers. A ‘perfect peace’ about the loss was my experience. As a faithful steward of that gift, I did everything in my power to care for it. I had no control over the loss of it, which was in God's hands. As it turned out, the Lord provided a much more economical car, used in our days of raising support for mission ministry, giving great savings in fuel and maintenance costs.

There is peace, which passes understanding, in the context of being good stewards when the believer suffers loss. At the loss of all, Job had peace. At the loss of a husband, a faithful wife had peace. At the loss of their daughter, a young Christian couple had great peace. At the loss of a car, I had peace. Whether the loss is large or small, God ensures a peace within the heart to those who faithfully practice good stewardship of His gifts. I am convinced that it is this peace in the believer which the world sees. It is this peace, expressing confident hope in God, which causes the world to enquire, and which all believers should be prepared to give an answer for by sharing the gospel of Christ. (1 Pet. 3:15).

The principle of ownership with the practice of stewardship and the blessing of peace is one of the foundational truths of Scripture for God's

people. Ownership is an important matter.

I am no longer my own, but thine.

Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.

Put me to doing, put me to suffering.

Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,

Exalted for thee or brought low by thee.

Let me be full, let me be empty.

Let me have all things, let me have nothing.

I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.

And now, O glorious and blessed God,

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

Thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.

And the covenant which I have made on earth,

Let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

John Wesley's Covenant of Life

It is no wonder that John Wesley was a great man of God, used so mightily in God's service. John Wesley resolved the ownership matter in a covenant of life between himself and heaven. Simply stated: 'God owns all!' Spurgeon, another man used mightily of God, said in one of his sermons that if God called him to leave pastoral ministry and shine shoes on the street, that's exactly what he would do.

The gift of salvation is completely of grace through faith and 'not of works lest any man should boast.' Through salvation sins are forgiven, no condemnation is present, guilt is removed, Christ's presence is secured, and eternity with God is assured. Unfortunately, many Christians settle on these great truths and rob themselves of many more rich blessings from God through neglect of good stewardship. If God's people would come to terms with the principle of ownership, truly transfer the title deed of all to God, the rightful owner, and if they would diligently practice good stewardship of all God's gifts, then they would know the great peace of God regardless of any loss.

Practicing the principle of ownership will bring the blessing of peace, but God is not finished yet. He also calls His people to the practice of first fruit giving and the blessing of His provision. Here the Personal Study continues.

GOD SUPPLIES – TO HIM BE THE GLORY!

When my father died in 1998 my mom was left living alone in rural southern Ontario. The care of the two-acre property soon became too much for her to handle so we invited her to come and live with us. Our oldest daughter was then in college in the U.S.A. so her bedroom was available. After a year, it was evident that Mom was happy living in the area, had come to make friends with a few ladies in the church, and expressed contentment to stay if she had a more private living area.

With this in mind, we contemplated the possibility of building a home with a ‘granny flat’. I approached a real-estate agent church member to see if he could search for a suitable property for sale. A few weeks later, he called and asked if Kathi and I were free on Saturday morning to have a look at a property that was available. On that memorable Saturday he took us out of town to a two-acre lake side bush property to ‘check it out.’

As much as I enjoyed the excursion into the bush (being a country boy at heart), I had no realistic expectation of purchasing this piece of property, given my knowledge of the price of waterfront land in this tourist-driven community. When I conveyed this to the agent he simply asked, “Are you interested?” Our answer was just as simple, ‘Interested? Yes, but we know this is out of our price range. Our calculations indicate that we can just manage a lot in town to build a house on.’ His response was “Let me see what I can do.” Now as much as I had great respect for this man’s integrity, I was not hopeful of any possibility of building on a lake, despite the great joy it would bring me (being the canoer and angler that I was). God had different plans.

Within a month, we took ownership of that property for the average price of a smaller town lot! This piece of waterfront had been purchased ten years earlier. The family that purchased it had inherited a waterfront property on another ‘pristine’ lake and had simply paid taxes for this property since. By some miracle of God, our real estate agent convinced them to let the property go for less than one-half the price they had paid for it ten years earlier!

As we began preparing the property for building, God’s provision continued. When I was clearing out the bush a church member, a lumber mill owner came to check the trees and noted that the trees I had cleared were huge, solid specimens with enough black cherry alone for 1500 square feet of hardwood flooring. He offered to produce all the cherry hardwood

flooring in exchange for the other trees I had cleared. So we have black cherry flooring from our own lot for the price of a few trees that would have ended as fire wood had the Lord not intervened. While building, I discovered that our brother-in-law could do the all the floor sanding for me, as a gift. The Lord also provided custom kitchen cupboards and a radiant heating system for cost from a former church member, all without my own solicitation.

With God's provision, we were able to build a home, on a quiet lake (with great fishing), which accommodates all our family (even now with two daughters and a son, their spouses and ten grandchildren), along with a comfortable granny flat for Mom. This has given my family the added blessing of knowing and living with a grandmother. God has blessed us all with her wisdom of experience, having lived through WWII in England, and as a mother in Southern Ontario through nearly 50 years of marriage. She is also, I might add, often the life of the party at our family gatherings. *God Supplies – To Him be the Glory!*

PART 3: MY FIRST IS MY FAITH

PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS: The path to finding God's provision for life lies in our own commitment to honouring Him first and foremost.

Discovering the Real Meaning and Value of Dependence

WEEK 3, DAY 1

If your house is anything like ours, we could be cut off from society for a month and get by with the store of provisions in the freezer and pantry. Living from day to day is only experienced in our home by my mother's shared memory of war time England, of food rations and existence on such delicacies as turnip soup, beet casserole, and horse meat.

God's wonderful blessings are taken for granted all too often in North America, yet His plan has not changed. God desires His people to acknowledge their complete dependence upon Him.

Read the following texts and answer the related questions.

Matt.6:9 "In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. 10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. 13 And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. 14 "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 "But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

1. From the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9-15) write the phrase that best expresses

a believer's dependence on God.

2. In what timeframe was that dependence expressed (v.11)?

Ex. 16:15 So when the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "This is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat. 16 "This is the thing which the LORD has commanded: `Let every man gather it according to each one's need, one omer for each person, according to the number of persons; let every man take for those who are in his tent.'" 17 Then the children of Israel did so and gathered, some more, some less. 18 So when they measured it by omers, he who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack. Every man had gathered according to each one's need. 19 And Moses said, "Let no one leave any of it till morning."

22 And so it was, on the sixth day, that they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. And all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. 23 Then he said to them, "This is what the LORD has said: 'Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you will bake today, and boil what you will boil; and lay up for yourselves all that remains, to be kept until morning.'" 24 So they laid it up till morning, as Moses commanded; and it did not stink, nor were there any worms in it. 25 Then Moses said, "Eat that today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. 26 "Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, there will be none."

God desires His people to acknowledge their daily dependence on Him. In Exodus 16 the wilderness experience of “manna from heaven” is a model passage for understanding daily dependence upon God.

3. List all the instructions given to Israel for partaking in the manna (vs.16, 19, 23, 26).

Notice the implications of these instructions:

1. Each family was to take only enough for each member's need.
2. Each family was to collect the manna each day.
3. Each family was to use all they collected and look to God to provide for the next day. They were not to "store up" except for the Sabbath.
4. Each family had occasion only in the morning to collect.

Psm. 23:1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want

Psm. 34:10 The young lions lack and suffer hunger; But those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing.

Psm. 37:18 The LORD knows the days of the upright, And their inheritance shall be forever. 19 They shall not be ashamed in the evil time, And in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.

Is. 33:15 He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, He who despises the gain of oppressions, Who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes, Who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed, And shuts his eyes from seeing evil: 16 He will dwell on high; His place of defense will be the fortress of rocks; Bread will be given him, His water will be sure.

Luke 12:29 "And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. 30 "For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things.

4. Summarize in your own words, the previous verses relating to dependence on God.

God Supplies: A Biblical Perspective of Dependence upon God

Psm. 23:1

Psm. 34:10

Psm. 37:18-19

Isaiah 33:15-16

Luke 12:29-30

Where do you look for your provision? Do you seek provision from your present resources (possessions, stored wealth, abilities, job), or from God?

5. In what way does your family acknowledge its dependence upon God?

giving thanks before meals

thanking God for blessing during family devotions

giving testimony to others of God's provision of job, home, etc.

asking God to meet the needs of the family during family prayer.

other _____

6. What steps is God leading you to take?

WEEK 3, DAY 2

Read the following texts and answer the related questions.

Ex. 23:16 "and the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labors from the field. 19 "The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God.

Ex.34:19 "All that open the womb are Mine, and every male firstborn among your livestock, whether ox or sheep. 20 "But the firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb. And if you will not redeem him, then you shall break his neck. All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem. And none shall appear before Me empty-handed.... 26 "The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring to the house of the LORD your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk."

Lev. 23:10 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: `When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest.

1. What did God command the people to do in each of the preceding verses?

God commanded Israel to commit the first fruits of every blessing to Him. All they owned and gained was a gift from Him. He asked them to acknowledge this by committing the first and best to Him. This included all the firstborn livestock, all the first of the crops, and all the first-born male children. He made provision for the redemption of the children, but Israel was to acknowledge this principle. This is called the Principle of First Fruits.

Gen. 14:18 Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. 19 And he blessed him and said: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; 20 And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he gave him a tithe of all.

Josh. 6:19 "But all the silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, are consecrated to the LORD; they shall come into the treasury of the LORD."

As God prepared Israel to enter the Promised Land, a place of abundance and blessing, He established a principle to ensure their continued acknowledgement of dependence upon Him.

2. How did Abraham acknowledge the Principle of First Fruits? (Gen. 14:18-20)

3. How was Joshua called to acknowledge the Principle of First Fruits in battle? (See the context of Josh. 6:19-read in your Bible Josh.5-6)

Long before God gave the commandments to Israel, His people were practicing the Principle of First Fruits. Abraham gave 1/10 of the spoils of war to the priest of God. Joshua was commanded to give all the spoils of Jericho, the first town to be defeated, to God.

Luke 12:16 *Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. 17 "And he thought within himself, saying, `What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' 18 "So he said, `I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. 19 `And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." 20 "But God said to him, `Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' 21 "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."*

4. In the place of abundance, blessing, and victory, simple dependence can be misplaced. How is this demonstrated in the parable of the rich farmer in Luke 12:16-21?

The rich farmer did not acknowledge his dependence upon God. When abundance came, he saw only the opportunity for leisure and recreation. His store was his security. The present was his focus. He lost sight of God.

5. How might things have been different if the farmer had kept the Principle of First Fruits?

6. What has God said to you about living with abundance and acknowledging dependence upon Him?

WEEK 3, DAY 3

Read the following texts and answer the related questions.

Genesis 28:22 *And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."*

Exodus 22:29 *You shall not delay to offer the first of your ripe produce and your juices. The firstborn of your sons you shall give to Me.*

Genesis 14:20 *And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he gave him a tithe of all.*

Prov. 3:9 *Honour the LORD with your possessions, And with the first fruits of all your increase;*

Matt. 6: 33 *But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*

Keeping the Principle of First Fruits is a matter of obedience to God's command. There are over thirty references in Scripture to the mandate of God's people to acknowledge that we belong to God and we must commit to Him the first and best of all He supplies.

1. Review the previous verses that address the Principle of First Fruits and match the text to the context (You may have to review the contexts).

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| ___ Gen. 28:22 | a. Wisdom's Advice |
| ___ Ex. 22:29 | b. Israel's command |
| ___ Gen. 14:20 | c. A Christian's duty |
| ___ Prov. 3:9 | d. Abraham's gift |
| ___ Matt. 6:33 | e. Jacob's promise |

For Israel, First Fruit living meant tithing the first of each of their harvests, it meant donating the first of their livestock, it meant dedicating the redemption price of their first-born sons.

Mal. 3:6 *"For I am the LORD, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob. 7 Yet from the days of your fathers You have gone away from My ordinances And have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you," says the LORD of hosts. "But you said, 'In what way shall we return?' 8 "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me!*

But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. 9 You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation. 10 Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this," Says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it.

Israel was charged with disobedience, of “going away from God’s ordinances.”

2. What did God call this sin? (v.8)

3. What was the consequence of their sin? (v.9)

The book of Malachi is a sad commentary of Israel’s cold heart toward God. Because of disobedience, they missed God’s rich blessing and faced years of leanness of soul and substance. Four hundred years later, their hearts were still calloused in their rejection of Christ.

Prov. 3:9 Honour the LORD with your possessions, And with the firstfruits of all your increase; 10 So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine.

4. What principle is Prov. 3:9 advocating?

First Fruit living is not without present promises because it is a part of the life of faith.

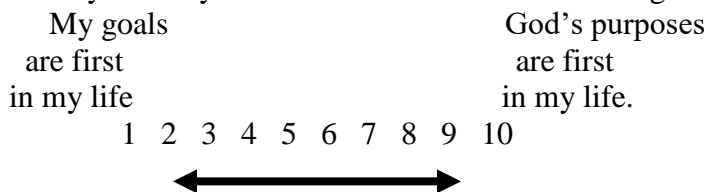
5. Re-read Mal. 3:6-10 and write out what God promised Israel if they would return to First Fruit living. (v.10)

Prov. 3:9 Honour the LORD with your possessions, And with the firstfruits of all your increase; 10 So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine.

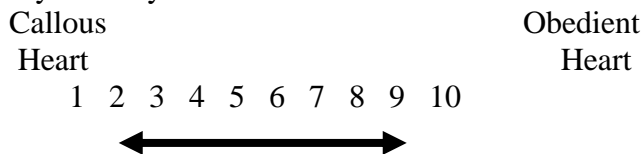
6. What does God promise to do for all who honour Him with First Fruit living? (Prov. 3:9-10)

As with the Principle of Stewardship, the Principle of First Fruits has its greatest reward in the approval of God for simple obedience. There is nothing greater in life than knowing that we are doing just what God wants us to do. And there is nothing more tragic in life than disobeying God and falling into complacency. This leads to a calloused heart and leanness in life.

7. How would you rate your commitment to first fruit living?



8. How would you rate your life before God?



WEEK 3, DAY 4

Read the following texts and answer the related questions.

God's promised supply is for those who 'put Him first.' This is seen in the response of the poor widow to Elijah's needs in 1 Kings 17.

1 Kgs.17: 8 *Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying,* 9 *"Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you."* 10 *So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, "Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink."* 11 *And as she was going to get it, he called to her and said, "Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand."*12 *So she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die."* 13 *And Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son. 14 "For thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth.'" 15 So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for many days. 16 The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke by Elijah.*

1. When Elijah asked for food, what was the widow's concern (v. 12)?

2. What did Elijah tell her do (v.13)?

3. What was Elijah's promise to the widow if she fed him first (v.14)?

4. What was the result when the widow obeyed (v.16)?

God obligates Himself to supply the needs of His people when they put Him first. This is not just an Old Testament promise.

Matt. 6:19 *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 "but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. 22 "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. 23 "But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! 24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. 25 "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 "Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? 28 "So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; 29 "and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 "Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'" 32 "For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. 34 "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

Re-read Matt. 6:19-34 and answer the following questions.

5. Where will a person's heart be (v.21)?

6. What two choices of service do believers have (v.24)?

7. List the things God says that His servants should not worry about (v. 25, 31).

8. What in the text are ‘all these things’ God promises (v. 31)?

9. What does God promise to provide for His servants (v.33)?

10. What is the condition of God’s promise (v.33)?

Review your comments on the verses relating to dependence on God (Day 1). There is a co-relation between dependence of God and first fruit faith: God obligates Himself to meet the needs of His children when they obey Him and live by first fruit faith.

Psm. 37:21 The wicked borrows and does not repay, But the righteous shows mercy and gives. 22 For those blessed by Him shall inherit the earth, But those cursed by Him shall be cut off. 23 The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, And He delights in his way. 24 Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the LORD upholds him with His hand. 25 I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread. 26 He is ever merciful, and lends; And his descendants are blessed.

11. List all the things the righteous do in the above passage.

12. Re-read Psm. 37:25 and identify the words that describe David's experience of God's promised provision.

13. Have you experienced a unique provision of God in your life?

Yes No

If yes, explain

14. What did God say to you in today's study?

15. What action does He want you to take?

WEEK 3, DAY 5

Read the following texts and answer the related questions.

Deut. 6:4 *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! 5 "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength..."*

Deut. 6:17 *"You shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, His testimonies, and His statutes which He has commanded you..."*

Deut. 26:2 *That thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the earth, which thou shalt bring of thy land that the LORD thy God giveth thee, and*

shalt put it in a basket, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to place his name there.

Before God called Israel to First Fruit Faith, He called them to something more meaningful that would make such an expression of faith a simple daily step.

1. In the context of Deuteronomy (the above verses) re-read Deut. 6:4-5 and identify the words that identify God's call in Israel's life.

First Fruit living is an expression of obedience to God. It is an expression of faith that stems from a 'whole life' love for God and which naturally desires to put Him first in everything. I have discovered that when I am reluctant to live First Fruit Faith, it is because my love for God has slipped out of place by love of self. It is then that I take a fresh look at the cross.

In comparison to God's love for me on Calvary's cross, no expression of First Fruit Faith can match that love. Surrender seems easy when the cross is kept in the foreground.

Read Mark 15 below with a view to God's love for you.

Mark 15:1 Immediately, in the morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council; and they bound Jesus, led Him away, and delivered Him to Pilate. 2 Then Pilate asked Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" He answered and said to him, "It is as you say." 3 And the chief priests accused Him of many things, but He answered nothing. 4 Then Pilate asked Him again, saying, "Do You answer nothing? See how many things they testify against You!" 5 But Jesus still answered nothing, so that Pilate marveled. 6 Now at the feast he was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them, whomever they requested. 7 And there was one named Barabbas, who was chained with his fellow rebels; they had committed murder in the rebellion. 8 Then the multitude, crying aloud, began to ask him to do just as he had always done for them. 9 But Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" 10 For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy. 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, so that

he should rather release Barabbas to them. 12 Pilate answered and said to them again, "What then do you want me to do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?" 13 So they cried out again, "Crucify Him!" 14 Then Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they cried out all the more, "Crucify Him!" 15 So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged Him, to be crucified. 16 Then the soldiers led Him away into the hall called Praetorium, and they called together the whole garrison. 17 And they clothed Him with purple; and they twisted a crown of thorns, put it on His head, 18 and began to salute Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 19 Then they struck Him on the head with a reed and spat on Him; and bowing the knee, they worshiped Him. 20 And when they had mocked Him, they took the purple off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify Him. 21 Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross. 22 And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. 23 Then they gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He did not take it. 24 And when they crucified Him, they divided His garments, casting lots for them to determine what every man should take. 25 Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him. 26 And the inscription of His accusation was written above: THE KING OF THE JEWS. 27 With Him they also crucified two robbers, one on His right and the other on His left. 28 So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And He was numbered with the transgressors." 29 And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, 30 "save Yourself, and come down from the cross!" 31 Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. 32 "Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Even those who were crucified with Him reviled Him. 33 Now when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. 34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" 35 Some of those who stood by, when they heard that, said, "Look, He is calling for Elijah!" 36 Then someone ran and filled a sponge full of sour wine, put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink, saying, "Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to take Him down." 37 And Jesus cried out with

a loud voice, and breathed His last. 38 Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 39 So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, "Truly this Man was the Son of God!" 40 There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome, 41 who also followed Him and ministered to Him when He was in Galilee, and many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem. 42 Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 44 Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. 45 So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. 46 Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. 47 And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses observed where He was laid.

In week 2 we discovered the Principle of Ownership which calls for stewardship living. This week we examined the Principle of First Fruits which calls for First Fruit Faith.

The Principle of Ownership calls for a conscientious transfer of the title deed of our person and our possessions to God with a sense of responsibility to exercise a steward's care over all God's gifts – time, abilities, health and strength, and wealth.

The Principle of First Fruits calls for a conscientious commitment to returning the first and best of God's gifts back to Him. For Israel, who brought the first of their harvest and flocks, this is an expression of faith in God to continue to provide for them.

This is an expression of faith in God today as well. In actuality, OUR FIRST in giving IS OUR FAITH in living. This is living in dependence upon God, truly "OUR FIRST IS OUR FAITH!"

Matt. 6: 30 *"Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is,*

and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'" 32 "For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. 34 "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

2. Re-read Matt. 6:33 and write out the condition Jesus shared that would obligate God to meet His people's needs (v. 33).

Jesus reminded the Jewish people of this First Fruit Principle. To put God's righteousness first means to give God's purposes the first and best of our time, our abilities, our health and strength, and our wealth.

3. Check those which *you agree* with in the following statements:

First Fruit living in respect to time for every believer should mean:

- To give to God the first portion of my day in prayer and devotion
- To give God the first day of the week in worship and praise.
- To give God a measurable portion of my time each week in Christian service.

First Fruit living in respect to abilities for every believer should mean:

- To offer my abilities to God for His use in the church, or on the mission field.
- To discover my Spiritual gift and surrender it to God for His use and glory.
- To give God the glory for any gifts and abilities He has blessed me with.

First Fruit living in respect to wealth for every believer should mean:

- To give the first portion of my earnings (wages) to God.
- To give the first portion of my increase (gifts, interests) to God.
- To give generously to those in need.
- Other (You define as God has led)

4. Go back to these statements and circle the ones you are faithfully exercising.

5. What does your expression of First Fruit Faith tell you about your love for God? _____

Living the Principle of First Fruits provides the blessing of obedience and the promise of provision. Take time to review this week's study and answer the following.

6. What has God said to you in this study?

7. What action does God want you to take in living "First Fruit Faith?"

NOTES

GOD SUPPLIES – TO HIM BE THE GLORY!

As a pastor, I would teach these Biblical Principles of Financial Stewardship every year. When people began to live them, God began to uniquely bless individuals and ministry alike. I am absolutely convinced, by virtue of the integrity of God's Word and our personal experience, of God's promise to provide for those who faithfully practiced First Fruit Giving principles. In my youthful enthusiasm, during the seminars I would promise to make up the difference if God failed to supply for any who fully followed the Lord.

In one church there was a couple involved full-time in Christian camping ministry. They were paid approximately \$500 per month with housing provided and meals during camping season. They initially thought that their service was their tithe to God. Nevertheless, they struggled financially.

While attending the stewardship seminars, God challenged them to begin first fruit giving. One evening this couple called me and asked me to visit them, reminding me that I would make up any financial deficit if God did not. With some trepidation, I consented to visit them that night.

When I arrived, I was surprised to find a smiling couple welcoming me with encouraging words. Rather than facing a couple with financial challenges, I was privileged to hear the testimony of this couple's renewed faith in God. They admitted that their comment regarding my making up their financial difference was a joke. They really wanted to express their appreciation for what God had done for them since they began 'first fruit tithing.'

They shared with me that since making this commitment, six months previous, God had provided marvelously for them. All their bills were paid, their children were wearing new clothes, and for the first time they had money in the bank. They stated that they did not know how this happened other than that God provided. This couple experienced what Malcolm McGregor referred to when he said that he 'gave up trying to reconcile God's accounting system'.⁶

God Supplies – To Him be the Glory!

⁶ Malcolm MacGregor, *Your Money Matters*, p. 54.

COMMENTARY

Biblical Principles of Financial Stewardship: First-Fruit Giving

The Bible teaches us that salvation is a point of decision, Ephesians 2:8, "*for by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, not of works, lest any man should boast.*" Although so many churches today teach that man can earn his salvation, this is just not Bible truth. Individuals are saved by grace. Grace is something undeserved. Salvation is a gift. A gift is something unearned. The gift of salvation is received when a person, understanding that he or she is a sinner before a Holy God, are condemned because of sin to an eternity separated from God, *cries out by faith* for the gift of salvation, earned by Christ on the cross by substituting His death for their death. It is in that point of decision when salvation is truly understood to be "*not of ourselves but the gift of God.*" Salvation is all about faith in the Son of God, believing that He, being perfect, died in mankind's place and rose again the third day, to offer eternal life to all who would believe.

God offers to all the wonderful privilege of eternal life, by faith. This decision of faith alone is so life changing that Jesus called it 'new birth' (John 3). This decision commences a new life in which the believer, deemed by God to be justified (freed from the guilt and punishment of sin and clothed in Christ's righteousness), is governed by faith.

Scriptures declare "the just shall live by faith" no less than four times (Hab. 2:4, Rom. 1:17, Gal. 3:11, Heb. 10:38). Faith is the path of the believer in every walk of life. It is important to see how faith relates to our gift of possessions. Even in this matter of the stewardship of our possessions, faith is the path. The just shall live, even financially, by faith.

In 1 Kings 17 God illustrates the relationship between faith and possessions. Here Elijah had announced to King Ahab that there would be no rain except by his own word. He had withdrawn to the brook Cherith, where there was a water supply. The Lord also provided food for him by way of a raven.

Elijah is directed by God to leave the brook and go to Zarephath, where a widow would provide for him. Elijah's encounter with the woman demonstrates the call of God's people to, by faith, put God first. The widow is challenged to give her remaining food supply to the man of God and wait upon God for provision. The Scripture states: "*See, I have command-*

ed a widow there to provide for you." (verse 9)

Elijah went to Zarephath, found the widow and sought water and food from her. When the widow was confronted with the request to feed Elijah, she immediately expressed her concern,

"As the LORD your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die."

The widow's concern was legitimate; she and her household were at the point of starvation themselves. Any mother under such dire circumstances would be reluctant to take the only remaining food in the house and pass it on to a stranger.

However, Elijah presented a unique word of hope to her; in essence, if she stepped out in faith and obeyed God, He would provide for her until He sent rain to provide for the family needs.

Note first in this passage that God had told the widow to provide for Elijah. The widow was called to provide from her resources for the prophet. Second, the Lord directed Elijah straight to the widow. God clearly purposed to bring these two together. Third, notice that when Elijah asked for bread and water, the widow indicated she was in a state of despair. She had only enough for one meal for her and her son before death would come. It was in the middle of a drought, and although this woman was a child of God, she was also suffering from the severity of this drought.

From human understanding, this woman had come to the end of her resources and the end of her life. She and her son were facing the slow death of starvation; nevertheless, God commanded her to provide for Elijah. In her state of desperation, God gave her the opportunity to step out in faith and find His promised provision. The terms for God's provision are very clear, she is not to fear but to give **first** to the prophet, **then** trust God to provide. Upon the word of the Lord, this woman gave first to God and by faith trusted in Him to provide. God did not fail her. Elijah and her family ate for many days by the miraculous provision of God.

The story goes on to show how God confirmed His prophet through the death and restoration of the widow's son through Elijah. God's final word concerning the widow is significant: *"Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is the truth."* The story ends with the widow's confirmation that God has privileged her alone, among all His people,

with His unique, personal, gracious care in fulfilling His purposes.

I love to share this passage in Africa, where practically every believer has faced a similar situation as this widow. They have experienced the harshness of drought and the severity of want. West Africans know hunger, and they have seen starvation.

The African saints love stories, so after reading this story to them, I ask the important questions: "Tell me, is this story real? Is this a true story? Do you think this really happened?" Of course they answer with a resounding, "YES, YES IT HAPPENED. THE BIBLE SAYS THAT HAPPENED, IT IS TRUE." They not only believe the truth of the story, but they understand the challenge of a child of God presented with a great step of faith.

Then I ask a second question: "Is God the same now as He was then?" Although the answer is a little slower in coming, they do acknowledge "God is the same yesterday, today, and forever according to the Bible." They realize that the very God that spoke to Elijah, and the God who called this widow to such faith, is the very God who has provided our salvation. He is the God who parted the Red Sea for Israel's escape from Egypt. He is the God who fed Israel in the wilderness and gave them water from the rock. He is the same God who hears our prayers and promises our provision.

With these reminders I ask this next question, "Do you think that God could do the same today?" At this point among the African believers there is usually a contemplative silence. Now I am not asking about a story in the past but the reality of the present. It is here that I challenge believers to recognize that God continues to do this every day for His people.

As God's people begin to understand the role of faith, having laid down an earlier foundation of proper thinking, each must come to realize that God delights, as our Father, in being their provider. This is the will of God, to see His people depend upon Him for everything. It is God's desire and joy to be the One who provides for His own! Nevertheless, God tells us that there is a condition involved. That condition is faith. *The just shall live by faith.*

When Scripture's record of the experience of Israel wandering through the wilderness is studied, it is evident how God delighted to provide for them. He gave them manna from heaven, fresh meat by a favourable wind, water from a rock, and led them to a land of bounty and blessing for which they never laboured. Consistently through Scriptures, God provides for

His people who step out in faith and put Him first. The same is true throughout church history, especially among the great works of missions.

God delights to provide for His own, He wants to be the source of their supply. God has not changed. The path of provision for life lies in honouring Him first. Elijah challenged the widow to give to God's prophet first! The Old Testament consistently reveals the patterns by which He provides for His people. These patterns relate directly to the church in terms of principles for believers today. It is true, the church is not under the law. Praise God! The church has not replaced Israel under the law; nevertheless, the principles that God incorporated for Israel regarding faith and His provision are the same for God's people today. These principles were evident before the law, were incorporated in the law, and apply to believers today who are not under the law. For this reason, the ***Principle of First Fruit*** giving is significant today.

In the Old Testament the terms of first fruit and tithe were repeatedly used. Simply stated, the first fruit evidenced the priority of giving and the tithe evidenced the proportion of giving or the amount given to the Lord as the duty of God's people. It is important to understand that God promises His provision on the basis of the Principle of First Fruit giving. That has never changed. This is how God's people put God first in their stewardship of finances. This is the way God's people say, "I am not trusting in myself, nor the things that I have for my supply or security. I am not trusting in my position, I'm not trusting in my possessions nor bank account, I am not trusting in my personal ability, but I am trusting completely on the Lord." This is God's will for every believer: a walk of faith in full dependence upon the Lord.

God established this principle even before the Mosaic Law. When Abraham rescued his nephew Lot, and returned with the spoils of victory, the Scriptures state that Abraham gave the first of the spoils, a tenth of those spoils, to God's priest Melchizedek. Abraham said, "I will give a tithe of everything I have to you Lord." This took place before the law was given, before God laid out the rules for Israel to live by.

When Jacob was escaping from his brother, returning to his parent's homeland to find a wife, he stopped to rest and laid his head upon the rock. There God gave him a vision of angels descending from heaven, the testimony of God's presence with him. In response to this vision, Jacob promised to give God a tithe of everything that God would bless them with. This too was before the Law.

In the story of God delivering Israel from the bondage of Egypt through His servant Moses, God gave him the Laws for Israel to obey, thus establishing the first true Theocratic (God-led, God-ruled) nation. As God gave Moses information regarding how Israel was to live, He incorporated the Principle of First Fruit giving, Exodus 22:29 states: *"You shall not delay to offer the first of your ripe produce and your juices. The firstborn of your sons you shall give to Me."* This principle is repeated for Israel throughout their Old Testament history.

Israel's occupation of the Promised Land, recorded in Leviticus, re-states First Fruit giving. God promised to provide crops that they did not sow and blessings for which they did not labour. This promise incorporated the Principle of First Fruit giving. Again, God calls the people to give Him the first of the blessings of the land. Although Israel initially failed to enter the promised land, the principle was repeated in the second giving of the law on the location of Israel finally entering into the promised land: De. 18:4 *"The firstfruits of your grain and your new wine and your oil, and the first of the fleece of your sheep, you shall give him."* God called Israel to practice this principle to demonstrate their faith in and dependence upon God, in contrast to other nations who put their trust in might and wealth.

This faith principle of 'First Fruit Giving' is explained in the wisdom literature of Solomon, King of Israel. Here the walk of faith is clearly defined and the promised provision of God shared:

Prov. 3: 5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths. 7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and depart from evil. 8 It will be health to your flesh, And strength to your bones. 9 Honour the LORD with your possessions, And with the firstfruits of all your increase; 10 So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine.

Note the positive actions of faith in this passage- trust in the Lord, acknowledge Him in everything, fear the Lord, and honour the Lord with possessions and firstfruits. In the call for believers of every age to walk by faith, God has always desired His people to give to Him first in a demonstration of their trust in Him, rather than their possessions. Nothing has changed. The church is asked to demonstrate the same faith in God. The way this faith is demonstrated is by giving back to God the first of His supply.

It has been said that tithing is not for the New Testament church, that this Principle of First Fruit giving is confined to Israel's law. Yet Jesus clearly expressed this principle in the Sermon on the Mount:

"For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" Matthew 6:32-34.

In the context of speaking to the Jews of His day, who knew the Old Testament, and were taught the responsibility of first fruit giving, Jesus stated they were to seek the kingdom of God first. He followed this statement with the promise of God's provision, which in the context was a promise for food, clothing, and housing. Jesus stated that, for all those who would be His followers, every need would be provided by His Father on the condition that they put Him first.

The minds of the Jewish listeners of Jesus' day would immediately have gone back to the repeated Old Testament promise. Yet the context of this 'Sermon on the Mount' indicates Jesus' remarks were directed to His disciples for their instruction (Matt. 5:1-2). It was these disciples, later declared to be the apostles of Christ who, after the resurrection became the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:19-21).

It cannot be denied that the blessings enriching God's people today, the true body of Christ, are to be privileged with strength as a gift, abilities as a gift, and even income and wealth as a gift, in order to express their faith in God by giving back the first of all this to Him. In so doing each believer today says, "I am not trusting in any of this, I am trusting in you God, to provide all that I need." This is real dependence upon God, this is a true walk of faith, and God loves to provide for such.

God's Word is the foundation for our lives, not just the New Testament, but the Old Testament as well. The widow, being at the absolute end of her resources, was told to give to God first. When I present these seminars in West Africa, everyone knows exactly what I'm talking about. They have lived from meal to meal. In West Africa, where the average income is two dollars a day, they do not live for the pursuit of pleasure, nor even for the pursuit of possessions, they strive simply to survive.

One of the pastors whom I teach came to class with three handfuls of grain wrapped in a plastic bag, his food for the week. This is where most of God's people live, even today. This passage strikes these believers right

in the heart. They live now where the widow lived many centuries ago. Poverty and starvation was the norm of her day and the norm of hosts of God's people today. Yet God said to her 'give to *ME* first, and you will have everything you need.'

Does the church in North America believe God is the same today as He was in the widow's day? What do you believe? God delights to be provider for His own. Yet, by my personal observation, the average Christian of North America, gathers funds and makes them life's security. In essence, material possessions become a passion, even an idol taking priority before God. In so doing they rob themselves of the security of dependence upon on God and the blessings of a walk of faith.

God says, "That is not the way; My children are to live by faith." God says, "You want to live by your own means; that's your choice. You might do all right in North America, living like the world around you, but you are going to miss out on so many blessings." Instead, "*Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness*" and all you need will be supplied as well as the blessings of My approval."

It is this Biblical financial principle, the historical First Fruit giving principle that the church needs to practice today. Giving first to God is the financial 'faith' principle of giving! By giving to God first as a priority, a tenth of His provision as a token proportion is the pattern of Scripture. To give God a tenth of our entire income first, in the schedule that it is received, is the expression of faith, which has confidence in God's promise to supply all needs.

My Dad taught us to put God first, even in times of hardship. With every nickel and dime that the Lord provided, I have been determined to give a tithe back to Him first. Having sought to do so to the best of my understanding, God's provision has become the story of my life, and the life of many believers I have encountered. My prayer is that each reader will come to experience such blessings.

This is the potential privilege of every child of God. This is what God wants His children to experience, because He desires to be our provider. God our Father delights to express His enduring love toward us, His family, by His continued provision of all our needs, just like a father.

The Lord blessed Kathi and I with three children. By the grace of God, all three came to Christ early in life and sought to follow His will. We had limited funds and were unable to supply much help for our children's God-directed post high-school education. Nevertheless, God in His grace

provided jobs for each of our children throughout their education years, enabling them to complete studies without debt.

As much as our children paid for their own education, there have been times when the Lord provided for their needs through Kathi and I- a borrowed car here, furniture there, transportation costs occasionally, emergency care, etc. Although these occasions sometimes meant personal sacrifice or inconvenience, like most parents no thought was given to the cost. Rather, we were filled with a feeling of joy at being able to provide some small necessities for our children as they made preparations for serving the Lord or sought to establish God-centred homes.

By God's grace, all our children are married to believing spouses, all with their own families are serving the Lord in a local church. Two are involved in full-time service with ABWE Canada. Being used of God occasionally to help meet their needs has been a wonderful experience. Is our Father in heaven any different? Is He any less desiring to give, any more concerned about personal sacrifice toward His children? The sacrifice of His own Son for His family shouts NO!

God's resources are limitless. His blessings are boundless, and He makes them ours by an obedient walk of faith. Our God is the God of 'continuance.' I am convinced that to God, every day is Christmas. He, our loving Father, is passionate about continuing to give to His own, just as any father wishes to give on Christmas Day, and uniquely as He initially gave on the first Christmas Day. His single condition is for His own to express their continued faith in Him by giving to Him first.

God is only obligated to meet our needs when we put Him first; the choice is ours. We can choose to rely on our own resources; it might work out, then again it might not, but it will result in lost blessings! God's message through Malachi is equally applicable as a warning to God's family today as it was to Israel many years ago:

"Will a man rob God? Yet, you have robbed me. But you say, "wherein have we robbed you?" In tithes and in offerings. "

And then God says this: "you are cursed with a curse for you have robbed me. Even this whole nation."'" (Mal.3:8-9)

The people stopped bringing their tithes. They stopped bringing their offerings. They discontinued the expression of their faith in God to supply. They no longer demonstrated that they were trusting in God, rather they lived as though their faith was in their own abilities to survive. And this is

what God says to them:

"bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house, and prove or test me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour you what a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it." (Mal.3:10)

These texts come from Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, and although we are not under the law today as the children of Israel were in the Old Testament, the principles are as true today as they ever were. God calls His people to live by faith as He has always done. Part of that expression of faith is giving to God **first**, a determined priority, with an appropriate proportion **a tithe**.

The story of the Mizo people demonstrates the uniqueness of these principles even for today. A number of years ago missionaries entered a south Asian country and began to work among the Mizo people. These were a nomadic people, travelling from jungle to jungle, living off the fruit of the forest and the animals of the wild.

These people were presented with the gospel of Jesus Christ and some accepted Him as Saviour. The missionaries were committed to following these people in order to teach them the Word of God, and show them the love of God. The Mizo people took God's Word seriously. They became determined to live by God's Word to the best of their ability. Although they had no money, they began practicing the principle of tithing. Every resource they harvested, they purposely tithed to God.

When the children went out to gather sticks of wood for the fires, they set aside one tenth of the sticks. When the women harvested the forest fruit they set aside one tenth, when the men hunted they set aside one tenth of the catch. Everything these people set aside for God they took to the villages to sell. With these funds they paid pastors, built churches, and eventually sent missionaries to other people.

As a result of their passion for God and their obedience to God, He blessed them with the privilege of seeing 99% of their people come to know Christ. The Mizo people today have sent more missionaries to other countries than many wealthier countries have. The Mizo choir has travelled throughout the world sharing Christ. God honoured their commitment to the principles of stewardship.

(For more information about the Mizo tithing see APPENDIX A, For additional study regarding First Fruit and Tithing, see APPENDIX B)

The Principle of First Fruit giving is where each believer begins in their giving to God. This principle is evident throughout Scripture, suggesting that it is the expectation of God for His people. It is accurate to say that this is where Christian duty toward giving begins. However, the fullness of God's blessings toward believers as they faithfully give to God is only realized when the third principle of stewardship is observed. Here the Personal Study continues.

Ivor Powell relates this modern day miracle of God's provision, told by a visiting missionary holding up a bottle containing some beans:

"Brothers and sister,' he said, 'you have heard much about faith. I wonder if you know what it is? I am an old missionary from China, and I want to tell you what happened to me. I often told my people that faith could move mountains. I often uttered the kind of sentiments we have heard to-day. Of course, I believed; of course, I had faith in my heavenly Father, and every day I exhorted the Chinese Christians to trust Him. Yes, it was very easy to preach those sermons; but there came a time when my people were starving. Bad seasons had ruined the crops, and our meagre supplies were exhausted. The position was desperate when the local Chinese gathered before the mission station to say, "Teacher, you always told us that God could answer prayer; that He would help those who called upon Him. Teacher, we are hungry. This is the time to prove what you have always told us. Ask Him to send food, and to send it quickly."

"Brethren,' continued the speaker, 'I had often preached about faith, and I enjoyed doing so; but this was a different matter. The people were waiting, and I had to do as they required. I knelt down to pray, and I don't mind admitting that I was a little fearful. When I rose again, I looked to the distant horizon, and recognized that a storm was approaching. You will find it difficult to believe what I am about to tell you, but I can assure you my story is true. A hurricane swept over our mission, and rained great supplies of beans upon us. We took those beans, and lived upon them. Some we planted, and my people were saved. Oh yes, we found out whence they came. Many miles away, farmers had been gathering crops when, to their dismay, a great storm swept their harvest into the sky. The devastating winds robbed them of their beans; but those same winds carried the beans and showered them upon us. I knew then that the people in England would never believe my story, so I gathered some of those precious things, and put

them into a bottle.' "

My host paused and said, "Brother, he produced that little bottle; he held it up and said, 'There they are. I would not sell one of them for £5. Please do not ask for one. But I'll put the bottle on the tea-table, and you can see for yourselves what our Heavenly Father showered from the sky.' Slowly he walked back to his seat; and believe it or not, we had almost forgotten about our tea. The meeting was closed in prayer, and as you can well imagine, the little bottle of beans was in great demand." My host, Mr. Lee, of Consett, said, "He told us that was faith—and it surely was."⁷

GOD SUPPLIES – TO HIM BE THE GLORY!

There was a family with four children in our church. The husband, a factory worker with a modest income, and his wife raised their children 'in the nurture and admonition' of the Lord to the best of their ability. They lived in the house that his father had built years earlier. A sad day came when their two nieces and a nephew were no longer cared for. The state was in the process of dividing the children up through adoption. Our loving couple came to the rescue. They applied and were accepted to adopt all three children.

The added responsibilities of child-care took a heavy toll on the income. They had to secure a larger vehicle to transport the family and typical food, clothing, and medical bills were a continual strain. All of these cares left no funds to keep an old home in repair. During one 'member-care' visit, it was discovered that some of the rooms of this home had no electricity due to inadequate electrical wiring; the family had to double and triple up for bedroom space, the home heating was very poor, and the cooking stove was a fire hazard. Something had to be done!

God marvelously supplied, not through a planned project of the church but through a spontaneous act of love from a host of God's people in the area. A group of Christian contractors determined to provide a new home for this family. They pooled their own resources, bought a lot and built a five-bedroom home for the family. This was long before Habitat for Humanity homes were present in the area. Therefore, news of this act of love quickly reached the local TV station.

⁷ Ivor Powell, *Bible Windows*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1910), 87-88.

As pastor of the family, I was asked to dedicate the home in prayer on the ‘key presentation day.’ The TV news people pulled me aside to ask how our church did this. I was quick to say, “You’re talking to the wrong man, this was not a local church labour, it was a labour of God through many of His children in this area.” I directed them to interview the contractors, reflecting that God had moved the hearts of many Christians to provide for a family who were their brothers and sisters in Christ. I pointed out that God cares for His own in unique ways. *God Supplies – To Him be the Glory!*

PART 4: FINDING THE NEW TESTAMENT ALTAR

PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

Finding the New Testament Altar

Summary of Discovered Truth

- 1. Session One** – The path to doing the will of God lies in an understanding of God’s view and purpose for possessions. This was a discovery of God’s “divine economics.”
- 2. Session Two** – The path to peace of mind about possessions lies in our own attitude towards ownership. This was a discovery of “the beauty of belonging to God.”
- 3. Session Three** – The path to finding God’s provision for life lies in our own commitment to honouring Him first and foremost. This was a discovery of the real meaning and value of dependence.
- 4. Session Four** - The path to discovering God’s promised prosperity lies in our own willingness to sacrifice for him. This was a discovery of the riches of God's own resources.

WEEK 4, DAY 1

Solomon was blessed with uncommon wisdom by God. (1Ki. 3:3-12). Ecclesiastes, written by Solomon probably in his latter days, reflects his remorse for squandering his wisdom on personal pursuits and admonishes God’s people to ‘fear God and keep His commandments’ (12:13). Chapter 11 begins with the reminder that man ‘cannot know’ the ways of God (vv. 2, 5, 6) and therefore calls for a walk of faithful obedience wrapped in trust.

Read the following texts and answer the related questions.

Eccl. 11:1 Cast your bread upon the waters, For you will find it after many days. 2 Give a serving to seven, and also to eight, For you do not know what evil will be on the earth. 3 If the clouds are full of rain, They empty themselves upon the earth; And if a tree falls to the south or the north, In the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie. 4 He who observes the wind will not sow, And he who regards the clouds will not reap. 5 As you do not know what is the way of the wind, Or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, So you do not know the works of God who makes everything. 6 In the morning sow your seed, And in the evening do not withhold your hand; For you do not know which will prosper, Either this or that, Or whether both alike will be good.

Imagine this common scene in ancient Israel at sowing time. The produce of the previous harvest has been reduced to a few bags of grain standing in the corner of your single room abode. From these bags, your family has taken grain and ground it to flour, the only source of your daily bread. As your family, of seven or eight gather around for their meal, you give thanks to God for His provision. Mealtime is filled with laughter and family fellowship. Afterward, the older children depart to the fields for a day's labour. The task at hand is to make a raised furrow around each plot that has been carefully worked by hand. Next, each plot is to be flooded from the ditch running with water from the artesian well.

You wait in prayer at the anticipated announcement that your plots are covered in two or three inches of water. You wait in prayer because you know that your next step is one of faith. It is now that you must take all but the smallest amount of that precious grain for your bread to the fields, and scatter it over the water. This is sowing day, and you are literally taking the food from your table and casting it upon the water in trust that God will return another harvest.

God is in the business of stretching our faith. His greatest pleasure is in His children drawing close to Him in total, daily dependence. Having learned the blessings of First Fruit faith and its promised provision, God calls His own to experience sacrifice and find the blessing of abundance.

God is continually challenging His children to a deeper walk of Faith. This is living out the principle of sacrifice. Here are the New Testament references to Christian sacrifices:

God Supplies: A Biblical Perspective of Dependence upon God

Ro 12:1 *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*

Php 2:17 *Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.*

Php 4:18 *But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God*

Heb 13:15 *By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.*

Heb. 13: 16 *But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*

1Pe 2:5 *Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a Spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up Spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.*

1. Identify the kind of sacrifices to which each text refers. It may be necessary to review the context of each text in your own Bible.

Ro 12:1

Php 2:17

Php 4:18

Heb 13:15

Heb. 13:16

1Pe 2:5

2. List the texts that involved material sacrifice.

Paul makes mention of a group of churches that took material sacrifice to level of personal self-denial by choosing to ‘go without’ for the work of Christ to go on.

2 Cor. 8:1 Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: 2 that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. 3 For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, 4 imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. 5 And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.

3. What commendable action had the churches of Macedonia taken? (v. 2)

4. In what personal state were these churches when they acted so generously? (v.2)

5. What was the first step in their self-denial for Christ? (v.5)

The churches of Macedonia had supplied Paul with a generous gift to pass on to the other churches. They had done so in the midst of great poverty themselves. God had moved them to self-denial, to personal sacrifice for the work of Christ.

The principle of sacrifice is rooted in the nature of self-denial. Self-denial grows out of a meaningful walk with God.

6. Explain how Jesus modelled self-denial in the following texts.

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Cor. 5:21)

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree," (Gal. 3:13)

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:8)

7. Have you ever sacrificially given to the ministry of Christ?

YES

NO

If yes, comment on how you felt after the sacrifice.

The churches of Macedonia experienced an ‘abundance of joy’ in their sacrifice. The true measure of self-sacrifice is in the joy God supplies at

its giving.

8. What has God said to you about the Spirit of self-denial?

WEEK 4, DAY 2

The topic of the sacrifice stimulates thoughts of Old Testament altars where God's people offered their respective sacrifices as they walked before God in faith. Although Christ fulfilled the Old Testament sacrificial system as the Lamb of God, sacrifice is still on the agenda for God's people.

Read the following texts and answer the related questions.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Rom. 12:1-2)

Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. (Heb. 13:15-16)

1. From the verses listed previously, identify ***in your own words*** the specific New Testament sacrifices God calls Christians to make:

Romans 12:1-2

Hebrews 13:15

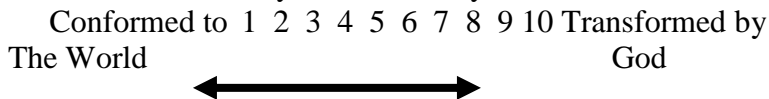
Hebrews 13:16

2. How, ***in your own words***, is the sacrifice of our person described in Romans 12:1?

3. Identify, ***in your own words*** the contrasting lifestyles that are present in Romans 12:2.

The Christian life is intended to be one of unique distinction from the world. This can be achieved only as we yield ourselves to God in self-denial. This is the reasonable expectation of God for His children.

4. On the scale below, rate your own lifestyle.



5. How is the sacrifice of praise and possessions responded to by God the Hebrews text?

Finish today's study by reading David's song of Psm. 103:

1 Bless the LORD, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name! 2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits: 3 Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, 4 Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, 5 Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

6 The LORD executes righteousness And justice for all who are oppressed.7 He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel.8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.9 He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever.10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities.

11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.

13 As a father pities his children, So the LORD pities those who fear Him.14 For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.15 As for man, his days are like grass; As a flower of the field, so he flourishes.16 For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, And its place remembers it no more. {Compare Job 7:10 }

17 But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting On those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children's children,

18 To such as keep His covenant, And to those who remember His commandments to do them.19 The LORD has established His throne in heaven, And His kingdom rules over all.20 Bless the LORD, you His angels, Who excel in strength, who do His word, Heeding the voice of His word.21 Bless the LORD, all you His hosts, You ministers of His, who do His pleasure.22 Bless the LORD, all His works, In all places of His dominion. Bless the LORD, O my soul!

6. Write out your own song of praise and offer it to God in prayer as a sacrifice of praise to Him.

7. What other ways might you offer to God a sacrifice of praise?

WEEK 4, DAY 3

The principle of sacrifice begins with a personal commitment to Jesus as the sacrifice of self. It encompasses a Spirit of thanksgiving that offers to God regular, meaningful sacrifices of praise.

In addition, God calls His own to offer the sacrifice of their possessions. This is not restricted to those who are called to be pastors or missionaries, nor to those with abundance of wealth. This is God's call to all of His children.

In his discourse on *Community of Goods*, D. N. Duke identifies this principle of self-sacrifice in the New Testament.

The Jerusalem church chose to practice the selfless generosity in a form that closely resembled the lifestyle of Jesus and the Twelve. Other early churches practiced sacrificial generosity in different forms (Acts 11:27–30; 1 Cor. 16:1–4; Rom. 12:13; 1 John 3:17), for Jesus' call to set aside possessions took more than one form (cp. Matt. 19:16–22 with Luke 19:1–10).⁸

Read the following texts and answer the related questions.

Acts 11:27 *And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. 29 Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. 30 This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.*

1. Who gave? (v.29)

2. By what measure was giving made?

⁸ Duke, D. N. (2003). *Community of Goods*. In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p. 324). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

3. For what purpose was giving made?

Matt. 28:19-20

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

4. According to Matt. 28:19 who are disciples today?

1 Cor. 16:1-4

1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. 2 Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. 3 And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem. 4 And if it be meet that I go also, they shall go with me.

5. Who was to give? (v.1)

6. By what measure was giving to be made? (v. 2)

7. How was this giving described? (v.3)

Rom. 12:10-13

10 Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; 11 Not slothful in business; fervent in Spirit; serving the Lord; 12 Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; 13 Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.

8. By what three measures is giving's motivation indicated? (v.10)

9. Who was the giving for? (v.13)

1 John 3:16-17

16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

10. Write in your own words, what this verse teaches about giving.

Matt. 19:16–22

16 And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? 17 And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. 18 He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, 19 Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 20 The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? 21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. 22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

The young man believed he had lived according to the 'law of God' and seemed genuinely seeking what else would qualify him for eternal life.

Jesus answered his question specifically by stating what he had to do to be *perfect*:

Perfect [*teleios*] translated in the KJV as “perfect” 17 times, “man” once, and “of full age” once, meaning; **1.** brought to its end, finished. **2.** wanting nothing necessary to completeness.

11. What three things did Jesus tell this man to do? (v.21)

12. In your own words, what prevented this man from doing as Jesus said?

Luke 19:1–10

1 And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. 2 And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. 3 And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. 4 And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way. 5 And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house. 6 And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. 7 And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. 8 And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. 9 And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

13. From the texts cited, write out each phrase that identifies sacrifice. (v.8)

Luke 21:1 *And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, 2 and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. 3 So He said, "Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; 4 "for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had."*

14. How would you describe the giving of the widow?

Matt. 6:19-24

19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 "but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. 22 "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. 23 "But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! 24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

15. What must the condition of the heart be in order to lay up treasures in heaven? (v.20-21)

Mark 10:23–31;

23 Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" 24 And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! 25 "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

26 *And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, "Who then can be saved?"* 27 *But Jesus looked at them and said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible."* 28 *Then Peter began to say to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You."* 29 *So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's,* 30 *"who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time — houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions — and in the age to come, eternal life.* 31 *"But many who are first will be last, and the last first."*

16. Why is it hard for those who have riches to enter heaven? (v.23, 24)

Luke 6:22-25

22 *Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile you, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man's sake.* 23 *Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets.* 24 *"But woe to you who are rich, For you have received your consolation.* 25 *Woe to you who are full, For you shall hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, For you shall mourn and weep.*

17. What is the motive for those receiving great reward in heaven? (v.22)

18. List those who receive what is their due in present life. (v.24-25)

20. In your own words describe what the rich receive (ie. What their 'consolation' is)?

Luke 12:13 *Then one from the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." 14 But He said to him, "Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?" 15 And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." 16 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. 17 "And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops? 18 "So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. 19 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry."' 20 "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' 21 "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."*

In week 2, Day 1 we examined this verse, here is a quick review:

21. What is the sin mentioned in this passage? (v.15)

22. What is the consequence of this sin? (v.19)

23. What is the remedy for avoiding this sin? (v.21)

What these incidents have in common is an emphasis on sacrificial giving (Luke 21:1–4), requiring a complete change of heart so that God, not possessions, is served (Matt. 6:24) with a clear recognition of riches' dangers (Mark 10:23–31; Luke 6:24; 12:13–31).⁹

Acts 4:33 *And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. 34 Nor was*

⁹ Duke, D. N. (2003). Community of Goods. In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p. 324). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, 35 and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. 36 And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, 37 having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. 2 And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet. 3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? 4 "While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." 5 Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. 6 And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him. 7 Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?" She said, "Yes, for so much." 9 Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." 10 Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband. 11 So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.

24. Why was Joses honoured by being called 'Son of Encouragement'? (v.36-37)

25. What was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira? (v. 5:3)

The danger of riches manifested itself in the context of the community of goods (Acts 4:36–5:11). In contrast to Barnabas who sold some land and gave the proceeds to the apostles, Ananias and Sapphira held back some of the proceeds from their sale. Their subsequent deaths testified to the severity of abandoning the common life for selfish interest. Possessiveness led to lying to the Spirit (5:3, 9) and therefore rejecting the bond (“one heart and of one soul” in 4:32) created by the Spirit. The voluntary nature of this community of goods was therefore not a matter of individuals independently choosing when and if to give, but the ongoing spontaneous generosity of a community unified and directed by the Spirit.¹⁰

Luke 18:24 *And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! 25 "For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." 26 And those who heard it said, "Who then can be saved?" 27 But He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God." 28 Then Peter said, "See, we have left all and followed You." 29 So He said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, 30 "who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life.*

26. What prompted Peter to make his comment about leaving all and following Jesus? (You may have to check out the context in your Bible.)

27. According to this text, what personal sacrifices might the Christian be called to make?

28. For what purpose were such sacrifices legitimate? (v.29)

¹⁰ Duke, D. N. (2003). Community of Goods. In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p. 324). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

Luke 14: 22 *"Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. 23 "When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. 24 "And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see." 25 Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.* After His resurrection, Jesus joined two of His followers travelling to Emmaus. In conversation, Jesus explained the path of Christ's life. (v. 26-27)

29. What words did Jesus use to describe that path?

Mt 20:23 And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.

In Matt. 20, Jesus had earlier stated that his followers would follow that same path.

30. What words did Jesus use to describe the path His followers would take in this text?

The life of obedience regarding the principles of ownership, first fruits, and sacrifice in following Christ is a choice of self-denial!

31. What, in your opinion, might keep a believer from making that choice?

32. Do you know Christians who are models of self-denial?

YES

NO

33. If so, what do you admire about their lives?

34. What has God said to you in this study?

WEEK 4, DAY 4

The principle of sacrifice says, "I will do without that the work of God may go on." In Day 1 we discovered how God brings joy to those who respond to His leading with self-sacrifice.

Read the following texts and answer the related questions.

1. List the **personal** results of sacrificial giving in each text.

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever." Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, (2 Corinthians 9:8-10)

"And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his

reward." (Matthew 10:42)

Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, "who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time — houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions — and in the age to come, eternal life. (Mark10:28-30)

"But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. "And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just." (Luke14:13-14)

2. Read again the preceding texts and list all the other results, ***in the world***, of sacrificial giving.

When God's people rise to the call of self-denial and meaningful sacrifice, He accomplishes much in the believer by way of stretching faith, and much in the world. His name is praised, the ministry of righteousness is expanded, needs are met, God's grace is magnified, and God's love is presented in a practical way.

Paul delighted in the call to self-sacrifice for its unique privileges:
*8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ
9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from*

done good and faithful servant.” This in itself is great reward. Nevertheless, in God’s wise providence, He also grants great present blessings with each principle.

1. Can you identify the present blessing beside each principle studied so far?

Present Blessing

The Principle of Ownership

The Principle of First-fruits

GOING DEEPER

2. In each of the verses listed below, identify again the phrases that indicate God’s promised blessings of sacrificial giving.

But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever." Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, (2 Cor. 9:6-10)

"And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward." (Mat. 10:42)

Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, "who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time — houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions — and in the age to come, eternal life. (Mark10:28-30)

"But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. "And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just." (Luke14:13-14)

The Principle of Sacrifice privileges the believer with God's promise of prosperity. However, the promised prosperity is not focused on the material, but focused on the Spiritual.

Note the promises of each text:

In 2 Cor. 9:10 the promise is abundance for every good work resulting in increased **'fruits (harvest) of your righteousness.'**

Charity reaps an eternal reward (cf. Prov. 19:17; Matt. 25:40).

...Practical righteousness endures forever not only through the deeds but in the doer as he is progressively transformed into Christlikeness (2 Cor. 3:18). Ultimately a believer's reward is the culmination of the process (Phil. 3:14, 21).¹¹

The harvest of righteous deeds, like the harvest of the field, does not come from us, but from God. The righteousness that we become through Christ's sacrificial death (2 Cor. 5:21) works itself out in our sacrificial generosity to others.¹² In essence, the promised prosperity a

¹¹ Lowery, D. K. (1985). 2 Corinthians. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Ed.) (2 Co 9:9–10). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

¹² Garland, D. E. (1999). *Vol. 29: 2 Corinthians*. The New American

Spiritual harvest of souls also bearing Spiritual fruit.

In Matt. 10:42 the promise is not to 'lose his reward.' The **reward** is in keeping with the act performed: (*misthos*), a recompense based upon what a person has earned and thus deserves, the nature of the recompense being either positive or negative¹³. To *give a cup of cold water* is basic eastern hospitality and needs no *reward*; but God's grace goes beyond our deserving.¹⁴ The promise does not distinguish between eternal or temporal rewards but does reflect the Spiritual nature of its prosperity to the recipient both in the present and future.

In Mark10:30: The first promise is the prosperity of a "hundred fold" specifically referring to the blessing of belonging to the household of God, the body of Christ. Among many blessings, this includes the security of a church family that cares and shares, very evident in the early church record of Acts. This also includes the practical blessings of a spiritually endowed loving family in its 'building up of one another' through spiritual exercises. This privilege culminates in the final and greatest blessing of eternal existence with God.

In Luke14:13-14 the promise is to "be repaid at the resurrection of the just" where "repaid" means to 'give back', 'repay in a positive sense.' It speaks of incurred obligation returned, to give in return. God obligates Himself to repay by Spiritual blessings *in eternity* what sacrifices His own make in present life.

3. Where 'in time' is the promised prosperity/blessing focused in the following texts?

Mark10:28-30

There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, "who

Commentary (411). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

¹³ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Vol. 1: Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: Based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.) (490). New York: United Bible Societies.

¹⁴ *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition*. 1994 (D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer & G. J. Wenham, Ed.) (4th ed.) (918). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time — houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions — and in the age to come, eternal life.

Luke 14:14

“And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

Acts 2:44-45

Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Philip. 4:18-19

Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Luke 6:38

Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.

Luke 14:13-14

But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind." And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.

It is evident that the promised prosperity/blessings of giving, viewed by God not as material, but spiritual (although often of physical nature now) is granted both in the present and future life.

4. Can you see a relationship between the lifestyle evident in Luke 14:13-14 and the promise of Proverbs 22:6 in its context?

4 By humility and the fear of the LORD Are riches and honour and life. 5 Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse; He who guards his soul will be far from them. 6 Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.

7 The rich rules over the poor, And the borrower is servant to the lender.

8 He who sows iniquity will reap sorrow, And the rod of his anger will fail.

9 He who has a generous eye will be blessed, For he gives of his bread to the poor. (Prov. 22:4-9).

Explain the relationship.

I still remember going with my father to deliver bags of potatoes from our garden and meat from our freezer to a needy neighbourhood family. I saw God's care and love in action and remember the joy that such sharing brought to others and ourselves. One of the greatest present blessings of "eternal prosperity" is our children's acceptance of the Lord and walk with Him. A sacrificial and generous heart has a true and lasting effect on our children, as it did me. It is God's love in action.

Finally, the Principle of Sacrifice privileges the believer with *ma-terial prosperity with a specific Spiritual purpose*.

5. What is the purpose of such material blessing evidenced in the following texts?

2 Corinthians 9: 6

But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

2 Corinthians 9:10-11

10 Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, 11 while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. (2 Cor. 9:10-11)

1 Tim. 6:17 *Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. 18 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, 19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.*

Finally, Jesus taught that sacrificial giving is a characteristic of the unconditional love of God...

...demonstrated by Christ on the cross:

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.(Rom. 5:8)

...sown into the heart of every believer;

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. (Gal.

5:22-23)

...and taught to His own:

27 "But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 "bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. 29 "To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. 30 "Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. 31 "And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. 32 "But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 "And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 "And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. 35 "But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. 36 "Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. 37 "Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. 38 "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you." (Luke 6: 27-38)

6. Summarize in your own words what Jesus said about giving in verses 30-31 and verse 38 above.

In Luke 6:27–38, Jesus mentioned seven aspects of unconditional love. These actions, not done naturally by human nature, require supernatural enabling—and are thus proof of true righteousness:

- (1) **Love your enemies.**
- (2) **Do good to those who hate you.**
- (3) **Bless those who curse you.**
- (4) **Pray for those who mistreat you.**

(5) Do not retaliate (v. 29a).

(6) Give freely (vv. 29b–30).

(7) Treat **others** the way you want to be treated (v. 31).

This kind of **love** marks one off as distinctive (vv. 32–34), and as having the same characteristics as the heavenly Father (v. 35).

Jesus then taught His followers a fundamental principle of the universe—what one sows he will reap (vv. 36–38; cf. Gal. 6:7). Jesus outlined five areas that were proof of the sowing and reaping theme, mentioned so often in Scripture:

(1) Mercy will lead to mercy (Luke 6:36). The disciples were exhorted to have the same merciful attitude God displayed toward them.

(2) Judgment will lead to judgment (v. 37a).

(3) Condemnation will lead to condemnation (v. 37b).

(4) Pardon will lead to pardon (v. 37c).

(5) Giving will lead to giving (v. 38). It is simply a fact of life that certain attitudes and actions often reflect back on the individual.¹⁵

Jesus admits that even sinful people are quite ready to do good to those who have helped them or from whom they can expect some benefit in return. But disciples ought to go further and not stick simply to doing good for what they can get in return for it or as a way of thanking somebody who has done them good. There may well be no earthly *credit* for people who behave like this, but there will be a heavenly reward: God will regard them as His true sons who imitate their Father's merciful nature to those who are undeserving.

What this reward will be is indicated in vs 37–38. The person who loves like this will receive the same love—and more—from *God*. The person who does not judge other people will not be judged *by God*, and the person who gives freely will receive an ample return—like a container so full of corn that it spills over.

¹⁵ Martin, J. A. (1985). Luke. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 220–221). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Notice again that all of this is said to the disciples. Jesus is *not* saying that all that people have to do to inherit a heavenly reward is to love other people.

This sort of behaviour is revolutionary. It is a good question whether Jesus meant it absolutely literally or was using striking examples to make people think. Obviously Jesus was not promoting the kind of thoughtless generosity to any lazy scroungers which would simply confirm them in their ways. Things are here stated in absolute terms, and other Christian principles must also be taken into consideration.¹⁶

Two principles stand out: we must treat others as we would want to be treated (Luke 6:31), which assumes we want the very best Spiritually for ourselves; and we must imitate our Father in heaven and be merciful (Luke 6:36). The important thing is not that we are vindicated before our enemies but that we become more like God in our character (Luke 6:35). This is the greatest reward anyone can receive, far greater than riches, food, laughter, or popularity (Luke 6:24–26). Those things will one day vanish, but character will last for eternity. We must believe Matthew 6:33 and practice it in the power of the Spirit.

Luke 6:37–38 reminds us that we reap what we sow and in the amount that we sow. If we judge others, we will ourselves be judged. If we forgive, we shall be forgiven, but if we condemn, we shall be condemned (see Matt. 18:21–35). He was not talking about eternal judgment but the way we are treated in this life. If we live to give, God will see to it that we receive; but if we live only to get, God will see to it that we lose. This principle applies not only to our giving of money, but also to the giving of ourselves in ministry to others.¹⁷

Living the Principle of Sacrifice has great rewards. Ignoring the Principle has great danger.

¹⁶ Marshall, I. H. (1994). Luke. In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 991). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

¹⁷ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 193). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

7. What warning should be taken from Ezekiel regarding ignoring sacrificial generosity?

49 *"Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.*

50 *"And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw fit. (Ezek. 16:49-50)*

God warns His children of the dangers of self-indulgence that a lifestyle of “ignoring sacrificial generosity” produces. Sodom cared little about the poor and needy. Their self-centeredness led to self-indulgent idleness which in turn led to deplorable sexual self-gratification. The slide to immorality begins with the pattern of selfishness. This is evident in the moral slide of our present society, and the great danger that presents itself to all of God’s children when living carelessly in a prosperous society.

In contrast to Sodom’s self-centeredness, here is an encouraging testimony of self-sacrifice:

When Things Seem Impossible John 6:5-14

(Charles Stanley, *In Touch*, December, 2005, p.36.)

Years ago, our church was preparing to purchase some costly property, and our desire was to accomplish the transaction without going into debt. One week away from the deadline, we had accumulated less than half the money and raising the rest seemed impossible. I mentioned our need to the congregation, and after the first service, a young couple came up and gave me the husband's wedding ring to use toward the payment. They insisted I take the band in spite of the fact that they were barely getting by and had a baby on the way. During the second service, I pulled out the ring and told about this couple's sacrifice. Then the most amazing thing happened. People started streaming down the aisle and giving all kinds of thing-- boats, houses, jewelry, cars, etc. At the end of that service, we had exactly the amount we needed.

Nothing is impossible for our heavenly Father. He used an inexpensive ring to raise over 2 million dollars in one day, just as He

once borrowed a sack lunch to feed 5,000 people. We often make the same mistake as the disciples in today's passage.

We ask the wrong question: "What am I going to do?" Instead, we should ask the right one: "Lord, what are You going to do?" God has a plan to guide us safely through every seemingly impossible situation, if we but trust Him instead of our own resources.

Look to your Father for whatever you need, whether it is 2 million dollars or next month's rent. He has promised to provide for His children.

What has God said to you in a study?

Review

Take a moment to write out your own explanation of each of the Biblical Principles including the promised blessings, and comment on what changes God has brought about in your life as a result of this study.

Principle of Ownership

Explanation

Comments

Principle of First Fruits

Explanation

Comments

Principle of Sacrifice

Explanation

Comments

NOTES

GOD SUPPLIES – TO GOD BE THE GLORY

Five years into our second pastoral ministry the church facilities became inadequate for our ministry needs. It was apparent that either a church expansion or new facility was necessary. Upon consulting with experienced men in our fellowship of churches, it was decided that an expansion would be the best choice; nevertheless, the cost seemed beyond our ability.

However, our last consultant evaluated our membership and regular giving and left us with this statement: “When it comes to expanding church buildings Baptists are notoriously lacking in faith. You cannot do it, but God can. Dig a hole and start building and see what God will do!”

With this challenge our leadership team decided to have a ‘Faith Promise’ banquet in which we would ask the attendees of our church to prayerfully consider making a sacrificial ‘above tithe’ gift toward the building project. The leadership pre-determined that if \$25,000 was committed during this banquet we would proceed with building, trusting in God to supply the rest.

A careful plan was developed to first prepare the people for the unanimous ‘faith promise commitment’ so that all understood the intent and commitment. Arrangements for caterers and date for the affair was set for early spring when most of our ‘summer attendees’ (folks who frequented their summer cottages in our area) could attend as well as our ‘snow birds’ (our retirees who spent the winter in Florida) could attend. All possible people interested in our ministry were informed and invited. Preparations were made to seat over 200 folks! The plans were bathed in prayer.

The long awaited banquet day arrived. It was a disaster! There was an unexpected snowstorm which prevented ‘summer attendees’ from making the drive north. There was a flu epidemic and many of our regular attendees could not come. The caterers had prepared the meal; they could not be cancelled. We had no choice but to proceed with the banquet and sixty people arrived.

As pastor I tried to keep a positive attitude but within I was deeply disappointed. I presented a slide presentation entitled ‘People Need the Lord’ showing how expanded facilities were not an end but an end to a means – reaching and teaching more people for Christ. Anticipating that we might not reach the \$25,000 go, no-go commitment I gently shared that the Lord’s will was of foremost importance.

The people were fed, the presentations were completed, only the completing of the 'Faith Promise' pledges was left. The pledge statements were handed out, completed and collected and two folks were selected to 'tally' the total. This would determine if we expanded or remained content with our present facilities. Hardly a murmur was heard as the tally was being calculated. I wasn't sure if this was a Holy silence or Fearful silence!

Suddenly the silence was broken by a 'whoopie' from the teller's room. The tally total was rushed to my hand with beaming smiles. With less than a quarter of our church families represented, the Lord had moved hearts to commit to \$60,000 as a 'faith promise.' Even as I write this, my eyes are filled with tears of appreciation to the Lord for His gracious provision. This work of God is one of my life's Spiritual markers. It is a reminder never to lose faith in God's plan!

The hole was dug! Within the year the building expansion was completed involving a new auditorium, expanding our seating capacity from 150 to 400, and old facilities remodeled for expanded teaching and meeting space. Much of the work was completed voluntarily by our own folks. And, the Lord continued to bless the ministry with souls saved, the body maturing, and twelve families called to pastoral or mission work. Why? I really think it started that night when God took thirty families and said, "Are you going to sacrifice or aren't you?" And they did! *God Supplies – To God be the glory.*

COMMENTARY

Biblical Principles of Financial Stewardship: Sacrifice

The third principle of stewardship is evident in the Gospel of John chapter 6. Here we find a beautiful picture of what happens when God's people sacrifice for Him. Here God is endorsing going beyond the Principle of First Fruit giving to the principle of sacrifice. Here is evidence of the beauty of God's people who go without in order for God's work to go on. Here is evidence that with sacrifice comes the blessing of prosperity.

Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do. Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little." One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?" Then Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted. So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost." Therefore, they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. John 6:5-13

In the culture of the Middle East, during the time of Christ, crowds were numbered by the attending men (as the heads of families). The 5000 mentioned in this text were 5000 men. Likely, the total number fed probably approached 14,000 or more. The text indicates that the crowd ate 'as much as they wanted.'

I have the privilege to teach in cultures similar to this Biblical context and have come to appreciate the eating customs. The busy lives of people in these poorer cultures prevent them from doing anything more than nibbling here and there throughout the day and then sitting down to one big meal near the end of the day. The result is people becoming conditioned to eat a large amount of food at their 'sit down' meal. I have joined families

for this meal and soon realized that I could never eat the portions of food they were used to eating. My stomach just could not hold that much food!

Jesus did not serve up a snack. On the contrary, He served a meal suitable for the culture of the day so that all who joined in had as much as their empty stomachs could hold. That was a lot of food provided by the Lord and all because one small boy was willing to go without so God's work could go on! This is a demonstration of the stewardship Principle of Sacrifice.

When this story is taught or preached, the focus is correctly on Jesus and the miracle, and yet, the little boy is often overlooked. Consider for a moment what this lad experienced with his sacrifice. Some 14,000 people are on the hillside and are hungry. The Lord knows it and He knows what He is going to do. The challenge first goes out to the disciples and Phillip humbly announces that they have nothing, but there is a little boy who has five loaves and two fish.

Now all eyes are upon the boy. What would the typical boy's response be? Would it not be 'forget it', 'no way', 'this is mine!', 'I was smart enough to bring something to eat!' Is this not the natural tendency of humanity, let alone a small boy? Being realistic, the fact that all those eyes just turning to that little boy would normally produce the response to 'RUN FOR YOUR LIFE!'

He did not run, nor did he plead his own needs. He just handed his lunch over to Jesus. He undoubtedly assumed he was going without lunch in giving his lunch into the hands of Christ. But what did Christ do? He multiplied that small lunch to feed 14,000 plus people, with twelve baskets left over, and gave one small boy an experience of a lifetime!

Imagine the impact this experience had on the lad. Although Scripture is silent regarding the boy's life from that moment, with the Lord's practice of blessing sacrifice I surmise a transformation through faith in Christ, a committed disciple of Christ and possibly one of the 500 privileged to witnessing the Lord's ascension. Regardless of the silence of Scripture, the fact that this boy's sacrifice drew 14,000 people to give Jesus full attention was a rich Spiritual blessing itself. The boy's willingness to go without in order for God's work to go on brought eternal dividends.

That little boy's sacrifice provided 14,000 people with a miracle that testified to who Jesus was. Please understand a Biblical truth in this matter: Jesus' miracles did not prove that He was God! For example, Jesus raised the dead; did anyone else raise the dead in the Bible? Yes. Jesus

turned water into wine; did anyone else perform a miracle that defied nature? Yes. Miracles do not prove deity, rather miracles prove the truth of the message accompanying miracles. The message that Jesus shared was "I am the Son of God!" This was well understood by the populace of His day:

Jesus claimed to be the unique Son of God. As a result, the Jewish leaders tried to kill Him because in "calling God his own Father, [Jesus was] making himself equal with God" (John 5:18 NIV). In John 8:58 Jesus went so far as to use the very words by which God revealed Himself to Moses from the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). To the Jews this was the epitome of blasphemy, for they knew that in doing so Jesus was clearly claiming to be God. On yet another occasion, Jesus explicitly told the Jews: " 'I and the Father are one.' Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, 'I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?' 'We are not stoning you for any of these,' replied the Jews, 'but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God' " (John 10:30-33).¹⁸

Jesus' miracle proved that His message was true. He stated, "Except you (Jews) see signs and wonders, you will not believe" (Jn. 4:48). The text of John 6 states that the people "saw His signs which He performed." This miracle proved to them that what He said was absolutely true: He was the Son of God. That little boy performed an act of sacrifice that allowed 14,000+ people to realize this man is God's Son. That is unique Spiritual prosperity.

This incident portrays the stewardship Principle of Sacrifice evident through Scripture-- God's people go without in order for God's work to go on. God takes that sacrifice and He multiplies it, not necessarily in the way looked for, but multiplied in ways to facilitate The Lord's continued labour of grace. Although the 'multiplying' may never be known or understood by the one making the sacrifice, it will bring forth Spiritual prosperity for eternity.

This is a recurring theme throughout the Bible: The widow of Luke 21 gave more than the rich because she gave all. The sacrifice brought Spiritual blessing to the disciples as Jesus taught them what true giving was,

¹⁸ Hank Hanegraaff, www.oneplace.com/ministries/bible-answer-man/

Barnabas in Acts 4, had land on the island of Cyprus, and sold it all, giving the proceeds to the apostles to carry on their labours. God accepted that act of sacrifice, changed his name to ‘Barnabas’ reflecting his influence as a ‘Son of Encouragement’ and used him uniquely as an instrumental in church planting. God blessed him with a rich heritage of eternal prosperity.

In 2 Corinthians 8, the saints of Macedonia gave generously. The Bible tells us they gave in their poverty; they sacrificed. The church at Jerusalem was going through some hard times. There was a severe drought. Paul urged churches to help. The believers of Macedonia rose to the occasion and beyond. They didn’t just give; they sacrificed. And God promised them abundant blessings because of their sacrifice.

Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. (2 Cor. 9:10-11)

When confronted with this term ‘sacrifice’ the minds of Christians are usually drawn to the Old Testament altars and sacrifices given to Israel in the Mosaic Law. The fulfillment of these sacrifices was Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God dying on the cross for the sins of the whole world. The subsequent conclusion among Christians is ‘there are no more sacrifices’. This is a wrong conclusion! In actuality, there are three present sacrifices commanded for God’s people today. These are recorded in the New Testament as follows:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. (Romans 12:1)

Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.

(But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. (Hebrews 13:15-16)

These ‘church’ sacrifices can be summarized as, The Sacrifice of Our Person, The Sacrifice of our Praise, and the Sacrifice of our Possessions. The believer’s responsibility of stewardship embraces all of these sacrifices. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study the focus is on the latter, the Sacrifice of our Possessions.

What does it mean to do good and share as a sacrifice? This means to

sacrificially give of your possessions. Christians are called to sacrifice possessions to the work of the Lord. In 2 Corinthians 8, God's people gave toward the needs of brothers and sisters in the Lord. In 1 John 3 and James 1, believers give to the needs of the defenseless widows and orphans, and in Proverbs 22:9 God's people give toward the needs of the poor.

The beauty of this Principle of Sacrifice is that it carries with it some unique partnerships. In Philippians 3, Paul explains that when he chose to go without for the sake of the kingdom of God he was conforming his life to Christ, the absolute perfect example of sacrifice. So by the stewardship principle of sacrifice believers are conforming to Christ's death. Paul calls this a participation in the partnership of the cross. We are united with God in the suffering of the cross. This is how, in one sense, believers are challenged to bear their own cross. In other words, believers are called to experience their own call to sacrifice.

What does the idea of the participation in the cross provide for Christians? It provides a deeper knowledge of Christ. That was Paul's greatest ambition: "that I might know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering, being conformed to His death." Paul's declaration is vibrant with the passion to pursue the deep riches of the knowledge of Christ. This is Spiritual prosperity; knowing Christ as never known before! There is nothing more valuable in life than knowing a personal, deep, and intimate relationship with Christ. There is no greater prosperity to be experienced, but this prosperity does not end here. To Christians who practice sacrifice for Christ, Jesus says:

There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life (Mark 10:29-30).

This passage is in the context of the inquiry of the rich young ruler, some clarity is necessary.

The man was rich, so Jesus told him to liquidate his estate and give the money to the poor. The man was a ruler, so Jesus told him to take up a cross and follow Him, which would be a humbling experience. Jesus offered this man the gift of eternal life, but he turned it down. It is difficult to receive a gift when your fist is clenched around money and the things money can buy. The Greek word translated "grieved" gives

the picture of storm clouds gathering. The man walked out of the sunshine and into a storm! He wanted to get salvation on his terms, and he was disappointed.

However, Peter's response indicated that there were a few problems in his own heart. "*What then will there be for us?*" (Matt. 19:27, NASB) This statement reveals a rather commercial view of the Christian life: "We have given up everything for the Lord; now, what will we get in return?" Contrast Peter's words with those of the three Hebrew men in Daniel 3:16–18, and with Peter's later testimony in Acts 3:6. He certainly came a long way from "What will I get?" to "What I have, I will give!"

Jesus assured His disciples that no one who follows Him will ever lose what is really important, either in this life or in the life to come. God will reward each one. However, we must be sure our motives are right: "For My sake and the Gospel's" (see Mark 8:35). The well-known Christian industrialist of a decade ago, R.J. LeTourneau, used to say, "If you give because it pays, it won't pay!" If we sacrifice only to get a reward, that reward will never come.¹⁹

In this passage there are three things evident which relate to the stewardship principle of sacrifice. First, such sacrifice characterizing God's children (as opposed to the unsaved rich young ruler) affirms the true family fortunes of the present. This is not a promise of personal prosperity but the privilege of becoming part of the great family of God, the body of Christ on earth. This is a privilege often taken for granted by Christians.

Consider how God binds His church together so uniquely and so closely that sometimes our relationship with our brothers and sisters in the Lord is closer than with our own blood siblings. In the two churches where I had the privilege to be pastor, often members would say their own blood relatives were not as close as the people in the church. It is God among His family that moves it to 'love one another, forgive one another, comfort one another, be kind to one another, bear one another's burdens, share with one another, meet the needs of one another...' In the context of today's torn society with so many broken homes, forgotten people, and ungodly relationships, one of the greatest expressions of hope of salvation is the privilege of becoming a part of the family of God.

¹⁹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Mk 10:17–31). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

There were special times in pastoral ministry where troubled children from broken families, forsaken husbands or wives abandoned by spouses, desperate parents mourning the loss of mates, sought help. In such dire states, incomprehensible to me, I was amazed at how often these people found consolation, comfort and hope with God's promise of embracing them into His family through new birth in Christ. Their peace was restored through the gift of salvation by faith in Christ, and their new-life confidence as His child, under His care, produced the strength to boldly carry on. These new believers regularly became the first to go without so that God's work would go on.

Second, such sacrifice characterizing God's children guarantees persecutions of the present. One might initially see this as a negative experience but Scripture teaches otherwise:

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (James 2:2-4)

The term 'trial' in this context indicates a state of trial in which God brings His people through adversity and affliction in order to encourage and prove their faith and confidence in Him.²⁰ Persecutions would clearly be included in these 'trials' (Matt. 13:21, Mark 4:17, Rom. 8:35, 2 Cor. 12:10, 2Thess. 1:4, 2Tim. 3:11) and affirm the love of God in nurturing His children to maturity (Heb. 12:5-10). The experience of suffering at the Father's hand, sets the Christian alongside Christ. It thus shows him plainly that he is the Father's child, loved by Him, received by Him as a son.²¹ Christian perfection is a gift of God's instruction, a rich personal blessing from a loving Father.

Third, such sacrifice characterizing God's children assures an eternity together in the presence of God. This is foremost a "*blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ*" (Tit. 2:13 ESV), the long anticipated wonder of seeing Jesus and being forever with God. This is also the completion of our salvation, the long awaited

²⁰ Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament* (electronic ed.). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

²¹ . *Vol. 5: Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. 1964- (G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed.) (electronic ed.) (622). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

perfection of our being where sin is erased from experience. And, this is the joy of everlasting, unbroken fellowship with all the children of God from every age of man.

How sad it is today that so many Christians deny themselves the greatest prosperity available: meaningful fellowship in the body of Christ, measurable maturity through the discipline of Christ, and managing strength through the anticipation of Christ. They forfeit the richest of blessings by denying themselves the God-called characteristic of self-sacrifice in conformity to Christ. Is it possible that those who claim the name Christian are not truly so? Let God's word be the judge:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

Titus 2:11-14

GOD SUPPLIES – TO HIM BE THE GLORY!

During the year of our church expansion program, we had the privilege of seeing the hired carpet layer and his wife come to know the Lord. This was a typical family blessed with three children. The husband was a skilled man, not only a professional carpet layer, but able to expand his home by adding a second story. He was in the midst of this home improvement task when he fell ill. He was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Within weeks, he was unable to work, leaving his family with no income and a home with one-half of a finished roof.

Although our church family had, through faith promise commitments, sacrificed much, an appeal was made to help this family, new to the faith and members of our church. The body responded in genuine love. A crew of construction workers from our church rallied together and completed the family home, at their own cost. The church gave generously for over six months to cover the family's living expenses. The Lord provided for the family through the body of Christ until well past the death of the husband, when other government resources were supplied. The family was loved and watched over for many years until the Lord provided another

loving husband and father, also a member of the church.

I remember the Sunday, a few months after the funeral, when leaving my Sunday School class, I was intercepted by a stranger. Upon introducing myself as pastor of the church, this young lady asked one question: “Is this where ... (the name of the carpet layer) went to church?” I responded with a quick “Yes, it is.” She responded immediately with “Then this is where I will go to church!”

The love of Christ she witnessed as a neighbor of our carpet layer had drawn her to the church, and eventually to Christ as Saviour. She became a faithful member of the church. *God more than supplies, He reproduces His own! To God be the glory!*

Review

This study of the Biblical Perspective of Financial Stewardship began by examining God’s view and purpose for possessions. The focus was on discovering God’s ‘Divine Economics,’ listed as the six mind-transforming truths foundational to understanding Biblical Financial Stewardship:

1. Health to earn and wealth to have are a gift from God.
2. God gives us the gift of earnings and wealth in order for us to give it away.
3. God measures our giving on the basis of what we keep, not what we give.
4. When we are generous with our gift of resources, God promises to provide in order for us to continue to be generous.
5. The greatest investment anyone can make is to give our gift of wealth toward eternity.
6. What we enjoy doing with our gift of wealth will indicate the direction of our heart.

Upon these six foundational truths are laid the Biblical principles of financial stewardship. **The first principle is the Principle of Ownership; God owns all things and His children are stewards of what He owns.** Christian responsibility is to be good stewards of what God has entrusted to each. It is every Christian’s responsibility to look after and care for all that God has entrusted to them to the best of personal ability. If believers are faithful in this, they have the promise of God's peace. If God should bring loss or tragedy into their lives, the assurance of being good stewards brings a peace that passes understanding to their hearts.

The second principle of stewardship is the Principle of First Fruit giving; the first of all God provides in income is returned to God. It is each Christian's responsibility to give at least a tithe of income to God before anything else is spent. This is how believers demonstrate their faith in God rather than in wealth or possessions. First fruit giving is a token expression of our dependence upon God and our faith in Him to supply. The principle is to give to God as first priority, and proportionately as He gives to us. If God's people are faithful in this, they have the promise of God's provision. God promises to supply all their needs.

The third principle is the Principle of Sacrifice: God's people go without in order for God's work to go on. It is the Christian's privilege to purposefully sacrifice wealth and possessions (in relation to financial stewardship), as well as personal rights, other Christian privileges and even life itself (in relation to presenting one's self to God as a living sacrifice) for the advancement of God's work. Such self-denial, such sacrifice secures God's promise of Spiritual prosperity. This may come as greater wealth for the purpose of greater sacrifice and most certainly will result in eternal dividends through the salvation of others, maturity of the body of Christ, and everlasting praise and glory of God.

Conclusion

Please understand that the inclusion of personal '*God Supplies – To Him be the Glory*' stories were not intended to suggest that my experiences of the Lord's supply were due in any way to personal merit, special identity or purpose, or unique treatment. The single purpose of the study and the stories is to draw attention to the unique promises of God to all His children as they live out God's own Will.

This study has focused on, and been limited to, God's will as reflected by the basic Biblical Principles of Financial Stewardship. My own experiences of God's peace, provision and Spiritual prosperity are the blessings from seeking to live and teach the principles of ownership, first-fruit giving, and sacrifice. These experiences are due in part to a godly father's example, a pastor's teaching, and a personal pastoral call, all of which are a part of God's power to transform surrendered minds through His Word.

I am privileged to practice a teaching career in which no personal ideas, concepts or thoughts were demanded, only faithfully teaching God's

Word. Through this privilege, I have witnessed God transform the thinking of people, change the behavior of people, move the hearts of people, and supply the needs of people according to His promises. I too, have been one of these people.

My prayer for all who participate in this study is for each to discover the best of life in declaring through personal experience: "*All I have needed Thy hands have provided, Great is Thy faithfulness, Oh Lord, unto me.*"

Where the best of life begins

It cannot be ignored that man stands separated from Holy God because of sin, that sin holds man in bondage in this life, and that all mankind stands condemned as a result. God's answer is personal salvation and is foundational upon several truths of Scripture:

The *first* of these truths is that "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23 NIV). Adam's fallen state of Spiritual death earlier examined is the inheritance of all mankind and results in the bondage of every person to sin - wrong thinking, wrong decisions, wrong actions, and to emotional disorder. Sin is falling short of God's perfection. Every person is in need of deliverance.

The *second* of these truths is that "*the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Romans 6:23 NIV). Whereas every person earns the penalty of sin (Spiritual separation from God in the present life and eternal separation from God after this life), *salvation is a gift*. A gift is something unearned, granted out of love and received out of gratitude.

The *third* of these truths is that "*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*" (John 3:16 NIV). The gift of salvation was provided out of the unconditional love of God for every person. This gift of love was provided by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God's own Son on the cross of Calvary, proved sufficient to transform man from the state of death to Spiritual life in Christ by the resurrection of Jesus.

The *fourth* of these truths is that "*it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no-one can boast*" (Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV). *Salvation is by grace*. Grace is something that is undeserved. Salvation is the graciousness

of God accepting the paid debt of sin by the sacrifice of God's Son and justly pardoning the guilty.

Salvation is free to man, but cost God much. His own Son actually became man's substitute. Where man is unable to change his standing before God through any self-effort, Christ died in his place. *"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly"* (Ro. 5:6). It is man's responsibility to believe and receive the free gift of life. *"if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.."* (Ro. 10:9)

Salvation is free, but not cheap, and it is anyone's for the asking 'in faith'. *"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved"* (Romans 10:13). Charles Spurgeon, known as "the prince of preachers" once wrote "It will not save me to know that Christ is a Saviour; but it will save me to trust Him to be my Saviour. I shall not be delivered from the wrath to come, by believing that His atonement is sufficient; but I shall be saved by making that atonement my trust, my refuge and my all."

The Bible clearly states that faith in Christ alone secures salvation: *"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved"* (Romans 10:13). This is a faith that turns the heart in sorrow from sin (repentance) to acceptance of Christ's substitutional death (belief). Therefore, the securing of salvation is not dependence upon any works of man such as being baptized or joining a church, but upon a point of decision. The epistle of John emphasises this point of decision: *"He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the children of God, [even] to them that believe on His name"* (John 1:11-12).

This decision to "receive" Christ as *personal Saviour* restores the relationship of each individual (in the fallen state of Spiritual death) to Spiritual life in Christ. At the moment of this decision by faith the Spirit of God enters into the individual, quickening (or making alive) the Spirit of man (Ephesians 2:5). This new state or "new birth" (John 3:3) allows the believing individual to be Spiritually led by God and empowered by God and to be delivered not only from eternal punishment (John 3:16) but also from present bondage (Galatians 5).

For each individual who has heard (or read) of God's free offer of salvation by faith through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus, there is a window of opportunity. This is not an opportunity to prove oneself

before God, sin prevents this (Romans 3), but an opportunity to accept the gift of life from God. God has secured the means of Spiritual rescue from present bondage and eternal loss by dealing with the penalty and the power of sin on the Cross of Calvary. It is now up to each individual to reach out by faith and receive that gift. It is this gift of life. This is where the best of life begins.

APPENDIX A

The Miracle of Mizoram Missions

(By Lorry Lutz, Partners International Mission)

From an isolated state of India sandwiched between Bangladesh and Burma a great mission movement has sprung from a people who were once head-hunters. By 1985 ninety-six percent of these nomadic people had embraced Christ. But their journey was not an easy one.

The 1960 “bamboo flowering” harvest stirred up discontent in the hearts of dissidents who felt not enough had been done to avert the problem of poverty. Murmurings and grumbings fed the discontent of the agitators, and by 1966 an armed uprising was staged to gain political independence from India. Although Christians were involved in the insurgency, the Mizo church officially discounted violence as a solution.

Communal Living Enforced

To control the rebels and to improve intelligence in the rugged mountain territory, the hapless Mizos were herded into communal villages—in what was called “village groupings.” Before the insurrection Mizo villages were located on hill-tops, between fifty and three hundred families in a village depending upon the arable land within reach. Since there is no level area large enough for a regulation football field in all of Mizoram, tillable land is always a serious consideration.

Now the people were hastily corralled, allowed to take only as much as they could carry. Near one village the army was ambushed and several men killed, including a pastor. The closest village was held responsible and within 24 hours the entire population had been moved. Houses and churches were burned to the ground, and a lifetime of toil disappeared in flames.

In some “village groupings” free rations were distributed for a time, but after a few months the people had to fend for themselves. The families put up rough shelters from whatever materials they could salvage. With so many more people living in one area, many had to walk long distances to their fields. But with curfews requiring that they be in the village between dusk and dawn, their hours to work were cut short by the time it took to walk back and forth, and there was a constant food shortage.

Foreign Missionaries Evicted

In the midst of this, the remaining foreign missionaries in the territory were given their “quit order.” But on that very day in 1968 the indomitable Mizo church commissioned two new missionaries to start work in the Mikor Hills of Assam. By 1976 there were 31 workers.

In his mission report in 1978, Rev. V. L. Zithango reported the following:

Mizo missionaries serving in Cachar, Assam	27
Mizo missionaries in the Mikor Hills	38
Mizo missionaries serving in Manipur (work begun in 1913)	49
Total	114

The Zoram Baptist Mission, which represents a smaller and poorer church, has more than 20 missionaries working among tribes in Assam, Tripura, and other nearby areas. New converts baptized by the missionaries in 1978 totaled 432, and plans were underway to send a registered nurse to India, to support a doctor under the Bible and Medical Missionary Fellowship, and to build a hostel in Aizawl for students coming from the mission fields to study in Mizoram.

Poverty No Limitation

All this from a country that is one of the poorest in the world and cannot even provide sufficient food for itself in the foreseeable future. Mizoram has no industry, limited natural resources, one main road from Assam which is tortuous, unpaved and dangerous, no airports, and no access to the sea. The society is entirely dependence upon its own subsistence farming and cottage industries such as weaving cloth.

Vanalal Ngkaha, well-known Mizo evangelist who was named “Man of the Year of 1975,” says the Mizos have risen above their poverty in a remarkable way. “It is the only state in India where there are no beggars or homeless persons.” He is convinced that Christianity’s effect upon society is the only cure for India’s poverty as well. In spite of their poverty the Mizo church has given generously to missions. In 1978 the missionary offering alone totaled more than \$100,000.

How does this church, so limited in resources and so young in its history, give so generously for the spread of the gospel? Their ingenuity surfaces in the simple, practical methods they have devised to raise funds for

their churches.

Ingenious Fund Raising

The early missionaries must receive some credit for training the people to give and to develop an independence Spirit. But the church leaders have also devised creative ways to challenge the Mizos, who have a Spirit-given concern for the lost.

In the few cities government officials and teachers give regularly in an “envelope system” reminiscent of churches around the world. But in the country the people give one tenth of their produce to the pastoral funds, to care for their local needs, and all mission funds are extras. There are several ways they have learned to do this:

Church families are challenged to set aside one stick of firewood each day. The women of the church collect these at the end of the month and the proceeds from their sale are given to missions. “Visits to mission fields” are planned—the family will set aside the funds needed to travel to a specific field (usually a tribal area within several hundred miles from Mizoram). They will bring enough rice or other produce to last for the period of time they would be at the mission station. Church families then meet together, bringing their supplies—but rather than traveling to the field, they donate them [their supplies] to missions, and spend the time together in prayer and sharing.

Handful of Rice

The women have devised another method of raising missionary funds. When they cook rice, they measure out what is needed for the family, and then take back one handful and place it in a special container. At the end of the month this rice is taken to the church where it is sold for missions. This amount is hardly noticed by the family, but when it is done twice a day by every Christian family for a whole year, the total amount becomes enormous. In 1991 almost 7,000,000 rupees was provided for missions this way in the Presbyterian church alone.

Of course these projects aren’t always profitable. Zairema tells of one firewood collection that turned into a debacle. In this case, the women who are responsible for gathering the family firewood went out to gather fuel for a whole day, planning to sell it for missions. But on this particular day there was plenty of wood in the village. It was selling at 90 pieces for a rupee (about 12 cents). Thus by the time they paid for refreshments, their

net profit for the day was three cents.

In spite of this, the heart for missions is there —the concern for the millions without Christ just across the border in greater India. While the Mizo choir was in the United States in 1978 exciting news reached them. The Zoram Evangelical Fellowship, which sends missionaries into other parts of India to work with existing organizations, sent its first workers into Kashmir. A mother with two teenage children was commissioned and sent to accompany another single missionary. Mrs. Lalringliana's husband had also applied, but due to certain circumstances his departure had to be delayed for a year. But she felt so burdened and concerned that the door to Kashmir — a Muslim state —might be closed soon, that she begged to be sent ahead of her family, trusting them to the care of the church. Since that time the rest of the family has joined her, and the others are waiting to go.

APPENDIX B

First Fruits and Tithing

Old Testament First-fruits

The first-fruits of the ground were offered unto God just as the first-born of man and animals. The law required,

1. That on the morrow after the Passover Sabbath a sheaf of new corn should be waved by the priest before the altar (Le 23:5,6,10, 12; 2:12).
2. That at the feast of Pentecost two loaves of leavened bread, made from the new flour, were to be waved in like manner (Le 23:15,17; Nu 28:26).
3. The feast of Tabernacles was an acknowledgement that the fruits of the harvest were from the Lord (Ex 23:16; 34:22)
4. Every individual, besides, was required to consecrate to God a portion of the first-fruits of the land (Ex 22:29; 23:19; 34:26, Nu 15:20,21).
5. The law enjoined that no fruit was to be gathered from newly-planted fruit-trees for the first three years, and that the first-fruits of the fourth year were to be consecrated to the Lord (Lev 19:23-25). Jeremiah 2:3 alludes to the ordinance of "first-fruits," and hence he must have been acquainted with the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, where the laws regarding it are recorded.

Exodus 23:

The institution of the sabbatical year, (Ex 23:10-11). Every seventh year the land was to rest; they must not plough nor sow it at the beginning of the year, and then they could not expect any great harvest at the end of the year: but what the earth did produce of itself should be eaten from hand to mouth, and not laid up. Now this was designed,

1. To show what a plentiful land that was into which God was bringing them—that so numerous a people could have rich maintenance out of the produce of so small a country, without foreign trade, and yet could spare the increase of every seventh year.

2. To remind them of their dependence upon God their great landlord, and their obligation to use the fruit of their land as he should direct. Thus he would try their obedience in a matter that nearly touched their interest. Afterwards we find that their disobedience to this command was a forfeiture of the promises (2Ch 36:21).

3. To teach them a confidence in the divine Providence, while they did their duty—that, as the sixth day's manna served for two day's meat, so the sixth year's increase should serve for two years' subsistence. Thus they must learn not to take thought for their life (Mt 6:25). If we are prudent and diligent in our affairs, we may trust Providence to furnish us with the bread of the day in its day.

Exodus 34:

The three feasts are here mentioned, with their appendages.

1. The Passover, and the feast of unleavened bread, in remembrance of their deliverance out of Egypt, and to this is annexed the law of the redemption of the first-born in Ex 34:18-20. This feast was instituted (Ex 12:13), and urged again (Ex 23:15).

2. The feast of weeks, that is, that of Pentecost, seven weeks after the Passover; and to this is annexed the law of the first-fruits.

3. The feast of in-gathering at the year's end, which was the feast of tabernacles (Ex 34:22). Of these also he had spoken before (Ex 23:16). As to those laws repeated here (Ex 34:25-26), that against 'leaven' relates to the Passover, that of the 'first-fruits' to the feast of Pentecost, and therefore that against 'broiling the kid' in his mother's milk in all probability relates to the feast of in-gathering, at which God would not have them use that superstitious ceremony, which probably they had seen the Egyptians, or some other of the neighbouring nations, bless their harvests with.

Deuteronomy 1:

This chapter gives an account of the provision made for the priests and Levites, with the reason of it (De 18:1-5), of allowance of a country Levite to minister at Jerusalem, and take his portion with the rest (De 18:6-8). The first-fruits were brought in, to the priests that resided among them, for their maintenance in the country; the first of their corn and wine for food, and the first of their fleece for clothing (De 18:4). The first-fruits were devoted to God, and He constituted the priests His receivers; and if God reckons what is, in general, given to the poor, lent to him, to be repaid with interest, much more what is, in particular, given to poor ministers. Those who were thus engaged and thus employed ought to have all due encouragement given them, as some of the most needful useful members of their commonwealth.

Tithes

Gen 14:20 *“And he gave him tithes of all.”* There are those who understand that the tithes were given to Abram. But Hebrews speaks otherwise, in declaring that Levi had paid tithes in the loins of Abram, (Heb 7:9), when Abram offered tithes to a more excellent Priest. And truly what the expositors above-mentioned mean, would be most absurd; because, if Melchizedek were the priest of God, it behooved him to receive tithes rather than to give them. Nor is it to be doubted but Abram offered the gift to God, in the person of Melchizedek, in order that, by such first-fruits, he might dedicate all his possessions to God. Abram therefore voluntarily gave tithes to Melchizedek, to do honour to his priesthood. Moreover, since it appears that this was not done wrongfully nor rashly, Hebrews properly infers, that, in this figure, the Levitical priesthood is subordinate to the priesthood of Christ. For other reasons, God afterwards commanded tithes to be given to Levi under the Law; but, in the age of Abram, they were only a holy offering, given as a pledge and proof of gratitude. It is however uncertain whether he offered the title of the spoils or of the goods which he possessed at home. But, since it is improbable that he should have been liberal with other persons’ goods, and should have given a very a tenth part of the prey, of which he had resolved not to touch even a thread, I rather conjecture, that these tithes were taken out of his own property. I do not, however, admit that they were paid annually, as some imagine, but rather, in my judgment, he dedicated this present to Melchizedek once, for the purpose of acknowledging him as the high priest of God: nor could he, at that time, (as we say,) hand it over; but there was a solemn stipulation, of which the effect shortly after followed.

Genesis 28:22

“And this stone which I have set for a pillar.” This ceremony was an appendage to divine worship, for external rites do not make men true worshippers of God but are only aids to piety. But because the holy fathers were then at liberty to erect altars wherever they pleased, Jacob poured a libation upon the stone, because he had then no other sacrifice to offer; not that he worshipped God according to his own will, (for the direction of the Spirit was instead of the written law,) but he erected in that place a stone—as he was permitted to do by the kindness and permission of God, which should be a testimony of the vision. Moreover, this form of speech, that the stone shall be Beth-el, is metonymical; as we are sanctioned, by

common usage, to transfer to external signs what properly belongs to the things represented. I have lately shown how ignorantly posterity has abused this holy exercise of piety

"And of all that thou shalt give me," I will surely give the tenth unto thee; for the support of his worship; for the maintenance of such that were employed in it; for the provision of sacrifice, and for the relief of the poor, or for any use or service in which God might be glorified. This was imitated by the Heathens in later times, who gave the tenth of their substance to their gods, Jupiter, Hercules, and others.

"I will surely give the tenth unto thee," to be laid out in thy service, and for sacrifices, and for the use and benefit of those who shall attend upon sacred things; as also for the relief of the poor and needy, whom God hath substituted and to whom part of the tithes were to be given by a following law (De 14:28,29).

A tenth of the produce of the earth consecrated and set apart for special purposes. The dedication of a tenth to God was recognized as a duty before the time of Moses. Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek (Ge 14:20, Heb 7:6) and Jacob vowed unto the Lord and said, *"Of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee."* The first Mosaic law on this subject is recorded in Le 27:30-32. Subsequent legislation regulated the destination of the tithes (Nu 18:21-24,26-28; De 12:5,6,11,17; De 14:22,23). The paying of the tithes was an important part of the Jewish religious worship. In the days of Hezekiah one of the first results of the reformation of religion was the eagerness with which the people brought in their tithes (2Ch 31:5,6). The neglect of this duty was sternly rebuked by the prophets (Am 4:4, Mal 3:8-10). It cannot be affirmed that the Old Testament law of tithes is binding on the Christian Church, nevertheless the principle of this law remains, and is incorporated in the gospel (1Co 9:13,14) and if, as is the case, the motive that ought to prompt to liberality in the cause of religion and of the service of God be greater now than in Old Testament times, then Christians ought to go beyond the ancient Hebrew in consecrating both themselves and their substance to God. Every Jew was required by the Levitical law to pay three tithes of his property:

1. one tithe for the Levites;
2. one for the use of the temple and the great feasts; and
3. one for the poor of the land.

Regulation of Tithes (27:30–33)

³⁰“A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD.³¹ If a man redeems any of his tithe, he must add a fifth of the value to it.³² The entire tithe of the herd and flock—every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd’s rod—will be holy to the LORD.³³ He must not pick out the good from the bad or make any substitution. If he does make a substitution, both the animal and its substitute become holy and cannot be redeemed.’ ”

27:30–33 In addressing what may be vowed, dedicated, or devoted to the Lord, the instruction finally turns to the tithe, for the tithe pertains to everything from the land (27:30). The word “tithe” (*ma ‘ăšēr*) is related to the number “ten” (*‘ešer*) and thus refers to a tenth. The concept of a tithe was not a new one for the Israelites, since we observe the practice before the giving of the Law (Gen 14:20; 28:20–22). Thus what we have in Leviticus 27 is a systematization of an earlier practice.¹⁸ In these texts from Genesis, as is the case also in this legislation from Leviticus, the tithe is taken from among the animal possessions (see Deut 12:17; 14:23).

There were three tithes for the ancient Israelites: (1) the general tithe (Lev 27), (2) the tithe of the sacred meal with the Levite (Deut 14:22–27), and (3) the tithe paid every three years to the poor (Deut 14:28–29). This text addresses the general tithe.¹⁹ Apparently the tithe was determined by counting every tenth animal that passed under the shepherd’s rod (27:32). This counting method appears to be the basis of Jer 33:13 and Ezek 20:37. The tithe was taken to maintain the Levites (Num 18:21–24), who in turn tithed their gifts to the priests (Num 18:25–32). The subject of tithes is addressed in Neh 10:38–39; 13:5,12; 2 Chr 31:5–6, 12. In Amos 4:4 the people placed an imbalanced value on the giving of the tithe, while in Mal

¹⁸ J. Raven, *The History of the Religion of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 118.

¹⁹ I.e., the tithe paid to the Levites who in turn tithed their portion to the priests (Num 18:21). R. Averbeck argues that Num 18 deals with the issue of the tithe from the perspective of the Levites and priests, while Deut 14 views the tithe from the perspective of the nation as a whole (מַעֲשֵׂר [*ma ‘ăšēr*], NIDOTTE 2:1041). The giving of the tithe was practiced by many ancient cultures (R. White, “Tithe, Tithing,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 2:2071).

3:8–10 they neglected it. As with vows, the tithed items could be repurchased based on the value of the object plus 20 percent (27:31).²²

New Testament Application

Matt. 6:33 *"The kingdom of God, and His righteousness,"* in this verse, are terms comprehensive of whatsoever appertains to the honour and glory of God, either as means, or as the end. Let your principal care and study be how to get to heaven, and how to promote the kingdom of God in the world; to bring your hearts into subjection to the will of God, that the kingdom of God may be within you, and how to bring others to the obedience of faith and of the will of God. And for the things of this life, it shall fare with you as it did with Solomon (1Ki 3:12), who asked not riches and honour, but had them. You shall have for your necessities, Psm. 37:4, Mr 10:30, 1Ti 4:8.

It is not that we are to seek first the kingdom of God and then these things; but seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all the rest will come. This is the great summing up. Strictly speaking, it has to do only with the subject of the present section—the right state of the heart with reference to heavenly and earthly things; but being couched in the form of a brief general directory, it is so comprehensive in its grasp as to embrace the whole subject of this discourse. And, as if to make this the more evident, the two keynotes of this great sermon seem purposely struck in it—"the KINGDOM" and "the RIGHTEOUSNESS". Of the kingdom—as the grand objects, in the supreme pursuit of which all things needful for the present life will be added to us. The precise sense of every word in this golden verse should be carefully weighed. "The kingdom of God" is the primary subject of the Sermon on the Mount - that kingdom which the God of heaven is erecting in this fallen world, within which are all the Spiritually recovered and inwardly subject portion of the family of Adam, under Messiah as its Divine Head and King. "The righteousness thereof" is the character of all such, so amply described and variously illustrated in the foregoing portions of this discourse. The "seeking" of these is the making them the object of supreme choice and pursuit; and the seeking of them "first" is the seeking of them before and above all

²² Rooker, M. F. (2000). *Vol. 3A: Leviticus*. The New American Commentary (327–328). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

else. The "all these things" which shall in that case be added to us are just the "all these things" which the last words of Mt 6:32 assured us "our heavenly Father knoweth that we have need of"; that is, all we require for the present life. And when our Lord says they shall be "added," it is implied, as a matter of course, that the seekers of the kingdom and its righteousness shall have these as their proper and primary portion: the rest being their gracious reward for not seeking them. (See an illustration of the principle of this in 2Ch 1:11,12). What follows is but a reduction of this great general direction into a practical and ready form for daily use.

Mt.23: 23. We have much the same (Lu 11:42), only there it is, Ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God. It is manifest by our Saviour's words in the latter part of the verse, these ought ye to have done, that he doth not blame the Pharisees' exactness in tithing mint, anise, rue, cumin, and all manner of herbs; but their neglecting the weightier matters of the law, faith and love to God, judgment, and mercy. The Levites having no inheritance: God ordained tithes for their maintenance; of which also the poor were to have a share (Le 27:30, Nu 18:24). The Pharisee boasted (Lu 18:12), that he paid tithes of all he possessed. Christ here acknowledged that the Pharisees were exact in their paying tithes; but He blames them,

1. For their partiality, neglecting the weightier things of the law.

2. For their hypocrisy; they were only exact in these little things, that they might be taken notice of as scrupulous observers of the Divine law; while they omitted those things, which were of much more weight, which he reckoneth up: faith, by which some understand faith in God, but the most, faithfulness, and sincere and honest dealings with men, in opposition to fraud, cheating, and circumventions.

Judgment, by which He means justice, giving to everyone what is their own.

Mercy, by which He means a charitable behaviour, in helping such as are miserable and afflicted.

Love to God, which is the true root, out of which all things should flow, and is indeed comprehensive of all our duty toward God, as well as the root of all our good works towards men.

Introduction to 1 Corinthians chapter 16

In this chapter the apostle,

- I. Gives directions about some charitable collection to be made in this church, for the afflicted and impoverished churches in Judea, 1Co 16:1-4.
- II. Talks of paying them a visit, 1Co 16:5-9.
- III. Recommends Timothy to them, and tells them Apollos intended to come to them, 1Co 16:10-12.
- IV. Presses them to watchfulness, constancy, charity, and to pay a due regard to all who helped him and his fellow labourers in their work, 1Co 16:13-19.
- V. After salutations from others, and his own, closes the epistle with a solemn admonition to them, and his good wishes for them, 1Co 16:20-24, to the end.

Ver. 1. In this chapter Paul closes this long epistle with some particular matters of less moment; but, as all was written by divine inspiration, it is all profitable for our instruction. He begins with directing them about a charitable collection on a particular occasion, the distresses and poverty of Christians in Judea, which at this time were extraordinary, partly through the general calamities of that nation and partly through the particular sufferings to which they were exposed. Now concerning this observe,

I. How he introduces his direction. It was not a peculiar service which he required of them; he had given similar orders to the churches of Galatia (1Co 16:1). He desired them only to conform to the same rules which he had given to other churches on a similar occasion. He did not desire that others should be eased and they burdened (2Co 8:13). He also prudently mentions these orders of his to the churches of Galatia, to excite emulation, and stir them up to be liberal, according to their circumstances, and the occasion. Those who exceeded most churches in Spiritual gifts, and, as it is probable, in worldly wealth (see the argument), surely would not suffer themselves to come behind any in their bounty to their afflicted brethren. Note, the good examples of other Christians and churches should excite in us a holy emulation. It is becoming a Christian not to bear to be outdone by a fellow-Christian in any thing virtuous and praise-worthy, provided this consideration only makes him exert himself, not envy others; and the more advantages we have above others the more should we endeavour to exceed them. The church of Corinth should not be outdone in this service of love by the churches of Galatia, which do not appear to have been enriched with equal Spiritual gifts nor outward ability.

II. The direction itself, concerning which observe,

1. The manner in which the collection was to be made: Ev-eryone was to lay by in store (1Co 16:2), have a treasury, or fund, with himself, for this purpose. The meaning is that he should lay by as he could spare from time to time, and by this means make up a sum for this charitable purpose. Note, it is a good thing to lay up in store for good uses. Those who are rich in this world should be rich in good works (1Ti 6:17,18). The best way to be so is to appropriate of their income, and have a treasury for this purpose, a stock for the poor as well as for themselves. By this means they will be ready to every good work as the opportunity offers; and many who labour with their own hands for a livelihood should so work that they may have to give to him that needeth (Eph 4:28). Indeed their treasury for good works can never be very large (though, according to circumstances, it may considerably vary); but the best way in the world for them to get a treasury for this purpose is to lay by from time to time, as they can afford. Some of the Greek fathers rightly observe here that this advice was given for the sake of the poorer among them. They were to lay by from week to week, and not bring in to the common treasury, that by this means their contributions might be easy to themselves, and yet grow into a fund for the relief of their brethren.

Indeed all our charity and benevolence should be free and cheerful, and for that reason should be made as easy to ourselves as may be. And what more likely way to make us easy in this matter than thus to lay by? We may cheerfully give when we know that we can spare, and that we have been laying by in store that we may.

2. Here is the measure in which they are to lay by: As God hath prospered them, as he has been prospered, namely, by divine Providence, as God has been pleased to bless and succeed his labours and business. Note, all our business and labour are that to us which God is pleased to make them. It is not the diligent hand that will make rich by itself, without the divine blessing (Pr 10:4, 22). Our prosperity and success are from God and not from ourselves; and he is to be owned in all and honoured with all. It is His bounty and blessing to which we owe all we have; and whatever we have is to be used, and employed, and improved, for Him. His right to ourselves and all that is ours is to be owned and yielded to Him. And what argument more proper to excite us to charity to the people and children of God than to consider all we have as His gift, as coming from Him? Note, when God blesses and prospers us, we should be ready to relieve and comfort His needy servants; when His bounty flows forth

upon us, we should not confine it to ourselves, but let it stream out to others. The good we receive from Him should stir us up to do good to others, to resemble Him in our beneficence; and therefore, the more good we receive from God the more we should do good to others. They were to lay by as God had blessed them, in that proportion. The more they had, through God's blessing, gained by their business or labour, their traffic or work, the more they were to lay by.

Note, God expects that our beneficence to others should hold some proportion to His bounty to us. All we have is from God; the more He gives (circumstances being considered), the more He enables us to give, and the more He expects we should give, that we should give more than others who are less able, that we should give more than ourselves when we were less able. And, on the other hand, from him to whom God gives less He expects less. He is no tyrant nor cruel taskmaster, to exact brick without straw, or expect men shall do more good than He gives ability. Note, where there is a willing mind he accepts according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not (2Co 8:12); but as He prospers and blesses us, and puts us in a capacity to do good, He expects we should. The greater ability He gives, the more enlarged should our hearts be, and the more open our hands; but, where the ability is less, the hands cannot be as open, however willing the mind and however large the heart; nor does God expect it.

3. Here is the time when this is to be done: The first day of the week (Lu 24:1), the Lord's day, the Christian holiday, when public assemblies were held and public worship was celebrated, and the Christian institutions and mysteries (as the ancients called them) were attended upon; then let everyone lay by him. It is a day of holy rest; and the more vacation the mind has from worldly cares and toils the more disposition has it to show mercy: and the other duties of the day should stir us up to the performance of this; works of charity should always accompany works of piety.

True piety towards God will beget kind and friendly dispositions towards men. This commandment have we from Him that he who loveth God love his brother also, 1Jo 4:21. Works of mercy are the genuine fruits of true love to God, and therefore, are a proper service on His own day. Note, God's day is a proper season on which to lay up for charitable uses, or lay out in them, according as he has prospered us; it is paying tribute for

the blessings of the past week, and it is a proper way to procure his blessing on the work of our hands for the next.

Introduction to 2 Corinthians chapter 8

In this and the following chapter Paul is exhorting and directing the Corinthians about a particular work of charity—to relieve the necessities of the poor saints at Jerusalem and in Judea, according to the good example of the churches in Macedonia (Ro 15:26). The Christians at Jerusalem, through war, famine, and persecution, had become poor, many of them had fallen into decay, and perhaps most of them were but poor when they first embraced Christianity; for Christ said, “The poor receive the gospel.”

Now Paul, though he was the apostle of the Gentiles, had a tender regard, and kind concern, for those among the Jews who were converted to the Christian faith; and, though many of them had not so much affection to the Gentile converts as they ought to have had, yet the apostle would have the Gentiles to be kind to them, and stirred them up to contribute liberally for their relief. Upon this subject he is very copious, and writes very affectingly. In this eighth chapter he acquaints the Corinthians with, and commends, the good example of the Macedonians in this work of charity, and that Titus was sent to Corinth to collect their bounty (2Co 8:1-6). He then proceeds to urge this duty with several cogent arguments (2Co 8:7-15) and commends the persons who were employed in this affair (2Co 8:16-24).

Ver. 1. Observe here,

I. The apostle takes occasion from the good example of the churches of Macedonia, that is, of Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and others in the region of Macedonia, to exhort the Corinthians and the Christians in Achaia to the good work of charity. And,

1. He acquaints them with their great liberality, which he calls the grace of God bestowed on the churches (2Co 8:1). Some think the words should be rendered, the gift of God given in or by the churches. He certainly means the charitable gifts of these churches, which are called the grace or gifts of God, either because they were very large, or rather because their charity to the poor saints did proceed from God as the author, and was accompanied with true love to God, which also was manifested this way. The grace of God must be owned as the root and fountain of all the good that is in us, or done by us, at any time; and it is great grace and

favour from God, and bestowed on us, if we are made useful to others, and are forward to any good work.

2. He commends the charity of the Macedonians, and sets it forth with good advantage. He tells them,

(1.) They were but in a low condition, and themselves in distress, yet they contributed to the relief of others. They were in great tribulation and deep poverty (2Co 8:2). It was a time of great affliction with them, as may be seen (Ac 18:17). The Christians in these parts met with ill treatment, which had reduced them to deep poverty; yet, as they had abundance of joy in the midst of tribulation, they abounded in their liberality; they gave out of a little, trusting in God to provide for them, and make it up to them.

(2.) They gave very largely, with the riches of liberality (2Co 8:2) that is, as liberally as if they had been rich. It was a large contribution they made, all things considered; it was according to, yea beyond, their power, (2Co 8:3) as much as could well be expected from them, if not more. Note, though men may condemn the indiscretion, yet God will accept the pious zeal, of those who in real works of piety and charity do rather beyond their power.

(3.) They were very ready and forward to this good work. They were willing of themselves, (2Co 8:3) and were so far from needing that Paul should urge and press them with many arguments that they prayed him with much entreaty to receive the gift (2Co 8:4). It seems Paul was backward to undertake this trust, for he would give himself to the word and prayer; or, it may be, he was apprehensive how ready his enemies would be to reproach and blacken him upon all occasions, and might take a handle against him upon account of so large a sum deposited in his hands, to suspect or accuse him of indiscretion and partiality in the distribution, if not of some injustice. Note, how cautious ministers should be, especially in money-matters, not to give occasion to those who seek occasion to speak reproachfully!

(4.) Their charity was founded in true piety, and this was the great commendation of it. They performed this good work in a right method: First they gave themselves to the Lord, and then they gave unto us their contributions, by the will of God (2Co 8:5) that is, according as it was the will of God they should do, or to be disposed of as the will of God should be, and for his glory. This, it seems, exceeded the expectation of the apostle; it was more than he hoped for, to see such warm and pious affections shin-

ing in these Macedonians, and this good work performed with so much devotion and solemnity. They solemnly, jointly, and unanimously, made a fresh surrender of themselves, and all they had, unto the Lord Jesus Christ. They had done this before, and now they do it again upon this occasion; sanctifying their contributions to God's honour, by first giving themselves to the Lord. Note,

[1.] We should give ourselves to God; we cannot bestow ourselves better.

[2.] When we give ourselves to the Lord, we then give Him all we have, to be called for and disposed of according to His will.

[3.] Whatever we use or lay out for God, it is only giving to Him what is His own.

[4.] What we give or bestow for charitable uses will not be accepted of God, nor turn to our advantage, unless we first give ourselves to the Lord.

Conclusion

It is evident that the first fruit offerings were primarily produce from the land but did include the offering of livestock when referring to offerings of the feasts of Israel. These feasts were a celebration of God's care and blessings upon Israel and had significance in the call to remembrance of various historical events that marked God's choice of and provision for His people. The underlying principle of firstfruit offering was an expression of dependence upon God, expressed in presenting to God the *very first* of His provision back to Him. This was an expression of faith not in the produce of the land or in the abundance of cattle but in the provider – The Lord God.

Tithing was clearly the pattern of giving for the people of God long before the Mosaic law. Although the laws of tithing introduced to Israel encompassed many things, the fundamental principle was the same as for the firstfruits - an expression of dependence upon God, not upon wealth or the spoils of war, but in the provider – The Lord God.

Christ's reference to "seeking first the kingdom of God" has various suggested applications. Nevertheless, Jesus addressed this Sermon on the Mount to His disciples and the host of people that followed Him to hear His teaching, the great majority, if not all of which, were Israelites. In view of this it would seem probable that the very reference to "first" would have brought immediately to mind the many references in the

Scriptures to first fruits.

The texts referring to offering in the Epistles to the Corinthians merit special consideration. Corinth was a Grecian city, on the isthmus which joins the Peloponnesus to the mainland of Greece. It is about 48 miles west of Athens. The ancient city was destroyed by the Romans (B.C. 146) and that mentioned in the New Testament was quite a new city, having been rebuilt about a century afterwards and peopled by a colony of freedmen from Rome. It became under the Romans the seat of government for Southern Greece or Achaia (Ac 18:12-16). It was noted for its wealth, and for the luxurious and immoral and vicious habits of the people. It had a large mixed population of Romans, Greeks, and Jews.

When Paul first visited the city (A.D. 51 or 52) Gallio, the brother of Seneca, was proconsul. Here Paul resided for eighteen months (Ac 18:1-18). Here he first became acquainted with Aquila and Priscilla, and soon after his departure Apollos came to it from Ephesus. After an interval he visited it a second time, and remained for three months (Ac 20:3). During this second visit his Epistle to the Romans was written (probably A.D. 55). Although there were many Jewish converts at Corinth, yet the Gentile element prevailed in the church there. Even with this fact, it is clear that the Jewish segments within the early church carried great influence because of the privilege of having God's Word. This was certainly the case with the church of Antioch where confusion over the role of the law within the early church was evident (see Acts 15). With this in view, it seems evident that the teaching regarding offering in 1 Cor. 16 and 2 Cor. 8, when addressing the need to help the poor and share with other suffering saints, would also be in the context of understood Old Testament first fruit offering and tithing.

Although the church was taught that the Mosaic Law is not binding in its formality, Christ Himself taught that the principles of the law are applicable to His kingdom of all ages (see Mat. 5:43-44). With this in view, we apply the principles of first fruit offering and tithing to believers today. The pattern of first fruit offering presenting *the Principle of Priority* – an expression of dependence upon God, expressed in presenting to God the *very first* of His provision back to Him, an expression of faith not in the possessions but in the provider – The Lord God. The pattern of tithing presents *the Principle of Obligation*, that the amount to be offered was a minimum of one tenth of God's blessings, again an expression of dependence upon God, an expression of faith not in the possessions but in the provider

– The Lord God.

APPENDIX C

BIBLE STUDY ANSWER GUIDE

Please note that the daily Bible study exercises contained two kinds of questions: Objective – where the answers are directly from Bible texts, and Subjective- where the answers come from the student’s perspective. This answer guide identifies the correct Objective answers but leaves the Subjective answers to the discretion of the student with this appeal to discuss these answers with others in small group “*GOD SUPPLIES*” study settings or one-on-one study sessions.

*Where there is no counsel, the people fall;
But in the multitude of counselors there is safety.
(Prov. 11:14)*

PART 1: GOD OR MONEY

WEEK 1, DAY 1

1. What was the young man’s understanding of his own Spiritual condition?

"All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?" - fully obedient to the law- righteous

2. Although this man considered himself to be a religious person, he refused to follow Jesus. What was the obstacle in this man’s way?

*he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.
– his great wealth*

3. What comment did Jesus make about the wealthy entering heaven?

it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

4. What does that say about the possibilities of the people in any country who pursue money as a life goal?

Money a big obstacle

5. State, in your own words, the main point of each following texts:

(Subjective answer: discuss with others)

6. The Christian must recognize the ever-present dangers of any measure of prosperity. What warnings are presented in each the following texts?

These texts present very real dangers to believers. There is the danger of the Bondage of Labour- being a slave of money rather than a slave of righteousness as urged by Paul. There is the danger of the Bondage

of Love- a heart captured by wealth rather than a heart captured by God.

7. How did the following people fall into these dangers?

All these men sold their souls for material gain: Ahab sold himself for a vineyard, Achan for a wedge of silver and a garment, Gehazi for silver and raiment, Judas for a bag of silver.

WEEK 1, DAY 2

1. Jesus made it clear, either man would serve Him or serve money. Is it evident in North American society, who the majority serve?

(Subjective answer: discuss with others)

2. Re-read 1 Timothy 6:6-10 and identify each statement identifying the destructive power of prosperity.

Fall into Temptation (of discontentment-v.6-8), a snare, foolish and harmful lusts, drown men in destruction and perdition. Strayed from faith in greediness, pierced themselves with sorrow

3. In your own words, explain from the above exercise, what is at risk for the believer, in a prosperous society:

(Subjective answer: discuss with others) Your answers may be worded differently, but should include the following risk factors:

1. Not being contented with godliness. The danger here is taking our eyes off eternity (6-8)

2. Being led by desire for wealth. Here the destructive power of temptation is pointed to as a snare that traps and kills Spiritual passion. (9)

3. Developing a love for wealth. God describes this as the destruction of peace and comfort of soul as one is pierced with sorrows (10)

4. The destructive power of prosperity is evident. List where each of the risks cited above could lead a believer and those he/she could influence:

(Subjective answer: discuss with others)

WEEK 1, DAY 3

1. What is the foundational motive for a believer's desire for transformation?

Phrase *the mercies of God*

Meaning *(Subjective answer: discuss with others)*

2. What first step is required for this transformation to take place?

God Supplies: A Biblical Perspective of Dependence upon God

Phrase *present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God*

Meaning *(Subjective answer: discuss with others)*

3. How is the sacrifice of our person described?

Phrase *holy, acceptable to God*

Meaning *(Subjective answer: discuss with others)*

4. The sacrifice of person is called ‘a service’; what word describes this service?

Phrase *reasonable*

Meaning *(Subjective answer: discuss with others)*

5. What conscious decision must continually be made for transformation?

Phrase *do not be conformed to this world*

Meaning *(Subjective answer: discuss with others)*

6. What is the result of this transformation of mind?

Phrase *be transformed by the renewing of your mind*

Meaning *(Subjective answer: discuss with others)*

7. Identify all the phrases that reflect Paul’s life as a “living sacrifice” for Christ.

I have counted loss..., I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,... I press forward.

WEEK 1, DAY 4

1. According to Colossians 3:10, how is the mind of a Christian renewed?

renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:

2. Identify all the synonyms for Scripture (the different names of the Bible), and all the words that describe the nature of the Scriptures such as *perfect*.

The law of the LORD, testimony of the LORD, statutes of the LORD, the commandment of the LORD, fear of the LORD, the judgments of the LORD

perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, true and righteous altogether, More to be desired are they than gold, sweeter also than honey and the honey-comb

3. Finally, make a list of all the benefits of the Scriptures to the Believer.

*converting the soul, making wise the simple, rejoicing the heart,
enlightening the eyes, servant warned, great reward*

4. According to 2 Timothy 3:16-17 what other benefits are derived from the Word of God?

profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

5. According to 2 Tim. 2:15, how is the disciplined student described?

Diligent, a worker, does not need to be ashamed

WEEK 1, DAY 5

1. Carefully read the following texts and write out the central idea of each passage in your own words. & 2. Match the verse references above to each of the following statements of central ideas.

The reference answers of #2 are in the following order: Ecc. 5:19, Eph. 4:28, Mark 12:42, 2 Cor. 9:6, 1 Tim. 6:19, Luke 12:34.

The matching statements indicate the central ideas of #1.

3. Re-read each statement and write brief statements about what is new to your understanding (what you never realized before).

(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

PART 2: WHO HOLDS THE TITLE DEED?

WEEK 2, DAY 1

1. In Lu.12:15, those who measure life by possessions are guilty of what sin?

Covetousness

2. Re-read Luke 12:15-21 and list all the dangers that abundance can lead to.

v.15 Covetousness, v. 18 I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater,- extravagance, v.19 "Soul, you have many goods laid up – trust in wealth rather than God, v.19 "for many years" – false assurance, v.19 "take your ease"- laziness, v. 19 "eat, drink, and be merry." – indulgence, v.20, "God said to him, Fool! This night your soul will be required of you ... "not rich toward God - foolish disregard for God, v.21" not rich toward God" – totally wrong life priorities

3. How would you rate your present attitude toward possessions? Draw a

circle around the number that best describes you.

(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

4. Re-read the texts and write a summary in your own words what each text states about the reason or implication of our ownership by God.

Psm. 100: 3 “*he that has made us*”- *He owns us because He created us*

Romans 14:7-8 “*none of us lives to himself...*” – *He owns us and all are responsible before and accountable to God*

1 Cor. 6:19 “*your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost*” – *He owns us and abides within every believer through the redemption of Christ.*

WEEK 2, DAY 2

1. To what is the believer called to be an instrument? (Romans 6:13)
instruments of righteousness to God.

2. What do you think it means to be an instrument of righteousness?
(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

3. What 4 things does God say are a gift from Him in Ecc. 5:19?
*1-given riches and wealth, 2-power to eat of it,
3-to receive his heritage 4-rejoice in his labour*

4. According to 1 Samuel 2:7, who sets the measure of our individual wealth in this world?

The LORD makes poor and makes rich

5. Identify the words in verse 8 above, that indicate what the promised inheritance is for those who accept the ownership of God even to the extent of world poverty.

inherit the throne of glory

6. Identify the words that indicate what Paul, through his experience of being with and without, learned.

*I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content,
I have learned both to be full and to be hungry...*

7. Record the words that indicate Paul’s attitude throughout these times.

*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me
– confidence, trust in God*

8. What did God say to you about the ownership of your life?

(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

9. What changes will you make?

(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

WEEK 2, DAY 3

1. Match the terms with whom or what they represent:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <u>b.</u> <i>The Christians</i> | <i>a. the travelling man</i> |
| <u>c.</u> <i>Our possessions</i> | <i>b. the servants</i> |
| <u>a.</u> <i>The Lord</i> | <i>c. the talents</i> |

2. Match the areas listed with the previous texts by looking each verse up in your own Bible and reviewing the context of each passage:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| <i>Pastoral ministry</i> | <i>Heb.13:17</i> |
| <i>Spiritual gifts</i> | <i>1 Pet. 4:10</i> |
| <i>Time</i> | <i>Col. 4:5</i> |
| <i>Exercised liberty</i> | <i>Rom. 14:12</i> |
| <i>Message of Christ</i> | <i>1 Cor. 4:1</i> |
| <i>Exercised leadership</i> | <i>Titus 1:7,</i> |

3. Identify the word in 1 Cor. 4:2 that defines the relationship of believers being accountable to Christ for all God has given.

Stewards

4. Therefore, according to this verse, this Christian practice of accountability is based upon the Principle of...

Stewardship

5. Identify the word in the text that indicates the responsibility of the believer as a steward of God's gifts

Faithful

6. What did God say to you about the Stewardship of your life?

(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

7. What will you do about it?

(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

WEEK 2, DAY 4

1. Identify each reward and write them out in your own words.

Well done, thou good and faithful servant... - (Subjective) commendation from God

I will make thee ruler over many things... - (Subjective) capacity for greater service (promotion) for God

enter thou into the joy of thy lord... (Subjective) joy (contentment) from God

2. Record the words that describe his faithful ministry in 2 Chr. 31:20.
*he did what was good and right and true before the LORD
(he did) before the LORD
he did it with all his heart.*
3. On the number scale provided, circle your estimation of your own stewardship
(Subjective answer: discuss with others).
4. Identify the words of Rom. 8:1, 2 that testify of the believer's escape from the judgement of sin.
no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus
5. Record the words in 1 Peter 1:7 and 1 Cor. 4:5 that describe the possible assessment of faithfulness for the believer
1 Peter 1:7 *might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:*
1 Corinthians 4:5 *will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts*
6. What did God say to you about the ambition of your life?
(Subjective answer: discuss with others).
7. What will you do about it?
(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

WEEK 2, DAY 5

1. Job is an example of a faithful steward. What commendation did He receive from the Lord?
vs.1 blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil.
2. Record the words of Job 1:21 that expresses his response toward loss. What was God's perspective of Job's response?
*The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD
- 1st acceptance and - 2nd praise for fulfilling God's purpose*
3. How did Job express His faith in God?
when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold – he expressed faith in his future
4. How did Job describe the outcome of His trust?
I shall come forth as gold. – He would stand before God in purity, perfection, preciousness

5. According to Isaiah 26:3, what does God promise to provide to the faithful steward who trusts in God?

perfect peace

6. Re-read Phil. 4:6-7 and list the conditions for that peace.

-Be anxious for nothing, - choose to stop worrying

-but in everything by prayer - replace worry prayer

-with thanksgiving – express thankfulness for His perfect will for you no matter what He chooses to do

- and supplication...let your requests be made known to God – ask with fervent, pleading prayer as to your father

7. On the number scale provided, circle your estimation of your own level of transferred ownership of all:

(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

8. In order for you to get the larger picture of what God is saying to you personally, look back and record what God said to you as you completed each day's study

(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

9. What steps is God leading you to take?

(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

10. Identify any especially meaningful verses that you have studied in this session...

(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

PART 3: MY FIRST IS MY FAITH'

WEEK 3, DAY 1

1. From the Lord's prayer (Matt. 6:9-15) write the phrase that best expresses a believer's dependence on God.

v. 11 Give us this day our daily bread

2. In what time frame was that dependence expressed (v.11)?

Daily

3. List the instructions given to Israel for gathering the manna.

gather it according to each one's need, one omer for each person, according to the number of persons, for those who are in his tent, leave any of it till morning. Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath

to the LORD. Bake what you will bake to day, and boil what you will boil; and lay up for yourselves all that remains, to be kept until morning, Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, there will be none."

4. Summarize in your own words, the previous verses relating to dependence on God.

(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

5. In what way does your family acknowledge its dependence upon God?

(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

6. What steps is God leading you to take?

(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

WEEK 3, DAY 2

1. What did God command the people to do in each of the preceding verses?

Bring in 'the firstfruits'

2. How did Abraham acknowledge the Principle of First Fruits? (Gen. 14:18-20)

he gave him (the priest of God Most High) a tithe of all

3. How was Joshua called to acknowledge the Principle of First Fruits in battle? (Josh. 6:19)

all the silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, are consecrated to the LORD- Jericho was the FIRST city conquered in the promised land and all the 'spoils' were given to the Lord.

4. In the place of abundances, blessing, and victory, simple dependence can be misplaced. How is this demonstrated in the parable of the rich farmer in Luke 12:16-21?

"So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."- the rich man 'foolishly depended on his wealth but his life was ended and he was empty of Spiritual life.

5. How might things have been different if the farmer had kept the Principle of First Fruits?

(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

6. What has God said to you about living with abundance and acknowledging dependence upon Him?

(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

WEEK 3, DAY 3

1. Review the previous verses that address the Principle of First Fruits and match the text to the context.

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| <u> e </u> Gen. 28:22 | a. Wisdom's Advice |
| <u> b </u> Ex. 22:29 | b. Israel's command |
| <u> d </u> Gen. 14:20 | c. A Christian's duty |
| <u> a </u> Prov. 3:9 | d. Abraham's gift |
| <u> c </u> Matt. 6:33 | e. Jacob's promise |

2. What did God call this sin? (v.8)

you have robbed Me – the sin of stealing

3. What was the consequence of their sin? (v.9)

You are cursed with a curse

4. What principle is Prov. 3:9 advocating?

Honour the LORD with your possessions, And with the firstfruits of all your increase – First Fruits

5. Re-read Mal. 3:6-10 and write out what God promised Israel if they would return to First Fruit living. (v.10)

pour out for you such blessing

6. What does God promise to do for all who honour Him with First Fruit living? (Prov. 3:9-10)

your barns will be filled with plenty... your vats will overflow - He will provide all we need with abundance

7. How would you rate your commitment to first fruit living?

(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

8. How would you rate your life before God?

(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

WEEK 3, DAY 4

1. When Elijah asked for food, what was the widow's concern?

I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.

– she and her son did not have enough food to survive themselves

2. What did Elijah tell her do (13)?

make me a small cake from it first... For thus says the LORD God of Israel...

- provide for God's servant first and trust God

3. What was Elijah's promise to the widow if she fed him first (v.14)?
The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth – God Himself would sustain her and her son through the draught.
4. What was the result when the widow obeyed?
God kept His promise and met all her needs
5. Where will a person's heart be (v.21)?
where your treasure is
6. What two choices of service do believers have (v.24)?
serve God or mammon – you cannot choose both
7. List the things God says that His servants should not worry about (v. 25, 31)?
what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on
8. What in the text are 'all these things' God promises(v. 31)?
the basic needs of life
9. What does God promise to provide His servants (v.33)?
All the basic needs of life
10. What is the condition of God's promise (33)?
seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness – First Fruit Faith living
11. List all the things the righteous do in the above passage.
show mercy and give, He is ever merciful, and lends;
12. Re-read Psm. 37:25 and identify the words that describe David's experience of God's promised provision.
I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread.
13. Have you experienced a unique provision of God in your life?
(Subjective response: discuss with others).
14. What did God say to you in today's study?
(Subjective response: discuss with others).
15. What action does He want you to take?
(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

WEEK 3, DAY 5

1. In the context of Deuteronomy (the above verses) re-read Deut. 6:4-5 and

identify the words that identify God's call in their life.

*love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul,
and with all your strength*

2. Re-read Matt. 6:33 and write out the condition Jesus shared that would obligate God to meet His people's needs (v. 33).

*seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness
– Putting God first in all things*

3. Check in which *you agree* with the following statements:

(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

4. Go back to these statements and circle the ones you are faithfully exercising.

(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

5. What does your expression of First Fruit Faith tell you about your love for God?

(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

6. What has God said to you in this study?

(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

7. What action does God want you to take in living "First Fruit Faith"?

(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

PART 4: FINDING THE NEW TESTAMENT ALTAR

Week 4, Day 1

1. Identify the kind of sacrifices each text refers to. It may be necessary to review the context of each text in your own Bible.

Ro 12:1 - present your bodies a living sacrifice

– sacrifice of body (person)

Php 2:17- if I am being poured out as a drink offering

- sacrifice of body (person)

*Php 4:18 - the things which were sent from you... sacrifice
acceptable - sacrifice of possessions*

Heb 13:15 - the sacrifice of praise – sacrifice of praise

Heb. 13:16 - good and to communicate - sacrifice of possessions

*1Pe 2:5 - to offer up Spiritual sacrifices - sacrifice of praise & person
(God's Spiritual household is.. to worship, offering Spiritual sacrifices (5)
and to witness, declaring the*

praises (9).²³

2. List the texts that involved material sacrifice:

Php 4:18, Heb. 13:16

3. What commendable action had the churches of Macedonia taken? (v. 2).
the abundance of their joy ... abounded in the... riches of their liberality - they gave sacrificially to Paul's work for the Lord

4. In what personal state were these churches when they acted so generously? (v.2).

a great trial of affliction, and their deep poverty

5. What was the first step in their self-denial for Christ? (v. 5).

they first gave themselves to the Lord

6. Explain how Jesus modelled self-denial in the following texts?

2 Cor. 5:21: He became sin for us, Gal. 3:13: He became a curse (death) for us, Rom. 5:8: He showed His love in dying for us,

7. Have you ever sacrificially given to the ministry of Christ?

(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

8. What has God said to you about the Spirit of self-denial?

Week 4, Day 2

1. From the verses listed above, identify *in your own words* the specific New Testament sacrifices God calls Christians to make:

(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

2. How, *in your own words* is the sacrifice of our person described in Romans 12:1?

(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

3. Identify, *in your own words* the contrasting lifestyles that are present in Romans 12:2.

(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

4. On the scale below, rate your own lifestyle.

(Subjective answer: discuss with others).

5. How is the sacrifice of praise and possessions responded to by God in?
with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

6. Write out your own song of praise and offer it to God in prayer as a sac-

²³ *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition.* 1994 (D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer & G. J. Wenham, Ed.) (4th ed.) (1376). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

rifice of praise to Him.

(Subjective response: discuss with others).

7. What other ways might you offer to God a sacrifice of praise?

(Subjective response: discuss with others).

Week 4, Day 3

1. Who gave (v.29)?

the disciples

2. By what measure was giving made?

each according to his ability

3. For what purpose was giving made?

to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea.

4. According to Matt. 28:19 who are disciples today?

Anyone who comes to Christ (responds in faith to the great commission message) to anywhere in the world

5. Who was to give (v.1)?

the saints (another name for Christians)

6. By what measure was giving to be made?

as God hath prospered him,

7. How was this giving described (v.3)?

your liberality

8. By what three measures is giving's motivation indicated (v.10)?

-kindly affectioned one to another, -brotherly love,

-in honour preferring one another

9. Who was the giving for (v.13)?

to the necessity of saints

10. Write in your own words, what this verse teaches about giving

(Subjective response: discuss with others).

11. What three things did Jesus tell this man to do (v.21)?

- go and sell that thou hast, - give to the poor, - come and follow me.

12. In your own words, what prevented this man from doing as Jesus said?

(Subjective response: discuss with others).

13. From the texts cited, write out each phrase that identifies sacrifice.

half of my goods I give to the poor, I restore him fourfold

14. How would you describe the giving of the widow?

(Subjective response: discuss with others).

15. What must the condition of the heart be in order to lay up treasures in heaven (v.20-21)?

where your treasure is – a heart ‘conditioned’ to lay up treasure in heaven

16. Why is it hard for those who have riches to enter heaven (v.23, 24)?

Because they are “those who trust in riches”

17. What is the motive for those receiving great reward in heaven (v.22)?

For the Son of Man’s sake (Jesus Christ) – they are hated, excluded, reviled and considered evil

18. List those who receive what is their due in present life (v.24-25).

Those who are “rich, full, and laugh now”

20. In your own words describe what the rich receive (What their ‘consolation’ is)?

(Subjective response: discuss with others).

21. What is the sin mentioned in this passage (v.15)?

Covetousness

22. What is the consequence of this sin (v.19)?

Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years – trust in possessions

23. What is the remedy for avoiding this sin (v.21)?

Being ‘rich toward God’

24. Why was Josiah honoured by being called ‘Son of Encouragement’ (v.36-37)?

Because he ‘brought the proceeds of the things that were sold’ as a gift to the believers ‘whohad need

25. What was the sin of Ananias and Saphira (v. 5:3)?

why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit he lied to God (also v.4)

26. What prompted Peter to make his comment about leaving all and following Jesus?

Context: To the rich man Jesus said “sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.”

Peter was seeking to confirm the apostles qualified as having treasure in heaven –i.e. Jesus’ approval

27. According to this text, what personal sacrifices might the Christian be called to make?

Forsake...house or parents or brothers or wife or children

– forsake those closest

28. For what purpose were such sacrifices legitimate (v.29)
for the sake of the kingdom of God – for the purpose of God’s kingdom
29. What words did Jesus use to describe that path?
Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory – first suffering then glory
30. What words did Jesus use to describe the path His followers would take in this text?
Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with – His cup & His baptism, they would follow the same path as He
31. What, in your opinion, might keep a believer from making that choice?
(Subjective response: discuss with others).
- 32, 33. Do you know Christians who are models of self-denial? If so, what do you admire about their lives?
(Subjective response: discuss with others).
34. What has God said to you in this study?
(Subjective response: discuss with others).

Week 4, Day 4

1. List the *personal* results of sacrificial giving in each text.
(Subjective response: discuss with others).
Although your answers may be different, the list of results should include the following:
- and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness*
→ *A confirmation of Spiritual maturity through the responsibility of greater possessions (2 Cor. 9:10)*
 - he shall by no means lose his reward.*
→ *A confirmation within the believer’s heart that God’s approval awaits. (Matt. 10:42).*
 - shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time — houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions — and in the age to come, eternal life*
→ *A confirmation of belonging to the greater family of God with anticipation of a shared future. (Mark 10:30).*

-you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just

→ A sense of security through investment in eternity. (Luke 14:14).

2. Read again the preceding texts and list all the other results, *in the world*, of sacrificial giving.
 - every good work, increase the fruits of your righteousness,*
 - a cup of cold water*
 - a feast*
3. What words or phrases describe Paul's self-denial in Phil. 3:8-11?
count all things loss, suffered the loss of all things, count them as rubbish,
4. What words or phrases describe Paul's unique privileges in Phil. 3:8-11?
the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord,
that I may gain Christ
and be found in Him, know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings,
being conformed to His death
5. Rate your own desire for fellowship in Christ's suffering.
(Subjective response: discuss with others).
6. What has God said to you in this study?
(Subjective response: discuss with others).

Week 4, Day 5

1. Can you identify the present blessing beside each principle studied so far?

The Principle of Ownership → Promise of Peace

The Principle of First-fruits → Promise of Prosperity

2. In each of the verses listed below, identify again the phrases that indicate God's promised blessings of sacrificial giving.

all grace abound toward you, having all sufficiency in all things,
an abundance for every good work, supply and multiply the seed you
have sown, increase the fruits of your

righteousness - 1 Cor.9

he shall by no means lose his reward." - Mat. 10

receive a hundredfold now (in the family of God), in the age to come, eternal life - Mar.10

you will be blessed, repaid at the resurrection of the just. - Lu.14

3. Where 'in time' is the promised prosperity/blessing focused in the following texts?

hundredfold now in this time — and in the age to come, eternal life. - Mark 10 - present and future

you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just - Luke14:14
- future

and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need - Acts 2 - present, - added to the church daily - Acts 2- salvation = present and future -

my God shall supply all your need - Phi. 4- present -

given to you: good measure, pressed down ... - Luke 6 -present

you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just - Lu. 14

- future

4. Can you see a relationship between the lifestyle evident in Luke 14:13-14 and the promise of Proverbs 22:6?... Explain the relationship.

Key: v.4 is experienced by the training which achieves v.9.

(Subjective response: discuss with others).

5. What is the purpose of such material blessing evidenced in the following texts?

have an abundance for every good work - doing good work through generous giving - 2 Cor.9:6

causes thanksgiving through us to God. - bringing thanks to God through liberal giving - 2 Cor. 9:11

nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God - keeping trust in God through sacrificial giving, - 1 Tim. 6:17,

storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come - keeping focus on eternity through sacrificial giving

- 1Ti 6:19

6. Summarize in your own words what Jesus said about giving in verses 30-31 and verses 38 above.

(Subjective response: discuss with others).

7. What warning should be taken from Ezekiel regarding ignoring sacrificial generosity?

The danger of self-indulgence is that it is manifested in many sins besides greed and God judges severely — “I took them away as I saw fit”



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Along with serving the Lord and enjoying his family, Earl's favourite pastime is canoeing and fishing the lakes of beautiful Muskoka, Ontario, Canada, where he and his wife Kathi reside.

