

LIVING THE GENEROUS LIFE

Changing Your Timeline: How Much Would You Give Away If You Knew Jesus Was Coming Back This Time Next Year?

*If we only had one more year to impact the Kingdom with all that God has entrusted to us,
would we be living and giving differently than we are right now?*

Jesus said in Matthew 24:42, “Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.” But what if we could know when the Lord was returning. And just for the sake of discussion, what if we could somehow know beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus was indeed, coming back exactly one year from today. And if we knew that beyond all doubt, would the amount of your giving change over the next year? It is certainly a question that should cause all of us to pause and reflect.

If our answer to this question is different than how much we are actually currently planning to give over this next year, it might be good to ask ourselves why? Why would the amount I would give over this year be different just because Jesus was coming back in one year instead of twenty years or after I am already long gone? There may be a number of reasons for why our giving would be higher and it might be a good mental exercise to contemplate what those reasons are.

Reason #1: Could it be that with only one year left we would be willing to make much greater personal, material sacrifices since it would only be for one short year before we would eternally relocate? In the grander scheme of eternity, twelve months is a pretty insignificant time frame.

People who exercise regularly say that they are able to endure much greater physical “torture” because they know that their workout is only going to last for say 45 minutes and then they can go back to more comfortable and less demanding lifestyle! We seem to be far more willing to give something up for *Lent* than we are to give it up for *life*. Might your giving increase if there was only one year left?

Reason #2: Might our giving amount be different because with only one year left, as the old hymn says, “the things of earth grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace?” As the new heaven and the new earth get closer and closer, this old one doesn’t seem quite so attractive.

If you think about the value of a confederate dollar in 1861 (when the Civil War began) compared to the value of that dollar in March of 1865 (a month before the war and the Confederacy came to an end), we would all agree that a confederate dollar after April of 1865 would be worthless to whoever held it. So, giving Confederate dollars away just before the end of the war wouldn’t really be all that much of a gift, would it? Likewise, as the return of Christ moves closer, the “things of earth” grow more and more worthless to us because what we possess will not be a measure of anything of value in the next life.

That is what makes the picture of the streets in heaven being paved with gold so humorous. We take gold which is universally valued here on earth and in heaven God uses it for street pavement. What the world values *here* is worthless *there*. And conversely, what the world

considers worthless here is priceless there. Might your giving increase if there was only one year left?

Reason #3: Would our giving increase because sending our financial resources on ahead would be much more appealing since we would be getting a much larger reward (Matthew 6:20, 19:21) in a very short time when we get to heaven next year?

Jesus tells us twice that giving now, produces rewards later. He says, "But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal." He adds, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." Give now: Rewarded later!

It is obvious to all of us, "You can't take it with you." But the good news is you can send it on ahead. If we knew that "ahead" would be only one year away and not decades or centuries away, we might view the temporal "loss" of our immediate enjoyment of and security in these things compared to the eternal gain to be a quite compelling trade off. Might your giving increase if there was only one year left?

Something very interesting seems to happen to our viewpoint when we dramatically shorten the timeline. How would things change for you if you knew there was only one year left of life as we know it? The world and our place in it seem to be instantly viewed from a totally new perspective while the real priorities of life seem to literally explode within our consciousness. We find every area of our life is quickly reshuffled creating an entirely new order of priorities. And all too often these new life priorities seldom include what currently consumes much of our daily routine right now.

In life, the *tyranny of the urgent* is constantly seeking to override the *priority of the important*. The tyranny of the urgent is always making noise, demanding your attention, and insisting on being addressed immediately. The priority of the important rarely makes any noise, seldom demands any attention of any kind and never demands that you address it. Yet the most important things in life are the ones that silently sit by waiting to see if you will ever discover just how critically important they are and whether you will give them the necessary time and attention they desperately need.

We always seem to devote significant amounts of time for the trivial and the unimportant, often because we mistakenly believe that there will always be time for getting to the "big stuff" – "the important stuff" later. Well, what if there was no "later?" What if there was no "next year?" As C.T. Studd said, "Only one life t'will soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last."

If we only had one more year to impact the Kingdom with all that God has entrusted to us, would we be living and giving differently than we are right now? If so, it might be a good spiritual and mental exercise to take some time to recalibrate our priorities so as to reflect an eternal mission instead of merely a temporal one. This will definitely happen if you choose adopt a shorter timeline rather than a longer one.

STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. What is your initial reaction to the message of this lesson?
2. Which of the “reasons” have you given the least consideration to?
3. How does your viewpoint about giving change when you shorten your life timeline?
4. Why do you think it is so easy for us to get caught up in the temporal?
5. What steps can we take to continue to focus our attention on the eternal?
6. What would change in your life and thinking if you could really know for sure that Jesus was coming back next year?
7. How does this fact impact your thinking about giving: Our material possessions will someday be worthless so why not use them now for the Kingdom while they are still valuable?
8. Share your thoughts on the words to the old hymn, “and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.” How is this true and why do you think it is?
9. What is going to change in your life going forward because of this lesson? What are you going to start doing differently?