

STUDY GUIDE: OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO GENEROSITY (MODULE 203)

Lesson #1 – Can We Trust Him: A Bridge or A Barrier

Being careful to not allow – unconsciously – what we possess to become the object of our security, our trust, and our hope.

This is a difficult question, one that you may have never pondered. Has God's abundant provision in your life become a bridge or a barrier to your ability to trust Him more fully in your life? You would think after having experienced abundant material provision from our loving Father for all these years, these abundant provisions would build for us a wide and easily traveled bridge, allowing us to confidently trust God in the future based upon what we have experienced in the past.

However, this does not seem to be what happens. On the contrary, these abundant provisions appear to create a barrier that limits our ability to trust Him more fully. This can be seen in the lives of many believers. The more we possess, the more likely we are to trust Him less. In other words, the more He provides, the less we trust Him to provide. Odd phenomenon, isn't it?

A financial advisor was once visiting with a young man who was struggling financially and he responded to his counsel by saying, "If I was making the kind of money you were making, I could trust God a lot more." The advisor responded right back to him and said, "Doug, if I was making the kind of money you are making, I could trust God a lot more." Doug had come to believe the false notion that his trust in the Lord would increase as God's provision to him increased. In other words, he thought God's additional provision to him would serve as a bridge enabling him to develop even greater trust and faith in God. As logical as this thinking might seem, when provisions start exceeding our most basic needs, they most often end up becoming a barrier preventing us from trusting God more not a bridge enabling us to trust Him more.

This is exactly what Jesus was getting at when He made this very shocking statement to His disciples in Luke 18:24-25 (NASB), *How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God! 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.* Those with a surplus put their faith in their surplus, living as though they have no need to put their faith in the Provider of the surplus. Solomon confessed, *He who trusts in his riches will fall* (Proverbs 11:28). When we trust in the provisions of God instead of the God of provisions, we will fall short of living by faith.

One amazing thing about believers in third-world countries is the depth of faith they possess in the midst of what most of us would consider intolerable poverty. How can these impoverished

believers be so entirely trusting of the One who has delivered so little material provision to them? The answer is painfully obvious: They have no material possessions to get in the way of trusting Him totally. For us the question is, “Are we going to trust in our stuff, or are we going to trust in the One who has provided the stuff?” For them, the question is a good bit simpler. It is merely, “Are we going to trust in God or not?”

Do You Believe?

Do you believe God can and will continue to provide for all your needs in the future as He has in the past? Most likely, all of us would intellectually respond with, “Yes, of course I do.” David confirms this idea in Psalm 37:25 (ESV), *I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread. Amen.*

We all believe God can and will provide, don't we? Or do we? For many of us, there seems to be a significant disconnect between what we intellectually believe about God's ability to provide and our everyday attitudes about what He has already provided to us.

Let's take this line of thinking one step further with another question. If everything that God has currently provided to you so far were to disappear overnight, would your faith and trust in Him continue unshaken? Would you be confident that God would provide for you in the future as He has in the past? At some point in the future, we may find ourselves living on less than we are now, but are we certain that He will never leave us “begging for bread”?

If all our material trappings were to be stripped away, might it reveal to us that these “trappings” have indeed become a barrier to fully trusting in Jehovah Jireh (God our Provider)? Jesus makes this point in Matthew 6:31-34 (NKJV) when He says, *Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. 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. To paraphrase, do not worry about tomorrow and what might happen if the stock market crashes, or if the economy collapses, or if you lose your job or your business, or maybe even if you lose it all. Jesus says, “Seek Me first, and I'll provide for you.”*

Let Us Pray

How many of us would be willing to pray, “Lord, take away anything and everything in my life that is even the slightest barrier between You and me, including all that You have provided to me if necessary. If I have You alone, I have all I need.” That could be a dangerous prayer to utter, couldn't it?

A pastor friend was leading a discussion on this subject recently, and a gentleman in the audience appeared quite troubled by the conversation. He raised his hand and asked quite hesitantly, “What if God told me to give everything away...?” He looked him right in the eyes and said, “If you were certain God was telling you to give everything away and you did it, you would be the happiest man on this planet!” A “poor” man who is totally obedient and trusting in God is richer than the richest man on earth who isn’t.

Hebrews 12:1 (NASB) exhorts us, *let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.* Jesus told us if our hand, our foot, or our eye causes us to stumble, we should cut them off and throw them into the fire (Matthew 18:8-9). Likewise, if what God has provided to us is preventing us from fully trusting in Him, should we not likewise be compelled to lay them aside—to part with whatever we possess that is entangling us?

Are your provisions a bridge or a barrier to fully trusting in Jehovah Jireh? Let’s not forget, we came into this world with nothing and we will all leave that same way (Job 1:21). May we all, in the time between our arrival on and departure from this earth, be careful to not allow unconsciously what we possess to become the object of our security, our trust, and our hope. May we instead trust in the One who has so graciously provided it all to us.

STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. Would you describe yourself as having a “thankful spirit” or “always wanting a little bit more?” How do you see that demonstrated in your life?
2. Discuss your response to the following statement: “Doug had come to believe the false notion that his trust in the Lord would increase as God’s provision to him increased. As logical as this thinking might seem, when provisions start exceeding our most basic needs, they most often end up becoming a barrier – preventing us from trusting God more, not a bridge – enabling us to trust Him more.”
3. Do you intellectually believe that God can and will continue to provide for all your needs in the future as He has in the past? How do you struggle with applying this truth in your everyday life? What needs to be done about this disconnect?
4. If you have had any significant financial problems in the past, does this affect your ability to trust God for the future? If so, explain?
5. We as Americans have come to expect a certain standard of living. We may at some point in the future find ourselves living on less than we are now, but are we certain that He will never leave us “begging for bread?” How troubling is the idea that someday your lifestyle may go down? Are you hanging on to your stuff and standard of living too tightly?
6. Describe the ways you have set limits on your lifestyle and determined to live below your income level?
7. Let’s get very personal: Are you living on two incomes because you enjoy the lifestyle or do you need two incomes to survive? Are you becoming dependent on two incomes to such an extent that you could not survive on one, if you chose to do this?
8. Share specifically how your trust in your provisions are getting in the way of you putting all your trust in the Provider?

9. How willing would you be to pray this prayer, “Lord, take away anything and everything in my life that is even the slightest barrier between you and me?”

10. What is going to change in your life going forward because of this lesson? What are you going to start doing differently?